

# “Let's organize”: The organizational basis for stable public governance

Jarle Trondal<sup>1,2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>ARENA Centre for European Studies,  
University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science and  
Management, University of Agder,  
Kristiansand, Norway

## Correspondence

Jarle Trondal, Department of Political Science  
and Management, University of Agder,  
Kristiansand, Norway.

Email: [jarle.trondal@uia.no](mailto:jarle.trondal@uia.no)

## Abstract

This study carries two distinct contributions to extant literature. Theoretically, it introduces an organizational approach to the study of public governance. Empirically, it demonstrates how the organizational architecture of government represents a stable and systemic capacity for public governance across time. The study establishes how stability serves as an enduring feature of public governance and how this is anchored in the *organizational architecture* of government systems. Moreover, structured flexibility is illustrated by how the civil service adapts to both international organizations and societal stakeholders. Theorizing the organizational dimension of public governance, this study also introduces a *design tool* that may be useful for deliberately (re)structuring public governance. Empirically, these arguments are probed by a sizable dataset with 13,173 observations across 40 years, consisting of nine surveys of civil servants at ministry and agency levels. The data enables a long-term perspective on government civil servants over nearly half a century, thus allowing for a comprehensive study of the organizational basis for public governance.

[Corrections added on 09 June 2022 after first online publication: The tables in the original version of the article were incorrectly numbered. This updated version corrects the error.]

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2022 The Author. *Public Administration* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

How do government officials cope with times of turbulence in their every-day decision-making processes and how may robust public governance be explained? As highlighted in this symposium, these questions are pertinent since societal transformations and environmental turbulence evoke concerns about the robustness of public policy and administration (Adam et al., 2021; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2009; Pollitt, 2008). Times of turbulence increasingly make quests to governments to reform their organizational systems and routines (OECD, 2021; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Contemporary public administration faces increased calls for change—as illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, triggering widespread debates on the legitimate and efficient role of public authority (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019; Ansell et al., 2017; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; OECD, 2021: 19; Olsen, 2017, 2018; Pollitt, 2011; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999; Riddervold et al., 2021; Sørensen & Ansell, 2021). This study argues theoretically and probes empirically that civil servants' decision-making behavior are profoundly robust—as measured by its long-term stability. The study establishes how stability serves as an enduring feature of public governance and how this is anchored in the *organizational architecture* of government systems. The argument is empirically probed by a longitudinal research design across half a century. These contributions are vital since eras of turbulence call for systemic and organized capacities for public governance (OECD, 2021: 24).

Public governance is increasingly characterized by endogenous hybridity and governing paradoxes (Ansell, 2011; Ansell & Trondal, 2017; Emery & Giauque, 2014). One avenue of research examines how public administration strive to balance competing signals and preferences, for example, those originating from elected office holders, stakeholder groups, and transnational regulatory networks (Moloney & Stone, 2019; Olsen, 2018). Robust public service is seen as the capacity of public institutions to balance and reconcile highly valued but competing concerns, such as the importance of political/democratic steering (majority rule), knowledge concerns (expert rule), the interests of particularly affected parties (stakeholder rule), and the impartiality in law application (the rule of law) (Rothstein, 2012). This article contributes to a second and emergent avenue of studies interested in the temporal dimension of public administration (Ansell & Trondal, 2017; Douglas et al., 2021: 5). Extant literature has focused on dilemmas of continuity and discontinuity in public governance across time and how temporal robustness in public governance may be understood and prevailed (Ansell & Trondal, 2017; Howlett & Goetz, 2014; Olsen, 2009; Pierson, 2004). One challenge plaguing these studies has been a dearth of long-term data that enables a long-term perspective on government civil servants (Sørensen & Ansell, 2021). Already in the 1970s, Meyer (1979) observed that studies of public governance were often drawn from one or few cases, often based on cross-sectional data. To fill this void, this study examines temporal robustness in public governance over a period of 40-years. Temporal robustness refers to civil servants' ability to *combine* behavioral stability and change across time, however, accentuating their ability to *preserve* stability by resisting abrupt change. In our study, robustness-as-stability in public governance implies that significant behavioral patterns among civil servants are *established* within and across administrative systems, thus *maintaining* the ability to allocate *sustained and stable* value over time (Trondal, 2021).

The time period examined (see below) is characterized by internal and external chocks to the government apparatus. These includes shifting administrative reform programs questing remodeling administrative structures of the state (Aucoin, 1990; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2007; Dibben et al., 2004; Emery & Giauque, 2014; Hood & Jackson, 1991; Kettl, 2002; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Trondal, 2021), competing concepts of legitime and just modes of public governance (Olsen, 2017; Self, 1972), as well as increasing integration in the European Union that ultimately challenges domestic public administration (Benz et al., 2021; Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). Public organizations have experienced sequences of structural reforms due to reform doctrines, sectoral reform programs, but also self-standing changes prompted by the environment, political entrepreneurship, organizational initiatives, or a combination thereof (Greve et al., 2018; Kuipers et al., 2018; Wynen et al., 2019). Similarly, the Norwegian government has faced increased numbers of public organization reforms during the period of study (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2006; Greve et al., 2018; Verhoest, 2017). Facing a range of stressors, our study may be considered as a least likely case of governance stability—and thus temporal robustness. Concomitantly, the results reported are of

relevance for understanding governance robustness beyond the case at hand. The data presented demonstrates how the civil service is characterized by profound stability in which essential elements of public governance processes are fairly change-resistant. Theoretically, the study demonstrates how organizational structures of government institutions foster elements of temporal stability over time. Showing that contact patterns and participatory behavior among government officials are unaffected by these shocks, this suggests that government officials remain unaffected because of isolated structural clusters of the government apparatus. These arguments are probed by a sizable dataset with observations across 40 years, consisting of nine surveys of ministerial and agency officials ( $N = 13,173$ ).

Three distinct contributions are made to extant literature:

- First, the article outlines an organizational theory perspective on public governance. The study thus complements extant literature that emphasizes the role of de-institutionalized informal practices in public policy and administration (White, 2022). Three rationales motivate our theoretical focus: first, our study demonstrates how organizational structures of government institutions foster elements of temporal stability in the behavioral patterns among civil servants (Ansell & Trondal, 2017; Olsen, 2006; Simon, 1983: 22); Second, organizational theory is not frequently used in contemporary studies of public policy and administration (Bevir, 2010; Levi-Faur, 2012). Third, an organizational approach is instrumental: Organizational structures are flexibly available to deliberate design and may thus be a potential *design tool* in public governance (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018; Goodin, 1996; Peters, 2018; Self, 1972). By bringing in the organizational dimension of governance, the study introduces a design tool that may be applied for deliberately designing robust governance. The study thus responds to Ostrom's challenge of building ties between the academic study and the practical conduct of public administration (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018; O'Leary et al., 2010: 292), as well as to Johan Olsen's call for making political science an "architectonic discipline" on the basis of organizational sciences (Olsen, 2010).
- Second, these arguments are probed by a sizable dataset with observations across 40 years among top civil servants within both government ministries and agencies in Norway. Offering a long-term perspective on government civil servants over almost half a century, the dataset contains multiple observations at several observation-points in time. It consists of nine surveys among top civil servants conducted every tenth year between 1976 and 2016 (see below). In sum, these data establish profound stability in governance processes over study period, and thus overall governance robustness in the central administration overall. The Norwegian public administration is structurally stable over the time period of this study, contributing to long-term stability in governing patterns.
- Finally, the article establishes how varieties of organizational structures in the government apparatus fuel some stable tensions within the central administration. These tensions moreover illuminates structured flexibility in the government civil service: A first tension is observed between the open and inclusive versus a sealed and disclosed central administration; the second is between primary versus secondary organizational structures within the administrative apparatus; while the third is between the central administration as genuinely national system of governance versus its role as part of a European Union (EU) multilevel administrative system, meaning that national government institutions and EU institutions connect across levels of governance in their every-day governance activities. As argued below, the central administration has become "double-hatted," in which the role as a "national" central administration has been supplemented with its role as an administrative infrastructure for the EU. In sum, these tensions suggest structured flexibility by allowing the civil service to act flexibly but systematically over time by adapting to internal and external institutions, which include societal stakeholders and international organizations (cf. OECD, 2021). More generally, these observations highlight how diversity inherent in overlapping administrative structures fuel tensions within the central administration in which some ministers are oriented toward politics and the EU, while subordinated agencies are more oriented internally, professionally and toward stakeholder groups. In short, organizational specialization represents stable checks and balances inherent in the administrative system. As a result, the study establishes how such structural stability serves as a robust character in the central administration.

The article proceeds in the following steps: The next section theorizes the organizational dimension of governance robustness. Succeeding a presentation of data and methods, the empirical section displays observations of behavioral continuity and change in the behavioral patterns of top civil servants across time. The article concludes by discussing implications for future studies of governance robustness.

## 2 | AN ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE ROBUSTNESS

The theoretical approach is built on the conjecture that organizational features may account for how organizations perform and reform. Organization theory suggests that governance processes and human behavior reflect stable organizational routines (Cyert & March, 1963). Premises for choices within organizations are arguably based on previous experiences encrypted in organizational rules and articulated in the organizational architecture of the organization (Frederickson et al., 2012; Olsen, 2017). The organizational features are thus likely to systematically enable and constrain certain governing processes, thus making certain organizational choices more likely than others. Moreover, an organization approach also features similar ideas on organizational change, emphasizing ideas of structured flexibility in which sustained or stable governing patterns over time may be structurally conditioned (Olsen, 2009). However, we may envisage two kinds of flexibility. The first is associated with the ability of public administration to change over time. The second is related to the informal “secondary” structures that may develop both within and across sectors and levels within organizations and political life (White, 2022). To illustrate, structured flexibility was observed in the German financial administration facing the 2008 financial crisis: Whereas the hierarchically structured Finance ministry faced stability throughout the crisis, it developed collegial structures (networks) to respond to the financial crisis, in which these networks helped it adapt flexibly to episodic demands (McCowan, 2016).

Different conceptions on resilience and robustness can also be found in extant literature. As outlined by the OECD (2021: 26), resilience is not a binary concept. Studies distinguish between static and dynamic resilience (Ansell & Trondal, 2017). The OECD (2021: 25) also distinguishes how different logics of resilience may unfold at different stages of a disruption. Organizations may be likely to select a logic of static resilience to maintain and restore equilibrium conditions, particularly during early stages of a disruption. This strategy encourages path-dependent solutions that do not transform the essence or character of institutions (Selznick, 1957). This solution is likely to strive to get (or bounce) back to basics—reducing uncertainty and complexity to achieve order and stability. Resilience is enhanced by improving the fitness of the organization vis-à-vis new conditions. To do this, organizations are likely to establish and strengthen buffering capacity such as organizational units and resources whose core task is protecting the organization from changing conditions (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). By contrast, a logic of *dynamic resilience* does not draw a sharp distinction between stability and change (Easton, 1965; Farjoun, 2010). Rather, organizations may flexibly and pragmatically use stability to help them change and use change to help them to stabilize (Ansell, 2011). Moreover, no clear equilibrium between the organization and its environment is discerned and the organization appears to be continually changing as a reforming organization (Brunsson & Olsen, 1993). Dynamic resilience emphasizes the importance of building flexibility into organizational arrangements by absorbing complexity and incorporating requisite variety (Ansell & Trondal, 2017). Hence, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining multiple repertoires that can be flexibly used to meet changing situations. Rather than the sharp distinction between minor path-dependent incremental change and major exogenously produced punctuated change, this logic anticipates endogenous change that continuously reforms and updates the organization.

The two logics of resilience moreover resonate with the distinction between exploitation and exploration (March, 1991), that is learning how to do better what you already do (exploitation) and learning about new opportunities or about how to do new things (exploration). Studies show how public organizations tend to balance both exploitation and exploration, for example in order to both build capacities for continuous reform at the same time as organizing for every-day service delivery (March, 1991). Similarly, exploitation and exploration are often combined. A recent study of the COVID-19 shows how efficient and resilient crisis response includes creative and pragmatic

combinations of “core government functions” and at the same time temporary and agile crisis response units and skills (Muzzucato et al., 2021). This suggests a complex interplay between strategies of resilience and institutional change.

In our study, temporal robustness refers to the ability of civil servants to *combine* behavioral stability and change across time, however, accentuating their ability to *preserve* stability by resisting abrupt centrifugal forces stemming from political intrusion, democratic backsliding, and disruptive events (Bauer et al., 2021; Sørensen & Ansell, 2021). Essentially, however, this study does not test the effects of abrupt disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021). Robustness-as-stability in public governance implies that significant behavioral patterns among civil servants are *established* within and across administrative systems, thus *maintaining* the ability to allocate *sustained* value over time (Trondal, 2021).

This section first outlines the general argument and secondly derives four propositions: On stability and change (#1), on *inter-organizational* vertical specialization (#2), on *intra-organizational* vertical specialization (#3), and on organizational (re-)socialization (#4).

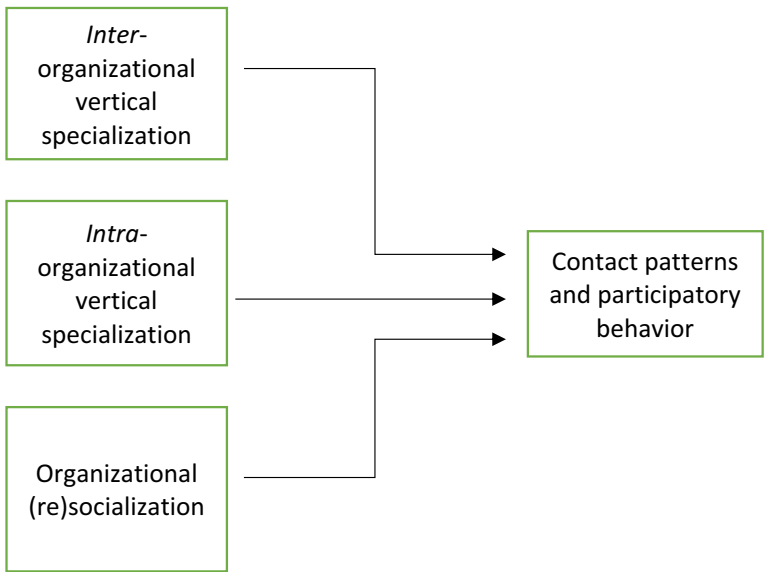
## 2.1 | The argument

By suggesting that organizational features are likely to mobilize actors' attention toward some problems, solutions and consequences while discounting others, Dwight Waldo inferred that a theory of organization is equally a theory of politics (Waldo, 1952). The pursuit of organizing and reorganizing are thus not neutral activities but are consequential (Gulick, 1937; Hammond, 1986; March, 2008; Schattschneider, 1975). Organizational variables are not merely manifestations of symbols and signals (Feldman & March, 1981; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), but are likely to generate systematic bias in human behavior and collective decision-making processes (Egeberg, 2012; Fligstein, 2001; Olsen, 1997; Simon, 1983; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). In this vein, organization theory is built on theories of decision-making (Simon, 1965).

Contemporary research in organization theory is particularly interested in the explanatory role of organizational *structure* (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). Organizational structures represent normative rules identifying a distribution of tasks among a set of roles (Scott & Davis, 2016). The structure submits how power and accountability should be allocated and is thus likely to shape actors' behavior by offering them with “a systematic and predictable selection of problems, solutions, and choice opportunities” (March & Olsen, 1976: 13). Organizational structures are not likely to determine the behavior of actors and organizations; they are likely to make some choices more *likely* than others (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018).

Organizational variables are not assumed to have direct societal impacts but to yield indirect effects by shaping policy processes within governing organizations. Organization theory moreover posits multiple mechanisms as to why actors are likely to comply with organizational rules and routines. Bounded rationality (Simon, 1965) is one such mechanism that *connects* roles to behavior. In short, organizational structures help to simplify actors' cognitive search for problems and solutions by nudging their attention toward a minor set of problems and solutions, and ways of linking them. Decision-makers work under three constraints disregarded by the “consequentialist theology” of economic man (March, 2020: 2): incomplete information; imperfect cognitive capacity to assess and process information; and shortage of time to make decisions. Accordingly, actors are likely to select satisfactory alternatives rather than optimal ones, and are likely to search for solutions that are proximate in time and space (Simon, 1965). The second mechanism—the logic of appropriateness—views human action as driven by internalized perceptions appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1989). Finally, actors may comply with rules based on their self-interests. Organizations are seen as providers of individual returns and penalties for organizational members (Ostrom et al., 2015; Simon, 1983).

In sum, an organizational approach conjectures that structural features of administrative systems are likely to influence the behavior of administrative staff over time. This general theoretical argument offers a first general proposition regarding stability and change:



**FIGURE 1** The theoretical model

*#1: Stable organizational structures in the government apparatus are likely to fuel stable contact patterns and participatory behavior among top civil servants over time.*

Next, three organizational variables are delineated that specifies how organizational structure may affect to civil servants' behavior: *inter-organizational vertical specialization*, *intra-organizational vertical specialization*, and *organizational (re)socialization*. The selection of variables is theoretical (Brady, 2000: 49) by particularly studying on the effect of vertical structuring of the civil service and varieties of organizational affiliations therein. Moreover, based on extant literature (see below), this variable is treated as a core organizational variable in this study, and thus serves as the basis for descriptive measurements (see Tables 1-4). All other independent variables (see below) are included in OLS regression models (Table 5; Figure 1).

## 2.2 | Inter-organizational vertical specialization

The division of tasks and labor *between* levels of authority in a government apparatus is expressed by a structural division between ministries and subordinate agencies (Pollitt & Talbot, 2004). *Vertical specialization* anchors relatively autonomous expertise within confined administrative units such as agencies subordinated to ministerial departments, which contributes to balance political loyalty against bureaucratic impartiality among office holders (Bach et al., 2015; Egeberg & Trondal, 2018; Læg Reid & Verhoest, 2010). Government agencies established at arm's-length distance from political control are created both to serve as advisory expert institutions *and* as loyal agents of the government. Such institutions may supply *stability* in governing processes and buffer shifting political signals from rotating governments. Vertical specialization allows decentered agencies to act shielded from direct political intervention in every-day affairs on the one hand. This also increases the likelihood that agencies establishes strong ties toward institutions outside the government apparatus, such as affected stakeholder groups and EU-level institutions (Egeberg & Trondal, 2009, 2017; Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011; Veit et al., 2017; Verhoest, 2017). By contrast, ministerial departments and ministry officials are structurally exposed to the political leadership and likely to become active in inter-organizational processers of the government apparatus at large, such as participation in inter-ministerial coordination committees. Structural proximity to executive heads in the ministerial leadership also

diminishes potential role ambiguities and interpretive leeway in task execution (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). In sum, vertical specialization is conducive to robustness since different vertical levels of the administrative apparatus are receptive to different constituencies and concerns. This leads to the second proposition:

*#2 Whereas **ministry officials** are likely to prioritize contact patterns and participatory behavior vertically toward the politico-administrative leadership and horizontally toward a broader spectrum of the administrative apparatus, **agency personnel** are likely to prioritize similar activities toward external institutions, such as stakeholder groups and EU-level and international institutions.*

### 2.3 | Intra-organizational vertical specialization

The division of tasks and labor *within* levels of authority and *within* institutions is measured in this study by officials' rank within their own organization. Previous studies show that top-ranked personnel in government ministries and agencies tend to assign more weight to steering signals from the top compared to low-ranked staff (Christensen & Lægreid, 2009; Egeberg & Sætren, 1999). Studies also suggest that government personnel in higher echelons of the hierarchy enjoy a horizontally broader attention-span than officials in lower positions, and they tend to identify more regularly with the government apparatus as a whole compared to staff located in lower-level positions. On top of this, higher-ranked government officials tend to be exposed to larger sets of relevant decision information compared lower-level staff. In sum, government officials in higher ranks are more likely to be attentive to broader organizational perceptions and outlooks than lower-ranked personnel (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). By contrast, government staff in lower-ranked positions are more likely to be loosely coupled to the government and enjoy local perspectives on responsibilities and tasks. This leads to the third proposition:

*#3 Whereas officials in **higher ranked** positions are likely to prioritize contact patterns and participatory behavior vertically toward the politico-administrative leadership and horizontally toward a broader spectrum of the administrative apparatus, officials in **lower ranked** positions are likely to prioritize similar activities toward external institutions, such as stakeholder groups and EU-level and international institutions.*

### 2.4 | Organizational (re)socialization

Time spent in organizations is likely to influence incumbents' behavior. This argument follows from a broad constructivist and institutionalist research literature in political science arguing that the effect of presocialization outside institutions is likely to be shaped and filtered by processes of resocialization *inside* institutions (Checkel, 2005; Trondal, 2001; Trondal et al., 2018). It is argued that socialization are dynamic processes in which organizations acquire some sense of shared values and meaning (or institutional "character") beyond the technical requirements at hand (Selznick, 1957). In short, organizations become institutions and members of the organization are induced to some shared rules, norms and beliefs, and filter out the causal effect of background (demographic) factors such as gender and age (Peters et al., 2015; Selden, 1997). At the actor level, processes of socialization within organizations relates to the processes in which organizational members are induced into a core set of institutional norms and beliefs that are deeply felt by senses of deep loyalty and long-term commitment (Selznick, 1992). Hence, processes of organizational ("in-house") socialization are likely to take time. Moreover, this argument also suggests that behavioral perceptions may occur over time due to *enduring* exposure to organizational rules and norms, leading to the development of new perceptions of appropriate behavior among the actors (March & Olsen, 1989). It is likewise argued that processes of resocialization are positively associated with the length of exposure to organizations—or the length of service within organizations (Beyers, 2010). This study measures resocialization by the *number of years*

that government staff are hired in the central administration. Organizational members with longer tenure are assumed to make different behavioral priorities compared to organizational members with shorter terms in office. This leads to the fourth proposition:

*#4 Officials with longer terms of office (in years) in the central administration in general are likely to be more integrated into the administrative services, measured by more frequent contact patterns and participatory behavior vis-à-vis the politico-administrative leadership as well as horizontally between organizations (ministries and agencies) compared to officials with shorter terms of office (in years) in the central administration in general.*

### 3 | DATA AND METHODS

Studies benefiting from large-N datasets allow for robust probes. This study benefits from nine novel large-scale surveys on the Norwegian central administration which includes officials within ministries ( $N = 7662$ ) and subordinated agencies ( $N = 5511$ ), with a total of 13,173 respondents. Questionnaires have been allocated to government officials from 1976 to 2016, including batteries of similar question over time regarding bureaucrats' backgrounds, careers, patterns of contact and involvement, issue-prioritization, role perceptions, perceptions of power-distribution, reform experiences, trust relationships, and internationalization and europeanization. Taken together, these surveys have enabled studying sequences of variables across time (Pierson, 2004: 173). This study selected a subset of these variables that are often used to study decision-making behavior (Bouckaert et al., 2010; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2008; Egeberg & Trondal, 2018), that is, officials' *patterns of contact and participation* in various institutions. This choice is made in order to offer a hard case of robustness-as-stability. Since patterns of contact and participation may arguably change more easily over time than, say, identities and role perceptions, we may consider contact and participation as least likely candidates for robustness. By measuring contacts and participation, we learn which institutions that are shaping discretionary behavior among civil servants, how frequent this happens, and ultimately how stable it is in terms of structured flexibility. Contacts entail all forms of interaction—oral, written, formal, and informal. The

**TABLE 1** Sample size and response rates in the ministry and agency surveys, 1976, 1986, 1996, 2006, and 2016

	Ministry		Agency	
	Responses	%	Responses	%
1976	784	72	-	-
1986	1185	72	1072	68
1996	1497	72	1024	64
2006	1874	67	1452	59
2016	2322	60	1963	60
Total	7662		5511	

**TABLE 2** Numbers of officials in ministries and agencies, over time (absolute numbers)<sup>a</sup>

	1976	1986	1996	2006	2016
Ministries	2812	3491	3945	4350	4752
Agencies	-	-	9182	11,040	15,359
Total	2812	3491	13,127	15,390	20,111

<sup>a</sup>Comparable numbers are missing for agencies in 1976 and 1986 (Christensen et al., 2018: 27).



survey asked which contacts civil servants emphasize during every-day decision-making, and what kind of participatory behavior they engage in at national and international level. These include primary structures such as ministries and agencies and secondary structures such as project groups, advisory boards, and committees (see below).

Surveying government officials who take part in the daily processes of decision-making, this study examines how they perceive the role and power of different government institutions over time. In particular, the article examines continuity and change along these variables as well as how statistical variation is associated with the structure of the central administration.

Whereas the surveys from 1986, 1996, 2006, and 2016 surveys include individual data files for ministry and agency officials, the 2016 survey in addition includes a merged data file of both ministry *and* agency officials ( $N = 4285$ ). The merged file enables careful analyses of the *theoretical variables included in the study*. *Importantly, since the OLS analysis does not include a time dimension, there are no theoretical reasons for doing similar analysis across time. Concomitantly, the most recent and comprehensive dataset from 2016 is thus used in the OLS regression analyses (Table 5). Moreover, since the first survey was fielded in 1976, the Norwegian central administration has become increasingly integrated into the EU administrative system, centered around the European Commission and EU agencies. This has caused governing dilemmas that are hard to handle separately by governing institutions and require processes of multilevel governance, that is, coordination of political authority across scales of authority. Consequently, the survey fielded since 1996 have included questions related to officials' contacts toward and participation within a variety of EU administrative bodies.*

The surveys include respondents from all ministries and all agencies. The survey at the ministerial level have been circulated to *all* civil servants at a so-called “A level” which include staff having nonclerical portfolios and who have at least *one year* in office. The sample thus includes the full population of “A-level” ministerial officials. By contrast, the agency surveys have been allocated to a random selection of *every third* official at the “A level” who have a minimum of *one year* in office. Due to the huge number of potential respondents at the agency level, random selection was largely a pragmatic choice.

Survey technologies have fundamentally shifted during our study—from the first survey in 1986 to the final survey in 2016. Whereas the studies in 1986 and 1996 approached respondents by physical post, the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) have been responsible for fielding the 2006 and 2016 surveys online. Yet, notwithstanding both changing survey technology as well as increases in survey exhaustion among respondents, response rates in these surveys have declined only slightly over the years (see Table 1). However, a minor reduction of responses from 1996 onwards which may still partly reflect shifting survey technologies and rising survey exhaustion among our respondents. Since both surveys in 1986 and 1996 used similar postal survey technologies, the drop in the response rates from may indeed reflect such fatigue.

One caveat is warranted: Empirical observations are based on the *perceptions* of the respondents. The study thereby risks that behavioral perceptions do not reflect actual behavior and/or are subject to perceptual errors. Admittedly, there are no guarantees that the perceptions of civil servants always materialize in actors' behavior and organizational decisions. However, perceptions serve as frames for action, rendering it more likely than not that particular decision-making logics are associated with certain perceptual patterns (Aberbach et al., 1981: 86) There are, however, ways of reducing such risks. One way is to use multiple observations and from different groups of respondents who respond to comparable questions over time. This is likely to renders the conclusions more robust and less subject to random distributions and methodological errors. Considering the challenges of self-reporting and respondents over-rating the importance of certain institutions, the study emphasizes variation in proportions across multiple variables.

## 4 | A LONG-TERM VIEW OF GOVERNMENT CIVIL SERVANTS

This section examines three behavioral proxies over time: First, civil servants' contact patterns toward a variety of institutions involved in the policy process (Tables 3 and 4), contacts toward international and EU-level institutions

(Table 5), and participation in secondary structures within the government apparatus (Table 6). Finally, based on the merged 2016 data-file an OLS regression model probes the controlled effects of *inter-organizational vertical specialization* (#2), *intra-organizational vertical specialization* (#3), and *organizational (re-)socialization* (#4) (Table 7).

Despite our surveys being fielded before, during, and after the NPM reform-wave, the organizational structure of the government apparatus has remained profoundly stable and robust over time, notably as regards the key organizational principles of vertical and horizontal specialization. This finding support recent observations on the stability and robustness of the organizational architectures of government institutions (Bertels & Schulze-Gabrechten, 2021). Essential to our argument, organizational stability is conducive to behavioral continuity (#1). However, Table 2 also shows a steady growth in organizational capacities measured by increased number of staff, providing the government with increased administrative capacities for public governance. Robustness, however, is also a capacity to modify practices without fundamentally transforming organizational structures (see below).

#### 4.1 | Long-term contact patterns

First, Tables 1 and 2 report long-term patterns of contact among ministerial and agency officials, respectively. These include contacts within the central administration, toward the political leadership, but also toward sub-national administration, interest groups, and business organizations. In sum, Tables 1 and 2 suggest that key contact patterns are associated with organizational boundaries within the central administration and thus that decision-making behavior, as measured, reflects the organizational architecture of the government apparatus. A second observation is profound stability in patterns of contact across 40 years (#1). Despite facing a range of stressors in this time period, these data demonstrate how long-term contact patterns are characterized by overall stability, in which essential elements of public governance remain robust.

By zooming in on variation in these observations, ministerial departments are consistently better anchored into the political leadership than agencies across time. Second, ministerial officials report consistently more horizontal anchoring within own institution than *vis-à-vis* other parts of the central administration, notably other ministries and agencies subordinated to the ministry. Contacts toward parliamentary institutions are also less frequent, reflecting that these relationships remain a responsibility for the ministerial political leadership. In essence, Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate profound stability over time (#1). Despite an increased calls for structural and policy reforms of government systems, and an increased internationalization of the civil service (see below), government officials report profound continuity in their behavioral patterns. Yet, structured flexibility is also illustrated by behavioral change. The most profound change observed in our data is less frequent contact between ministerial officials and regional and local administration over time—notably toward own regional and local administrative bodies. We also observe a decline in ministerial officials' contacts toward own political and administrative leadership. This does, however, not suggest a weakening of political steering or a de-politicization of the government apparatus since we are seeing a rising number of political advisors around the ministers during the same time period, relieving the politico-administrative leadership from direct interaction with ministerial officials (Krick et al., 2019; Veit et al., 2017). Moreover, agency officials have less frequent interaction with agencies other than their own and more frequent contacts toward business organizations. Supporting #2, high frequency of business contacts among agency officials reflects agencies' decentered role at arm's length distance from the political leadership, making agency officials biased toward stakeholder groups.

Reflecting the organizational specialization of the central administration, patterns of contacts toward stakeholder groups is also biased by policy portfolios: Ministerial officials tend to prioritize outwards contacts that match own task portfolios by enjoying more intensive toward agencies, regional and/or local administration, and stakeholders that match their own portfolios. Similar observations are seen at agency level. Moreover, Tables 1 and 2 establish that ministerial and agency officials have much less frequent contact toward regional and local

**TABLE 3** Proportion of ministry officials reporting *contacts* toward the following domestic institutions and bodies during the last year (%)<sup>a</sup>

	1976	1986	1996	2006	2016
<i>Intra-governmental contacts</i>					
The minister	41	45	33	34	33
State secretary/political advisors	49	51	44	49	51
Administrative leadership within own ministry (General Secretary, heads of unit)	90	87	77	82	76
Other units within own ministry	74	87	81	85	86
Other ministries	78	78	68	68	69
The Parliament and its internal bodies <sup>b</sup>	12	10	6	4	10
Own subordinate agencies and public enterprises	38	73	56	61	61
Agencies and governmental bodies beneath other ministries	21	20	17	18	17
<i>Inter-organizational contacts</i>					
Regional and local governmental bodies beneath own ministry	38	55	33	23	17
Regional and local administration	35	28	22	9	9
Labor and business organizations	42	28	19	16	26
Other organizations	–	–	23	19	23

<sup>a</sup>Civil servants reporting contacts “almost every month,” or more often. The original value scale on the variable was as follows: Almost every week (value 1), almost every month (value 2), a few times (value 3), never (value 4), not relevant (value 5).

<sup>b</sup>This includes contacts toward the Parliament and its internal units: Parliamentary committees within own policy area, individual Parliamentary representatives, and Parliamentary party groups.

**TABLE 4** Proportion of agency officials reporting *contacts* toward the following domestic institutions and bodies during the last year (%)<sup>a</sup>

	1976	1986	1996	2006	2016
<i>Intra-governmental contacts</i>					
Agency board	–	44	52	6	–
The top management of own agency	–	45	42	42	43
Other units within own agency	–	78	69	67	67
The political leadership in parent ministry	–	2	3	4	3
Civil servants in parent ministry	–	25	32	31	28
Other ministries (political leadership and/or civil servants)	–	11	11	9	8
Other agencies	–	18	19	24	33
Own external governmental bodies (if such exists)	–	84	69	40	33
Other external governmental bodies	–	14	16	14	13
<i>Inter-governmental contacts</i>					
The parliament (and its internal bodies)	–	11	0	4	16
Regional and/or local administration	–	13	17	16	16
Labor organizations	–	19	14	9	14
Business organizations	–	14	13	11	15
Other organizations	–	–	44	35	35

<sup>a</sup>Civil servants reporting contacts “almost every month,” or more often. The original value scale on the variable was as follows: Almost every week (value 1), almost every month (value 2), a few times (value 3), never (value 4), not relevant (value 5).

administration—that is, toward regional and local bodies subordinate to own ministry or agency, including the country governor's office. Reflecting a *quest for order* and “better coordination” of the government apparatus, our finding shows a stronger integration of the central government than an integration of national and sub-national administrative institutions (Egeberg & Trondal, 2016).

## 4.2 | Long-term international contacts

Norway is characterized as an associated EU-member-state without being politically a member. There are 101 living treaties between Norway and the EU. As a consequence, more than 14,000 legislative acts originating from the EU have been incorporated into Norwegian law since 1994. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the structured flexibility of these agreements, which leads to a continuous transposition of EU legislative acts into Norwegian law. It also reflects incomplete contracting in which the original EEA agreement gradually has become incomplete vis-à-vis the EU legal development and subsequently been accompanied by new agreements with the EU, leading to dynamic updating of the set of contracts—or treaties—over time. In effect, legal transposition increasingly occupies the working hours of Norwegian civil servants.

Table 5 examines patterns of contacts among ministerial and agency officials vis-à-vis EU and international institutions over time. Despite the dynamic character of Norway's relationship with the EU, Table 5 establishes profound continuity in civil servants' general international contact patterns across time. However, reflecting the dynamic character Norway's relationship with the EU (cf. Figures 2 and 3), observations made in Table 5 mask

**TABLE 5** Proportion of ministry and agency officials reporting *contacts* toward the following international and EU-level institutions during the last year (%)<sup>a</sup>

	1976	1986	1996	2006	2016
<i>Ministerial officials</i>					
Norway's delegation to the EU	-	-	16	18	16
The European Commission	-	-	7	8	7
The (Union) Council	-	-	-	-	1
The European Parliament	-	-	-	-	1
EU agencies	-	-	-	2	2
Nordic institutions (e.g., Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Council)	7	-	9	7	7
Other international organizations	11	22	12	14	18
Governments in other countries	12	22	7	14	22
<i>Agency officials</i>					
Norway's delegation to the EU	-	-	1	2	2
The European Commission	-	-	2	4	4
The (Union) Council	-	-	-	-	0
The European Parliament	-	-	-	-	2
EU agencies	-	-	-	4	6
Nordic institutions (e.g., Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Council)	-	-	7	8	5
Other international organizations	-	11	7	9	7
Governments in other countries	-	8	4	4	12

<sup>a</sup>Civil servants reporting contacts “almost every month,” or more often. The original value scale on the variable was as follows: Almost every week (value 1), almost every month (value 2), a few times (value 3), never (value 4), not relevant (value 5).

an increase in the *absolute numbers* of officials who are in regular contact with EU institutions. Two supplementary observations are noticeable: First, both ministerial and agency officials report fairly similar contact patterns, most importantly toward governmental institutions in other countries and international institutions. The European Commission and Nordic institutions are perceived as important, yet less than other international institutions. This is most notable at ministerial level (#2). One significant difference is that national agency officials prioritize contacts toward policy-relevant EU-level agencies compared to ministry officials (Egeberg & Trondal, 2009). Ministry staff enjoy a slightly more politicized international contact profile, *inter alia* focusing on contacts toward the Norwegian EU delegation.

### 4.3 | Continuity and change secondary structures

Government officials participate in multiple organizational *affiliations* that mobilize varieties of agendas, commitments, and loyalties. These affiliations in sum provide structured flexibility for government officials and thus avenues for robust governance. A “primary affiliation” is characterized as a structure that represents a primary guide to organizational members—such as ministries and agencies. In addition to the primary structure of government, central administrations also harbor a vast set of secondary structures such as collegial bodies, committee systems, projects, and working groups that involve civil servants part-time as well as include external stakeholder groups (Self, 1972: 105). A “secondary affiliation” is characterized as a structure that represents a secondary guide to organizational members (Egeberg, 2012). These structures are often established to reconcile administrative conflicts as well as increase coordination and integration between often loosely coupled primary structures. Such network structures tend to be established in the “shadow of hierarchy” (Héritier & Lehmkuhl, 2008), aimed to support activities in the primary structure. They might facilitate mutual learning and socialization among primary structures (March & Olsen, 1989). Secondary structures can be temporary or semi-permanent. Moreover, secondary structures can be internal to the central administration, that is, involving only

**TABLE 6** Proportion of ministry and agency staff *participating* in the following during the last year (%)

	1976 <sup>a</sup>	1986 <sup>a</sup>	1996 <sup>a</sup>	2006 <sup>a</sup>	2016 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Ministerial officials</i>					
Collegial bodies within own ministry	57	71	79	75	79
Collegial bodies across ministries	40	53	58	54	63
Collegial bodies with subordinated agencies	–	–	42	40	50
Government advisory groups/bodies	–	29	19	6	12
Nordic committee, working groups, etc.	36 <sup>b</sup>	61 <sup>b</sup>	37 <sup>b</sup>	–	15
Committee, working group in international organizations	37 <sup>b</sup>	61 <sup>b</sup>	41 <sup>b</sup>	–	26
<i>Agency officials</i>					
Collegial bodies within own ministry	–	82	80	8	87
Collegial bodies across ministries	–	–	20	20	30
Collegial bodies with subordinated agencies	–	34	33	36	29
Government advisory groups/bodies	–	14	9	5	6
Nordic committee, working groups, etc.	–	28 <sup>b</sup>	29 <sup>b</sup>	30 <sup>b</sup>	20
Committee, working group in international organizations	–	20 <sup>b</sup>	29 <sup>b</sup>	35 <sup>b</sup>	27

<sup>a</sup>Civil servants reporting “Yes.”

<sup>b</sup>Civil servants reporting “Yes, a few times, or more often” The original value scale is: “Yes, several times” (value 1), “Yes, one time” (value 2), “never” (value 3).

**TABLE 7** Summary of factors affecting ministry and agency officials' patterns of *contact* and *participation* (standardized beta coefficients; linear regressions on ministry and agency officials; 2016 data)<sup>a,b</sup>

	Model 1 Contacts toward top leadership in own ministry/agency	Model 2 Contacts toward other units in own ministry/agency	Model 3 Participation in collegial bodies within own ministry/agency	Model 4 Participation in collegial bodies between ministries/agencies
(#1) Inter-organizational vertical specialization (ministry/agency)	0.35**	0.26**	-0.10**	0.35**
(#2) Intra-organizational vertical specialization (rank)	0.31**	0.19**	0.11**	0.17**
(#3) Organizational (re-) socialization (tenure)	0.08*	0.06*	0.07*	0.05*
R square	0.122	0.092	0.082	0.098

\* $p \leq 0.05$ .\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

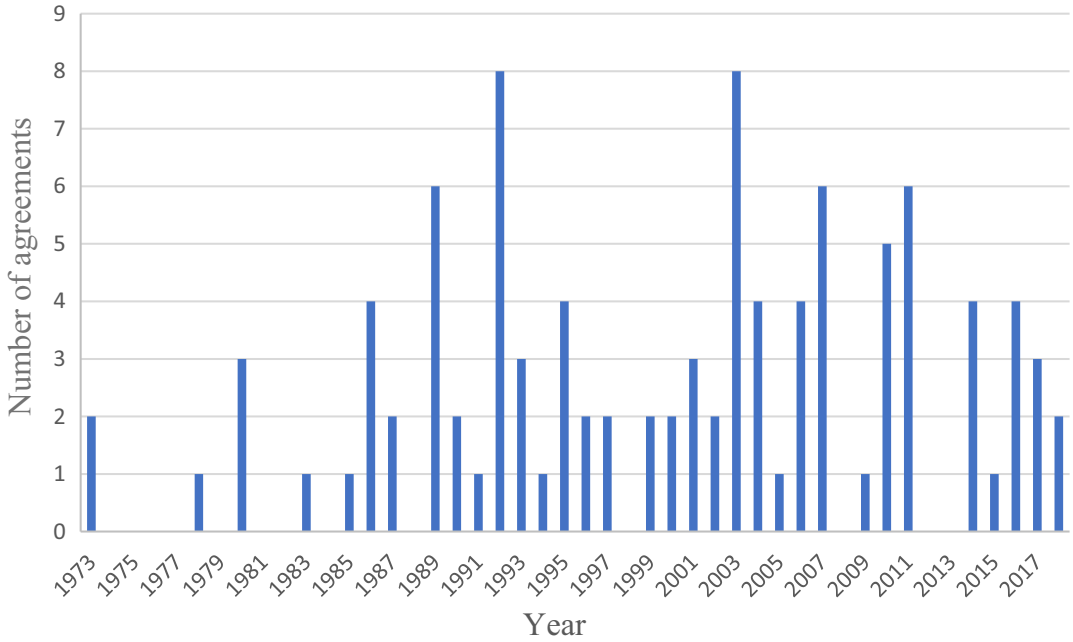
<sup>a</sup>Coding of the dependent variables: The original value scale in the survey of variables 1 and 2: Almost every week (value 1), almost every month (value 2), a few times (value 3), never (value 4), not relevant (value 5). The original value scale in the survey of variables 3 and 4: "Yes, several times" (value 1), "Yes, one time" (value 2), "never" (value 3).

<sup>b</sup>Coding of the independent variables: Vertical inter-organizational specialization: ministry (value 1), agency (value 0); vertical intra-organizational specialization (director general or higher levels/adviser/director or equivalent (value 1), deputy director general (value 2), assistant director general/adviser (value 3), principal officer/adviser (value 4), executive officer, higher executive officer/adviser (value 5); Organizational affiliation (tenure (in years) in the central administration in general): original natural continuous variable.

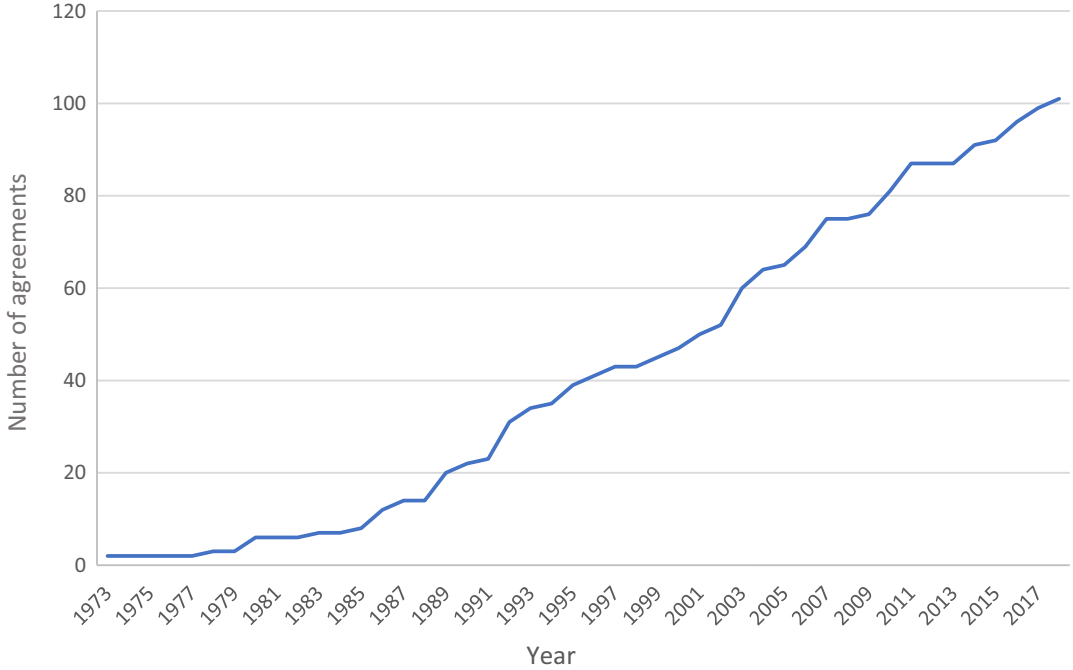
ministry officials, or they can be external and invite participation across ministries, agencies, levels of governance, as well as involving external stakeholder groups.

Table 6 establishes that secondary structures such as working groups and project groups that are internal to the government apparatus are common both at ministerial level and at agency level, yet most frequent at the agency level. This is a robust organizational form with a fairly long history. At ministerial level, by contrast, secondary structures became particularly important particularly during the 1980s. Still, 60% of ministerial staff attended collegial structures also during the 1970s.

Table 6 reveals two additional observations. First, we observe profound continuity in the role played by secondary structures across time (#1), particularly at the agency level (#2); second, we observe that participation in secondary structures reflect the primary structuring of the central administration in two ways. First, Table 6 reveals continuity over time as regards participation in working groups and project groups in both international and Nordic institutions. Agency staff participate in international collegial bodies at a similar frequency as in national collegial bodies—notably with parent ministry, between agencies, as well as with sub-national bodies. Moreover, ministerial officials report increased participation in working groups and project groups, both internally to the ministry, across ministries and toward subordinate agencies. Second, Table 6 suggests that participation in secondary structures is systematically shaped by primary structures, notably the organizational embedment of staff (#3). In effect, secondary structures tend to *support* primary structures since participation in collegial secondary structures is most evident *within own* institutions than across institutions, and more extensive within the central administration than internationally. Horizontally, this pattern is substantiated both by more extensive participation within *own* ministry and agency than between ministries and subordinate agencies (for ministry staff), as well as toward parent ministry (for agency staff). Participation in collegial structures across ministries and agencies is thus much less developed than participation in intra-organizational groups, and such structures are more extensively used at ministerial than at agency level. While we see a growth in the use of secondary structures at ministerial level, no parallel growth is



**FIGURE 2** Number of agreements between Norway and the EU, by year, 1973–2018 Source: Norwegian Government (2019)



**FIGURE 3** Accumulated number of agreements between Norway and the EU, 1973–2018 Source: Norwegian Government (2019)

observed at agency level. Moreover, participation in working groups and project groups across levels of governance is less frequent than horizontally within each level of governance, particularly among ministerial officials. A final observation is that ministerial and agency officials tend to reduce their involvement in ad hoc advisory commission, typically established by the Cabinet (see Christensen & Hesstvedt, 2018 on the expertization of government advisory commissions).

Finally, to estimate controlled effects, four OLS regression models are presented using the *merged* 2016 dataset that includes both ministry and agency officials ( $N = 4285$ ). Four dependent variables were selected: civil servants' contacts toward the leadership within "own" ministry/agency (model 1), contacts toward other units within "own" ministry/agency (model 2), participation in collegial bodies within "own" ministry/agency (model 3), and participation in collegial bodies between ministries/agencies (model 4). A general finding is that organizational structure significantly shapes the patterns of contact and participation among civil servants, despite an overall low explained variance. Moreover, officials in ministerial departments (#2) and in higher ranks (#3) tend to have significantly more contact toward the administrative leadership in "own" ministry/agency and other units in "own" ministry/agency compared to officials at the agency level and in lower ranks. One implication of these findings is that senior ministerial officials are more likely to "have a common mind with the minister" (Self, 1972: 165) and co-govern compared to lower ranked agency officials. In addition, higher ranked officials tend to participate more in secondary collegial structures—both inter- and intra-organizationally—compared to lower ranked staff (#3). However, whereas agency officials are more likely to participate in collegial bodies *within* their own organization, ministerial officials are more likely to prioritize *inter*-ministerial participation. Finally, whereas organizational embedment and rank leaves significant explained variance, organizational (re-)socialization (#4) as measured by the seniority of staff has significant, but weaker effects than the two other explanatory variables. Despite a fairly low  $R$  square, the findings supports extant literature suggesting that seniority is a profoundly weaker predictor of role obedience among civil servants than organizational structures (see Egeberg & Stigen, 2021).

## 5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study confirms Self's (1972: 151) seminal argument that an important role of public administration is to add stability and routine to the fluidity and ambiguity that characterizes democratic governance. Studying public governance across time is crucial in order to understand the conditions for robust political order (Olsen, 2018) and the long-term provision of public value (Dahlstrom & Lapuente, 2017; Douglas et al., 2021).

This study carries two distinct contributions to public policy and administration literature. Theoretically, it introduces an organizational approach to study public governance and demonstrates how the organizational architecture of government represents a stable and systemic capacity for public governance across time. The study establishes how stability serves as an enduring feature of public governance and how this is anchored in the *organizational architecture* of government systems. Patterns of contact and participation among government civil servants is shaped and biased by the organizational affiliation of civil servants within the central administration. Moreover, observing that contact patterns and participatory behavior among government officials are unaffected by these shocks, this suggests that government officials remain unaffected because of isolated structural clusters of the government apparatus. Behavioral processes are profoundly driven by fairly stable routines embedded in formal rules. Moreover, structured flexibility is illustrated by how the civil service has adapted to both international organizations and societal stakeholders. Second, the theoretical argument and empirical findings are probed by a novel large-scale and longitudinal dataset that spans four decades. These novel data encompass five observation-points, enabling a long-term perspective on government civil servants over nearly half a century, allowing a comprehensive study of the organizational basis for robust public governance.



One theoretical implication of these findings is that organizational structure (#2, #3) represents a stronger predictor of robust governance than processes of organizational socialization (#4). One subsequent implication relates to design-thinking in public policy and administration, in which the findings of this study establishes that the robustness of public governance may be subject to deliberate intervention through organizational engineering (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). One additional empirical implication is that robust coordination of governance processes within the central administration is primarily anchored among ministerial officials are tied close to the politico-administrative leadership. These observed patterns differ according with the actors' organizational belonging, which as such remain profoundly stable across time. Stable organizational architectures are thus conducive to robust behavioral patterns over fairly long periods of time.

Taken together, these observations establish the organizational foundation for robust public governance in which administrative systems harbor some fundamental stable organizational capacities. Moreover, this study shows that collegial (secondary) structures largely support hierarchical (primary) structures over time, and thus supply two complementary organizational capacities for robustness in the civil service. Finally, the article establishes how varieties of organizational structures in the government apparatus fuel stable tensions within the central administration. The study features three tensions in the central administration that together illuminates structured flexibility: A first tension is observed between the open and inclusive vs. a sealed and disclosed central administration, the second is between the primary and secondary structures of the administrative apparatus, while the third is between the central administration as genuinely national and its role as part of an EU multilevel administrative system. In sum, these tensions suggest structured flexibility by allowing the civil service to act flexibly but systematically over time by adapting to internal and external institutions, which includes societal stakeholders and international organizations. Organizational specialization of the civil service represents stable checks and balances inherent in the administrative system. As a result, the study establishes how such structural stability serves as a robust character in the central administration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges helpful comments on previous versions of the article from the Journal Editor, two anonymous reviewers, Eva Sørensen, Chris Ansell, and Johan P. Olsen.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data may be accessed at the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

## REFERENCES

- Aberbach, J., Putnam, R.D. & Rockman, B. (1981) *Bureaucrats and politicians in Western democracies*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Adam, C., Hurka, S., Knill, C. & Steinebach, Y. (2021) *Policy accumulation and the democratic responsiveness Trapp*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alvesson, M. & Spicer, A. (2019) Neo-institutional theory and organization studies: a mid-life crisis? *Organization Studies*, 40(2), 199–218.
- Ansell, C. (2011) *Pragmatist democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ansell, C. & Trondal, J. (2017) Governing turbulence. An organizational-institutional agenda. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 1(1), 43–57.
- Ansell, C., Trondal, J. & Ogaard, M. (eds.) (2017) *Governance in Turbulent Times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aucoin, P. (1990) Administrative reform in public administration: paradigms, principles paradoxes and pendulums. *Governance*, 3(2), 115–137.
- Bach, T., Ruffing, E. & Yesilkagit, K. (2015) The differential empowering effects of Europeanization on the autonomy of national agencies. *Governance*, 28(3), 285–304.

- Bauer, M.W., Peters, B.G., Pierre, J., Yesilkagit, K. & Becker, S. (Eds.). (2021) *Democratic backsliding and public administration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benz, A., Broschek, J. & Lederer, M. (Eds.). (2021) *A research agenda for multilevel governance*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Bertels, J. & Schulze-Gabrechten, L. (2021) Mapping the black box of intraministerial organization: an analytical approach to explore structural diversity below the portfolio level. *Governance*, 34(1), 171–189.
- Bevir, M. (Ed.). (2010) *The SAGE handbook of governance*. London: SAGE.
- Beyers, J. (2010) Conceptual and methodological challenges in the study of European socialization. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 17(6), 909–920.
- Bouckaert, G., Peters, B.G. & Verhoest, K. (2010) *The coordination of public sector organizations*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brady, H.E. (2000) Contributions of survey research to political science. *Political Science and Politics*, 33(1), 47–57.
- Brunsson, N. & Olsen, J.P. (1993) *The reforming organization*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Checkel, J.T. (2005) International institutions and socialization in Europe. Introduction and framework. *International Organization*, 59, 801–826.
- Christensen, T., Egeberg, M., Læg Reid, P. & Trondal, J. (2018) *Sentralforvaltningen. Stabilitet og endring gjennom 40 år*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Christensen, J. & Hesstvedt, S. (2018) Expertisation or greater representation? Evidence from Norwegian advisory commissions. *European Politics and Society*, 20(1), 3–100.
- Christensen, T. & Læg Reid, P. (Eds.). (2006) *Autonomy and regulation*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Christensen, T. & Læg Reid, P. (Eds.). (2007) *Transcending new public management*. London: Routledge.
- Christensen, T. & Læg Reid, P. (2008) The challenge of coordination in central government organizations: the Norwegian case. *Public Organization Review*, 8(2), 97–116.
- Christensen, T. & Læg Reid, P. (2009) Living in the past? Change and continuity in the Norwegian central civil service. *Public Administration Review*, 69(5), 951–961.
- Cyert, R. & March, J.G. (1963) *A behavioral theory of the firm*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dahlstrom, C. & Lapuente, V. (2017) *Organizing leviathan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dibben, P., Wood, G. & Rober, I. (Eds.). (2004) *Contesting public sector reform*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Douglas, S., Schillemans, T., 't Hart, P., Ansell, C., Andersen, L.B., Flinders, M. et al. (2021) Rising to Ostrom's challenge: an invitation to walk the bright side of public governance and public service. *Policy Design and Practice*, 4(4), 441–451.
- Easton, D. (1965) *A systems analysis of political life*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Egeberg, M. (2012) How bureaucratic structure matters: an organizational perspective. In: Peters, B.G. & Pierre, J. (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of public administration*. London: SAGE.
- Egeberg, M. & Sætnen, H. (1999) Identities in complex organizations: a study of ministerial bureaucrats. In: Egeberg, M. & Læg Reid, P. (Eds.) *Organizing political institutions*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Egeberg, M. & Stigen, I.M. (2021) Explaining government bureaucrats' behaviour: on the relative importance of organizational position, demographic background, and political attitudes. *Public Policy and Administration*, 36(1), 3–18.
- Egeberg, M. & Trondal, J. (2009) Political leadership and bureaucratic autonomy. Effects of agencification. *Governance*, 22(4), 673–688.
- Egeberg, M. & Trondal, J. (2016) Why strong coordination at one level of government is incompatible with strong coordination across levels (and how to live with it). The case of the European Union. *Public Administration*, 94, 3, 579–592.
- Egeberg, M. & Trondal, J. (2017) Researching European Union agencies. What have we learnt (and where do we go from here). *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55(4), 675–690.
- Egeberg, M. & Trondal, J. (2018) *An organizational approach to public governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Emery, Y. & Giauque, D. (2014) The hybrid universe of public administration in the 21st century. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 80(1), 23–32.
- Farjoun, M. (2010) Beyond dualism: stability and change as a duality. *Academy of Management Review*, 35, 202–225.
- Feldman, M.S. & March, J.G. (1981) Information in organizations as signal and symbol. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(2), 171–186.
- Fligstein, N. (2001). Organizations: theoretical debates and the scope of organizational theory. Unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley.
- Frederickson, H.G., Smith, K.B., Larimer, C.W. & Licari, M.J. (2012) *The public administration theory primer*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Goodin, R.E. (1996) *The theory of institutional design*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gornitzka, Å. & Sverdrup, U. (2011) Access of experts: information and EU decision-making. *West European Politics*, 34(1), 48–70.
- Greve, C., Læg Reid, P. & Rykkja, L. (2018) *Nordic bureaucracy beyond new public management. Bureaucracy and Society in Transition (comparative social research, Vol. 33)*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 205–224. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0195-63102018000033014>

- Gulick, L. (1937) Notes on the theory of organization. In: Gulick, L. & Urwick, L. (Eds.) *Papers on the science of administration*. New York: Institute of Public Administration.
- Hammond, T.H. (1986) Agenda control, organizational structure, and bureaucratic politics. *American Journal of Political Science*, 30(1), 379–420.
- Héritier, A. & Lehmkuhl, D. (2008) Introduction: the shadow of hierarchy and new modes of governance. *Journal of Public Policy*, 28(1), 1–17.
- Hood, C. & Jackson, M. (1991) *Administrative argument*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.
- Howlett, M. & Goetz, K.H. (2014) Introduction: time, temporality and timescapes in administration and policy. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 80(3), 477–492.
- Kettl, D.F. (2002) *The transformation of governance*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Krick, E., Christensen, J. & Holst, C. (2019) Between “scientisation” and a “participatory turn”. Tracing shifts in the governance of policy advice. *Science and Public Policy*, 46(6), 927–939.
- Kuipers, S., Yesilkagit, K. & Carroll, B. (2018) Coming to terms with termination of public organizations. *Public Organization Review*, 18(2), 263–278.
- Lægreid, P. & Verhoest, K. (Eds.). (2010) *Governance of public sector organizations*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Levi-Faur, D. (Ed.). (2012) *The Oxford handbook of governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- March, J.G. (1991) Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science*, 2, 71–87.
- March, J.G. (2008) The myth of rationality. In: Sverdrup, U. & Trondal, J. (Eds.) *The organizational dimension of politics*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- March, J.G. (2020) A scholar's quest. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 20(4), 355–357.
- March, J.G. & Olsen, J.P. (1976) *Ambiguity and choice in organizations*. Bergen: Scandinavian University Press.
- March, J.G. & Olsen, J.P. (1989) *Rediscovering institutions*. New York: The Free Press.
- McCowan, M. (2016) Turbulent times for ministries of finance. In: Ansell, C., Trondal, J. & Orgard, M. (Eds.) *Governance in turbulent times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meyer, J.W. & Rowan, B. (1977) Institutionalized organizations. Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340–363.
- Meyer, M.W. (1979) *Change in public administration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moloney, K. & Stone, D. (2019) Beyond the state: global policy and transnational administration. *International Review of Public Policy*, 1(1), 104–118.
- Muzzucato, M., Kattel, R., Quaggiotto, G. & Begovic, M. (2021) *COVID-19 and the need for dynamic state capabilities: an international comparison*. UCL Development Futures Series Working Papers. London: University College London.
- Norwegian Government. (2019) *Prop. 47 LS (2018–2019)*. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/prop-47-ls-20182019/id2630679/?ch=15>.
- OECD. (2021) *Government at a glance*. Paris: OECD.
- O'Leary, R., Van Slyke, D.M. & Kim, S. (2010) *The future of public administration around the world*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Olsen, J.P. (1997) Institutional design in democratic contexts. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 5(3), 203–229.
- Olsen, J.P. (2006) Maybe it is time to rediscover bureaucracy. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 16(1), 1–24.
- Olsen, J.P. (2009) Change and continuity: an institutional approach to institutions of democratic government. *European Political Science Review*, 1(1), 3–32.
- Olsen, J.P. (2010) *Governing through institution building*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olsen, J.P. (2017) *Democratic accountability, political order, and change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olsen, J.P. (2018) Democratic accountability and the changing European political order. *European Law Journal*, 24(1), 77–98.
- Osborne, D. & Gaebler, T. (1992) *Reinventing government*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.
- Ostrom, E., Ostrom, V., Aligica, P.D. & Sabetti, P. (2015) *Choice, rules and collective action*. Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Peters, B.G. (2018) *Policy problems and policy design*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Peters, B.G., von Maravic, P. & Schroter, E. (Eds.). (2015) *Politics of representative bureaucracy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Pierson, P. (2004) *Politics in time*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pollitt, C. (2008) *Time, policy, management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pollitt, C. (2011) Not odious but onerous: comparative public administration. *Public Administration*, 89(1), 114–127.
- Pollitt, C. & Bouckaert, G. (2017) *Public management reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pollitt, C. & Talbot, C. (Eds.). (2004) *Unbundled government*. London: Routledge.
- Rainey, H.G. & Steinbauer, P. (1999) Galloping elephants: developing elements of a theory of effective government organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 9(1), 1–32.
- Riddervold, M., Trondal, J. & Newsome, A. (Eds.). (2021) *The Palgrave handbook of EU crises*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rothstein, B. (2012) Political legitimacy for public administration. In: Peters, B.G. & Pierre, J. (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of public administration*. London: SAGE.

- Schattschneider, E.E. (1975) *The semisovereign people*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Scott, W.R. & Davis, G.F. (2016) *Organizations and organizing*. London: Routledge.
- Selden, S.C. (1997) *The promise of representative bureaucracy*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe.
- Self, P. (1972) *Administrative theories and politics*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Selznick, P. (1957) *Leadership in Administration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Selznick, P. (1992) *The moral commonwealth*. California: University of California Press.
- Simon, H.A. (1965) *Administrative behavior*. New York: The Free Press.
- Simon, H.A. (1983) *Reason in human affairs*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Sørensen, E. & Ansell, C. (2021) Towards a concept of political robustness. *Political Studies*, 003232172199997. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321721999974>
- Thaler, R.H. & Sunstein, C.R. (2009) *Nudge. Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*. London: Penguin Books.
- Trondal, J. (2001) Is there any social constructivist – institutionalist divide? Unpacking social mechanisms affecting representational roles among EU decision-makers. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 8(1), 1–23.
- Trondal, J. (2021) Public administration sustainability and its organizational basis. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 87(2), 399–415.
- Trondal, J., Murdoch, Z. & Geys, B. (2018) How pre- and postrecruitment factors shape role perceptions of European Commission officials. *Governance*, 31(1), 85–101.
- Veit, S., Hustedt, T. & Bach, T. (2017) Dynamics of change in internal policy advisory systems: the hybridization of advisory capacities in Germany. *Policy Sciences*, 50(1), 85–103.
- Verhoest, K. (2017) Agencification in Europe. In: Ongaro, E. & Van Thiel, S. (Eds.) *The Palgrave handbook on public administration and management in Europe*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Waldo, D. (1952) Development of theory of democratic administration. *American Political Science Review*, 46(1), 81–103.
- Weick, K.E. & Sutcliffe, K.M. (2007) *Managing the unexpected*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- White, L. (2022) The de-institutionalisation of power beyond the state. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(1), 187–208.
- Wynen, J., Kleizen, B. & Verhoest, K. (2019) Are public organizations suffering from repetitive change injury? A panel study of the damaging effect of intense reform sequences. *Governance*, 32(4), 695–713.

**How to cite this article:** Trondal, J. (2022). “Let’s organize”: The organizational basis for stable public governance. *Public Administration*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12858>