

Conditional support from below? Understanding the dynamics of municipal amalgamation preferences among local politicians

Thomas Myksvoll

To cite this article: Thomas Myksvoll (2023): Conditional support from below? Understanding the dynamics of municipal amalgamation preferences among local politicians, *Regional & Federal Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/13597566.2023.2191318](https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2023.2191318)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2023.2191318>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 26 Mar 2023.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 316



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Conditional support from below? Understanding the dynamics of municipal amalgamation preferences among local politicians

Thomas Myksvoll 

Researcher II, NORCE Norwegian Research Centre, Health and Social Sciences, Bergen, Norway

ABSTRACT



Municipal amalgamations are commonly undertaken with promises of scale effects. But territorial reforms also invoke issues of local identity and democracy, which may be negatively impacted by upscaled local government. This article explores how these frames play out as drivers of amalgamation preferences among local representatives. Utilizing survey data of Norwegian local politicians during the 2014–2020 Local Government Reform, this article shows that local politicians are more likely to support amalgamation when prioritizing and supporting functional scale considerations. Conversely, they are less likely to support amalgamation when invoking issues of local belonging, democracy, and citizens' influence. But these attitudes are not static. Sources of support and aversion towards amalgamation are at times conditional; the characteristics of the municipality, the individual's status in the local political environment, and the views of the population may both enhance and weaken the degree to which functional or communitarian frames are rallied to support or oppose amalgamation.


ARTICLE HISTORY Received 23 July 2022; Accepted 9 March 2023

KEYWORDS Local politicians; local government reform; territorial reform; municipal amalgamation; preference formation; rescaling

Introduction

Amalgamating municipalities is commonly undertaken with promises of scale effect benefits. These may be increasing administrative efficiency, improving local finances, the quality of public services, and increasing, mobilizing, and

CONTACT Thomas Myksvoll  thmy@norceresearch.no  Researcher II, NORCE Norwegian Research Centre, Health and Social Sciences, Nygårdsgaten 112, 5008 Bergen, Norway

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2023.2191318>.

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

promoting local economic investment, development, and competitiveness (Brenner 2003; Brenner 2004; Swianiewicz, Gendzwil, and Zardi 2017; Swianiewicz 2021b). The promises of such potential benefits have not gone unnoticed among policymakers. Indeed, since 2000, a wave of amalgamation reforms has taken place, with reform efforts undertaken or underway in roughly 20 European countries (Swianiewicz et al. 2022).

But changing the territorial structure at the local level is also a potentially contentious policy and may upset local community and identity feelings tied to the attachment to long-established territorial units (Myksvoll, Tatham, and Fimreite 2022; Stein, Broderstad, and Bjørnå 2022; Terlouw 2016). Territorial upscaling may also weaken democratic representativeness (i.e. making sure every part of the territory is represented) and increase the distance between citizens and elected officials (De Vries and Sobis 2014; Swianiewicz, Gendzwil, and Zardi 2017). Indeed, concerns over local identity and democratic deficiency may even cause previously amalgamated municipalities to split apart¹ (Brajnik and Lavtar 2021; Łukomska 2021; Spáč 2021).

The decision to amalgamate one's municipality with one or more neighbours involves a reorganization not only of administrative-jurisdictional boundaries but also of political institutions. Local representatives thus become central reform stakeholders.

Though there is rich literature on municipal amalgamation, less is known about the conditions under which local representatives support or oppose reforming their jurisdiction's territory, and by extension, their political milieu. Local representatives may be viewed as direct stakeholders of municipal amalgamation because their political and institutional environments become subject to significant change through the joining of two or more government units. Understanding the dynamics involved among local representatives in this context increases our knowledge of the way amalgamation reforms develop, and the political calculation behind why some municipalities amalgamate while others do not. At a more general level, it contributes to our knowledge of the proclivity of political actors to alter their institutional environments.

Amalgamation reforms may vary in scope and form. They may be driven as bottom-up processes, where municipalities initiate, drive, and implement decisions. They may also be top-down, wherein the central government drives reform efforts, which may also include the coercion of unwilling municipal amalgamation partners (Gendźwiłł, Kurniewicz, and Swianiewicz 2021; Swianiewicz 2021b). Amalgamation reforms of the last decades have commonly taken a coerced rather than voluntary form, thus not formally requiring support from below (Erlingsson, Ödalen, and Wångmar 2020). But for amalgamation to be successful in the long term and not face the potential of later breakups, local willingness, as well as some degree of vertical (local-national), and horizontal (local-local) cooperation is desirable (Larsen 2016).

This article explores the recent Norwegian reform case, which, though initially desired and framed by the central government, mainly relied on local willingness to amalgamate. The Norwegian case provides a unique and contemporary case for investigating drivers of local politicians' amalgamation preferences. The reform was implemented on 1 January 2020 and reduced the number of municipalities from 428 to 356. Though the reform mainly relied on the local voluntary agreement, the reform was backed up with threats of the potential use of coercion by the central government, should local agreement lack. Utilizing comprehensive survey data of over 3000 Norwegian municipal council representatives, the local politicians' preferences are analysed through two sets of expectations: (1) scale effects according to beliefs of the functionality of governance and (2) a communitarian view, emphasizing issues of local belonging, identity, and democracy. Both are contained within a broader theoretical framework that regards the two as potentially antithetical logics concerned with the design of territorial-administrative units.

Two key findings are drawn from the analyses. First, a functionalist-leaning attitude among local representatives increases the likelihood of support for amalgamation, while prioritizing issues of local belonging, identity, and democratic representativeness reduces it. Second, the link between attitudes towards the two logics of territorial design is strong but not static and unconditional sources of amalgamation preferences. Indeed, there is an interplay between these attitudinal measurements and external observables: the characteristic of the municipality the politician represents, the position they occupy in the local political environment, and the stance of the electorate moderate the degree to which the two main logics act as sources of amalgamation preferences. These findings offer insights into individual-level dynamics at play in the local political sphere in a recent territorial reform setting.

The next section outlines theoretical frameworks for understanding amalgamation preference formation among local politicians. Subsequent sections describe data and applied methods before findings are presented. Analyses and discussions follow, with concluding remarks.

Why (not) amalgamate a municipality?

Studies of local territorial rescaling usually point to domestic functional pressures (Askim et al. 2016) or globalization trends (Lidström 2007) as key underlying causal determinants of the phenomenon.² But the decision to amalgamate a municipality is ultimately a political choice and depends on politicians' priorities and goals (Keating 2020). Moreover, the circumstances, priorities, and goals of local governments are contextual. A city-municipality with hundreds of thousands of citizens faces different challenges from a rural

municipality with a few thousand citizens (Keating 1995; Smith and Mayston 1987). The pervasiveness of municipal amalgamation reforms across many countries in recent years can be seen as a way of meeting those varied and contextual challenges. In part depending on the challenges that need to be addressed, decision-makers must weigh the potential benefits and risks of amalgamation. This holds especially true for local politicians when reform processes are anchored locally. They must live in and with the institutions and structures they potentially subject to dramatic change.

Yet individual-level literature on perceptions and preferences towards this process are relatively scarce. Among the studies that exist, Tavares (2018, 10–11) highlights both methodological limitations and their relative scarcity. Moreover, they mostly target citizens (Kushner and Siegel 2005; Poel 2000; Roberta et al. 2015; Higdem et al. 2020; Rose, Klausen, and Winsvold 2017; Saglie, Segards, and Christensen 2021; Stein, Broderstad, and Bjørnå 2022) or bureaucrats (Myksvoll, Tatham, and Fimreite 2022; Takagishi, Sakata, and Kitamura 2012) perceptions of and experiences with amalgamations.

A considerable causal chain and several explanatory factors can be expected to form the amalgamation stance taken by local representatives. This study considers two factors of primary interest, which can both be understood as views of the role of local government, and their relation to its territorial architecture.

The logics of territorial design

The discussion of the territorial architecture of government, and the proper scales at which governance is exercised, can be found in discussions of (government) size and democracy (Dahl and Tufte 1973), rescaling (Brenner 2003, 2004), metropolitan governance (Norris 2001), and new regionalism (Keating 1997). Found in these discussions is the understanding of governance scales as expressed through two enduring principles, or logics. They are known as functionalism and community/identity (Keating 2020, 4). The former relates territorial structures to a government's functional capacities. The latter sees government and governance as an expression of sociality among participants, with community or identity-based territorial borders (Tatham, Hooghe, and Marks 2021). As such, the two views may be antithetical; the functionalist view emphasizes efficiency and rational design, while the communitarian view relates to subjective and fuzzy feelings of community and belonging to a bordered territorial entity (Tatham and Bauer 2021, 5).

Functionalism

The logic of functionalism's premise is that 'the scale at which a public good is most efficiently provided depends on the costs and benefits of centralization for the public good in question' (Tatham, Hooghe, and Marks 2021, 4). This

thinking relates to public choice theories and that there exists some territorial design of a government unit (or level) that optimizes its effectiveness (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

An effective summary of the functionalist position regarding territorial consolidation is that larger local governments benefit from economies of scale, allowing for a less expensive, more effective provision of services in larger government units (Swianiewicz 2018, 3). Larger local governments can thereby become more efficient service providers and improve planning and economic development policies. Functional pressures arising from fiscal stress, urbanization patterns, and policy decentralization (Askim et al. 2016) may also be alleviated.

There is a broad swath of empirical literature on municipal amalgamation entrenched in the functionalist perspective.³ Literature reviews of this strand of research temper expectations of outright positive functional benefits from amalgamation (Dhimitri 2018; Tavares 2018). Nevertheless, the idea that larger local governments benefit from functional scale effects remain enduring frames employed by policymakers to argue for reform (Erlingsson, Ödalen, and Wångmar 2020). Indeed, functional motivations to undertake amalgamation have strengthened following the 2008 financial crisis. Since then, politicians have increasingly emphasized improving economic resilience and financial management as motivations for reducing the number of local units (Bolgherini, Casula, and Marotta 2018, 448; Xu and Warner 2015; Swianiewicz 2021b).

Promises of functional scale effects and the idea that ‘bigger is better’ can, in other words, make policymakers more prone to create larger local governments. This view may also be found in local councils (Dollery and Crase 2004) and can contribute to explain the occurrence of voluntary amalgamations. Hence, the first set of expectations can be formed:

H1a: A local politician prioritizing functional considerations is *more* likely to desire amalgamation.

H1b: If a local politician believes that larger local governments provide better public services, the *more* likely they are to desire amalgamation.

Community/identity

The community/identity logic holds that (territorial) governance scales cannot be explained solely by functional considerations, but also by collective feelings of identity.⁴ It rests on the question of what governance is and who has the right to make collectively binding decisions for a particular group (Hooghe and Marks 2016, 1; Tatham, Hooghe, and Marks 2021, 4). Long-established territories generate, but are also part of, peoples’ identities. Such identity feelings may be expressed as feelings of solidarity and

similarity, of anchorage and belonging to the local area and community (Stein, Broderstad, and Bjørnå 2022). Upsetting local territorial boundaries, for instance through amalgamation, is to upset local identities.

The link between the community/identity logic and amalgamation reform may also involve a democratic dimension. Often, the formal power to rescale subnational territories rests at the central level, which may also have the authority to coerce amalgamation. This is contentious and invokes questions of local autonomy vis-à-vis central authority (Swianiewicz 2010a, 6). It has been claimed to even challenge individual autonomy and human rights too (Erlingsson, Ödalen, and Wångmar 2020). Moreover, amalgamation may weaken local democracy in terms of participation, representativeness, and increased distance between citizens and elected officials (De Vries and Sobis 2014). Indeed, it has been observed that a negative correlation exists between municipal size and local democracy (Denters et al. 2014; Gendzwill and Swianiewicz 2016). Advocates of smaller government size further argue that smaller jurisdictions foster more mutual trust and greater accountability and responsiveness (Swianiewicz 2010a, 6). In this sense, local government reform may be seen as intricately tied to the maintenance of local democracy and democratic legitimacy (Vetter and Kersting 2003). There is such a reason to expect aversion towards municipal upscaling by advocates of the communitarian view of local governance. Linking this assumption to reform preferences among local representatives, the second set of hypotheses may be formulated as follows:

H2a: A local politician prioritizing communitarian considerations is *less* likely to desire amalgamation.

H2b: If a local politician believes that smaller local governments provide citizens with greater influence in municipal affairs, the *less* likely they are to desire amalgamation.

The hypotheses that have to do with the logics of territorial reform cover the study's main variables of interest.⁵ This does not mean they are expected (either theoretically or empirically) to capture all variations in the local politicians' amalgamation preferences. Policy preferences are a complex phenomenon, to which a variety of factors contribute. The central variables are therefore subjected to a range of controls, at both individual and municipal levels. At the individual level, controls relate to the respondent's position in the local political milieu, both in the local political party and in the municipal council. These relate the question of amalgamation to the propensity of involved actors' willingness (or incentives) to reform their institutional milieu (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2006). Controls also include personal background characteristics of education and employment status, which relate to the notion of socialization factors affecting one's engagement in and

views on the public sector (Campbell 2006; Tatham and Bauer 2015). Municipal-level controls account for the municipality's characteristics: geographic, population, and economic size. Local referenda are also controlled for as, though advisory, they represent an authoritative democratic impetus on representatives' decisions (Folkestad et al. 2021).

Finally, local representatives are usually affiliated with a political party's local branch. And within a party, there are usually some shared notions of how best to organize the public sector (Heywood 2015). Moreover, local reform efforts may be driven and even catalysed through local–national party networks and alliances, wherein subnational parties may act as agents of centrally initiated reforms through active interpretation and implementation (Fimreite 1996, 191). The representative's party affiliation is therefore also accounted for.

Case, data, and applied methods

The Norwegian Local Government Reform

The 2014–2020 Norwegian Local Government Reform (LGR) serves as the study's case focus. The reform was initiated in 2014 by the Conservative/Progress Party minority coalition government. The government received parliamentary support from the Liberal and the Christian Democratic parties, and in the early stages of the reform, from the Labor Party as well.⁶ The government's stated intention of the LGR was to create 'larger and more robust units', and through amalgamation reap 'better welfare services, more sustainable community development and stronger local self-rule' (Manifesto for the Norwegian Government 2013, 6;47, 2019, 57). The government did not set or propose a specific level or numbered reduction of municipalities. Rather, they would mainly rely on voluntary amalgamations anchored through local advisory referenda, letting the municipal councils decide. However, the government was also willing to coerce amalgamation, should certain conditions apply.⁷

A government-appointed committee set and provided a framework for the reform. The committee recommended a minimum municipal population size of 15,000–20,000 to secure 'robust service delivery', and that municipal borders should reflect 'functional areas'. In other words, citizens should operate their daily lives within the same jurisdictions so that administrative boundaries would match modern living- and travel patterns, to ensure streamlined and effective local governance. They also stressed the need to balance service delivery and local democracy, as the latter could be negatively affected by creating larger municipalities (Vabo et al. 2014, 127–138).

Following the committee's report, the municipalities commenced inter-municipal negotiations to determine their amalgamation position. Once

these had concluded, local advisory referenda were held. Most rejected the plans, and by June 2016, most municipal councils had decided against amalgamation. Despite widespread local rejection, however, a historic number of amalgamations was achieved. The reform reduced the number of municipalities from 428 in 2014, to 356 in 2020; 119 municipalities formed 47 new.⁸ Nevertheless, the LGR materialized geographically uneven, with most amalgamations taking place along the coast and around the cities (see [Figure 1](#)).

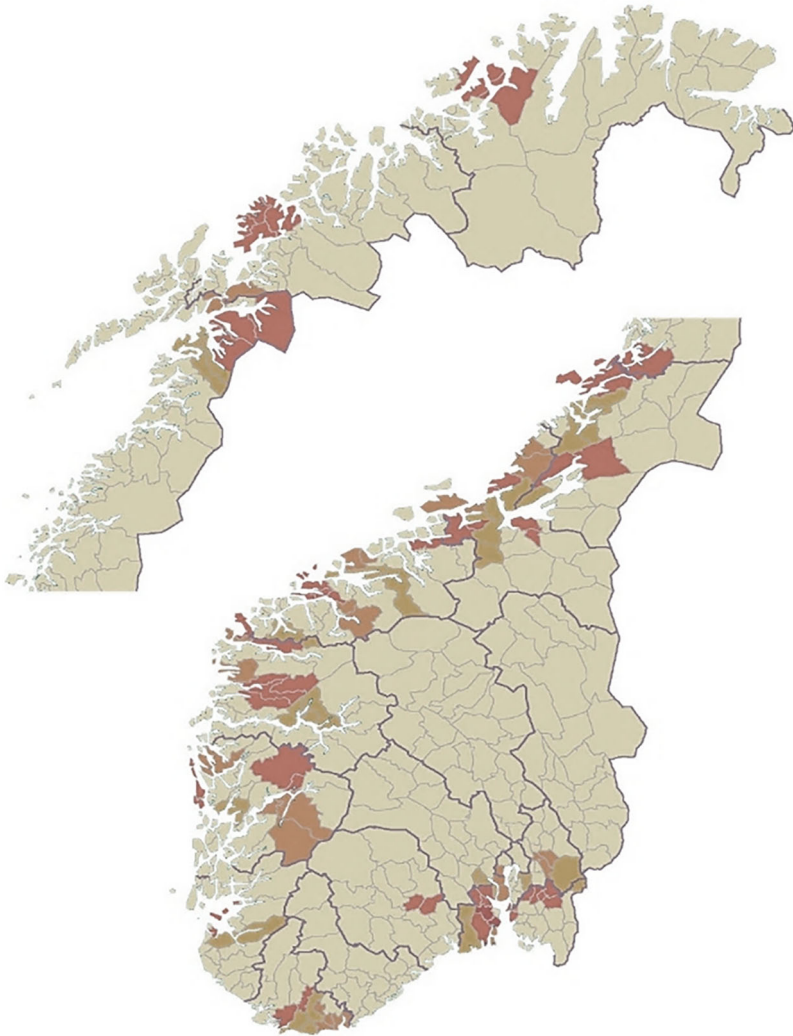


Figure 1. Municipal amalgamations in the Norwegian Local Government Reform. Source: Norwegian Mapping Authority.

After the LGR's implementation, parliamentary willingness for further reform has faded.⁹ Further amalgamation efforts are instead theorized to be initiated and driven by the municipalities themselves, as a continuous 'reform without a reform' (Fimreite and Flo 2018).

Data and methods

A rich survey data set is employed to analyse Norwegian local politicians' amalgamation preferences. The survey was distributed by email to municipal council representatives in every municipality. A total of 8450 representatives were contacted. The data collection took place between 1 October and 7 November 2018, placing it within the 2015–2019 local election term. After the initial distribution, recipients who had not responded were sent up to three reminders. Of the recipients, 3387 completed the survey in full, producing a response rate of 40.1%. Just under a third of the respondents ($N = 1021$, 30.14%) belong to a municipal council that decided to amalgamate.

To measure local representatives' functional and communitarian leanings, the respondents were asked which of the following issues they mainly prioritized when the question of amalgamation was to be decided in the municipal council: the municipality's economy, municipal services, local democracy, or local belonging.¹⁰ This categorical variable has been recoded to a dummy variable with the first two considerations combined to form a *functional priority*, the latter two to a *community/identity priority*. The respondents were next asked to what extent they agreed (on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' = 1 to 'Strongly agree' = 5) to the notion that larger local governments are more capable of taking care of their citizens' needs. A second notion, on an identical scale, put to the respondents the proposition that smaller local government give citizens greater influence in the municipal council's decisions. Translated survey questions are available in the supplementary appendix (A1).

The average respondent is just over 50 years old. A gender balance of 64% men and 36% women, closely reflects the total population (61% to 39%) (SSB 2018). The distribution of respondents according to their party affiliation also closely matches the actual distribution following the 2015 local elections, with difference values ranging from 0 to 1.7 percentage points. A notable minority (7%) is either affiliated with a municipal-specific local party or lacks party affiliation. The average representative has been a party member between 5 and 10 years, having served for a little less than three electoral periods. Their position as municipal council representative is for most a part-time engagement, as 73% occupy a full-time position in the workplace. Ordinary members of the council make up 59% of the respondents, 28% have a presidency position, 6% serve as deputy mayor, 7% as mayor.

The data is fundamentally hierarchical. Indeed, it is possible to identify a clustering of the individuals of particular interest: their party affiliation. While this study gauges individual representatives' amalgamation preference, the fact that elected representatives are nested within a party organization should not be ignored, and it can be expected that parties take a collective position on amalgamation. A party-based cleavage is therefore expected to act as an influential group mechanism behind the individual representative's amalgamation preference. The posited preference variation due to the representatives' party affiliation is empirically tested by observing the degree of intraclass correlation (ICC) on the dependent variable. In the empty model, an ICC of .188 is observed. In other words, roughly 19 percent of the variance of the respondents' amalgamation preference is attributable to their party affiliation. Following the recommendations of Leckie (2013) and Sommet and Morselli (2017), a multi-level (logistic) regression model is employed to analyse the individual local politicians' amalgamation stance. Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics of all variables.

Several of the variables chosen for this study can be theoretically expected to covariate. Empirically testing multi-collinearity reveals max (*Large Local Govt: Better Services* = 1.54) and mean (1.19) variance inflation factor (VIF) values that demonstrate multi-collinearity are within acceptable, even conservative, estimates of collinearity issues when individual-level policy preferences are analysed (Johnston, Jones, and Manley 2018). The supplementary appendix provides a full overview of VIF and correlation values of all variables (A2 and A3).

The hypotheses are evaluated in two different models. First, a model testing the core hypotheses themselves, i.e. the logics of functionalism and community/identity, on the representatives' amalgamation preference. The second model introduces the controls outlined in table 1. Full table formats of all models are provided in the supplementary appendix (A4–A9).

Results

Upon deciding whether to support amalgamation, municipal services were seen as the most important issue to most respondents (48%), followed by local democracy (27%), the municipality's economy (13%), while fewest prioritized local belonging (8%).¹¹ This is perhaps not so surprising, as Norwegian local governments are responsible for a relatively broad range of public services. Indeed, Norway's local level 'constitutes a major part of the public sector in terms of their task portfolio, the number of employees and in terms of financial resources' (Christensen, Fimreite, and Læg Reid 2014, 441). Issues facing local representatives are thus often related to the public services they oversee. The respondents show they largely perceived that to have been the case with municipal amalgamation too. As

Table 1. Descriptive summary of variables.

Explanatory factor	Variable description	Source	Type	N	Min / Max	Mean (SD)	Expected Sign
Dependent variable	Representative's amalgamation stance	Survey	Dummy	3310	0/1	.54 (.50)	
	Rescaling logics	Survey	Dummy	3310	0/1	.63 (.48)	+
	Large local Government: Better Services	Survey	Ordinal	3310	1/5	3.10 (1.30)	+
Control	Priority: Functionalism	Survey	Dummy	3310	0/1	.36 (.48)	-
	Small Local Government: Greater Citizen Influence	Survey	Ordinal	3310	1/5	3.85 (1.12)	-
	Rank in municipal council's party group	Survey	Categorical	3070	1/3	1.74 (.91)	
	Rank in municipal council	Survey	Categorical	3080	1/4	1.60 (.88)	
	Committee membership	Survey	Discrete	3096	0/2	1.20 (.87)	
	Party membership seniority	Survey	Discrete	3107	1/4	3.41 (.79)	
	Municipal council seniority	Survey	Discrete	3102	1/7	2.65 (1.68)	
	Seeking re-election (yes)	Survey	Dummy	3055	0/1	.54 (.50)	
	Education level	Survey	Categorical	3105	1/5	3.79 (1.20)	
	Employment status (full time employment)	Survey	Dummy	3104	0/1	.73 (.44)	
	Geographic size (10 km ²)	SSB	Continuous	3110	0.6/896.9	61.26 (72.23)	
	Population (1000)	SSB	Continuous	3109	0.21/673.47	19.83 (46.32)	
	Net budgetary result per capita (1000 NOK)	SSB	Continuous	3079	-6.44/44.31	3.32 (2.86)	
Referendum (yes to amalgamation)	CCRD	Dummy	2255	0/1	.41 (.49)		
Group	Party affiliation	Survey	Categorical	3110	1/10	5.34 (2.57)	

Notes: Municipal scale data drawn from the Norwegian Statistics Bureau (SSB) from 2016, when the councils made their amalgamation decision. Geographic size regards the municipality's landmass in km². Economic size is measured as a net budgetary result per capita, indicating economic leeway and general financial security after expenditures are accounted for. In the statistical modelling they have been transformed to a logarithmic scale due to their skewed distribution. The five municipalities that amalgamated in 2017 and 2018 (before the survey's distribution) are omitted from these variables. Referendum data drawn from The Centre of Competence on Rural Development (CCRD, *Dis-triktssenteret 2021, 2022*) and based on results of local referenda or opinion polling where referenda were not conducted. 116 municipalities (28% of respondents) did not conduct either.

for the notions put to the respondents concerning the virtues of local government size, a majority (71%) either somewhat or strongly agree that smaller local governments better accommodate citizens' influence. The proposition that larger local governments are better suited to take care of citizens' needs is more divisive, with roughly 55% in agreement (unsure/neutral responses omitted).

Figure 2 displays the results of the two-level logit regression modelling. The variables of functionalism and community/identity display robust, and strikingly divergent, though expected effects (regression tables provided in the supplementary appendix (A4)). All results are provided in odds ratio (OR) terms.

The logics of territorial design, both that of functionalism, and that of community/identity, affect local politicians' amalgamation stance. They do

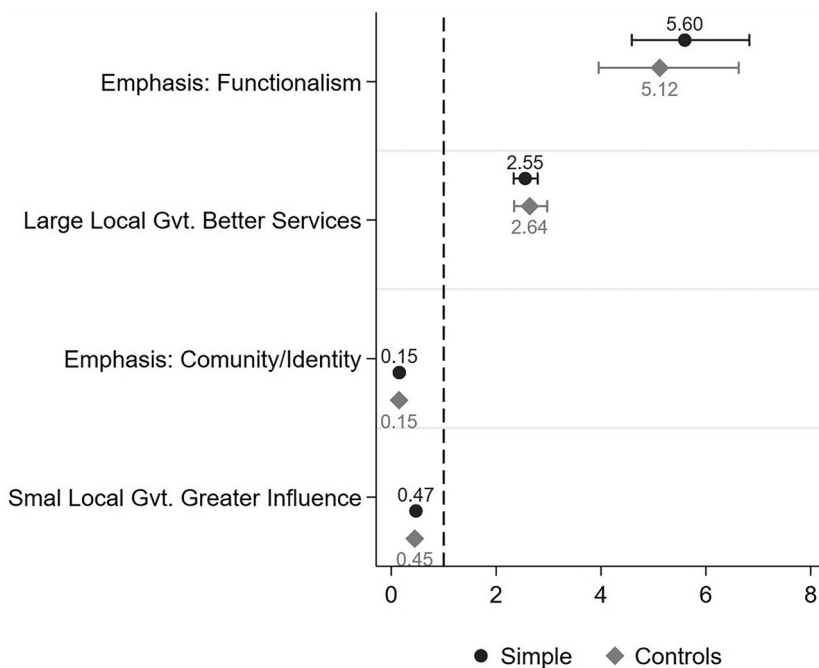


Figure 2. Effects of central explanatory variables on local politicians' amalgamation stance. Coefficient plot displaying results of two-level mixed-effects logit regression models. Coefficients displayed in odds ratios (OR). Municipal council representatives are defined as the lower level ($N = 3118$ and 3111 in the simple Functionalism and Community/Identity models, respectively, while $N = 2070$ and 2067 in the Functionalism and Community/Identity models with controls introduced, respectively). Representatives' party affiliation is defined as upper level ($N = 10$). Black circles (*Simple*) denote models consisting only of the central variables of interest, light grey diamonds (*Controls*) include individual and municipal-level controls. Vertical dashed line denotes non-significance value 1.

so, as posited by their respective hypotheses, with opposite directionality, with strong coefficients and remain largely unaffected by the introduction of controls. The odds of supporting amalgamation are around five times higher (OR = 5.6 in the simple model and 5.12 when controls are introduced) among those who prioritized functionalism (municipal economy, services) over issues of community/identity, supporting hypothesis H1a. Conversely, those who prioritized community/identity issues (local belonging, democracy) rather than functionalism, are much less likely to take a positive amalgamation stance, in line with the expectation of H2a. Indeed, they will support amalgamation only 15 times out of 100 (OR = 0.15 in both models). To smaller but still significant extents, the perceptions of the virtues of larger and smaller government size show similar effects, thus also supporting the expectations hypothesized in H1b and H2b. Supporters of larger local governments as a basis for improved service quality are more than twice as likely (OR = 2.55 in the simple model and 2.64 in the full model) to support amalgamation as those who do not support this statement. Conversely, advocates of the virtues of smaller local government, in creating better arenas for civic/democratic representation and responsiveness, are less likely to desire amalgamation – having just under half of the odds (0.47 (0.45 with controls)) of supporting amalgamation as those who do not support this notion.

The logics of territorial design are thus shown to have a relationship with attitudes toward amalgamation among local politicians consistent with outlined theoretical expectations. Local political support of the LGR, like the central government advocates of the reform, stemmed from a functionalist perspective. Aversion towards amalgamation meanwhile, was grounded in issues of local democracy, belonging, and representativeness.

Observing the direct effects between the central independent variables of interest and the dependent variable offers some insights into the way local politicians view amalgamation. But the real world is usually more complex, and various factors often interact together to shape preferences and behaviour. Behaviour may in this sense not only be shaped by an individual's preferences, beliefs, and values, but also by the environment in which they act (Tatham 2017). Despite observing strong direct effects of the central independent variables, the local politicians' attitudes may be more conditional than what [Figure 2](#) can reveal.

Following this argument and expecting the respondents to have some knowledge of, and be affected by, their surrounding environment, the first set of possible factors conditioning the relationships between the independent and dependent variables have to do with the characteristics of the municipality they represent. These variables have therefore been extracted from the full models to test whether they moderate the observed influence of the logics of territorial design.

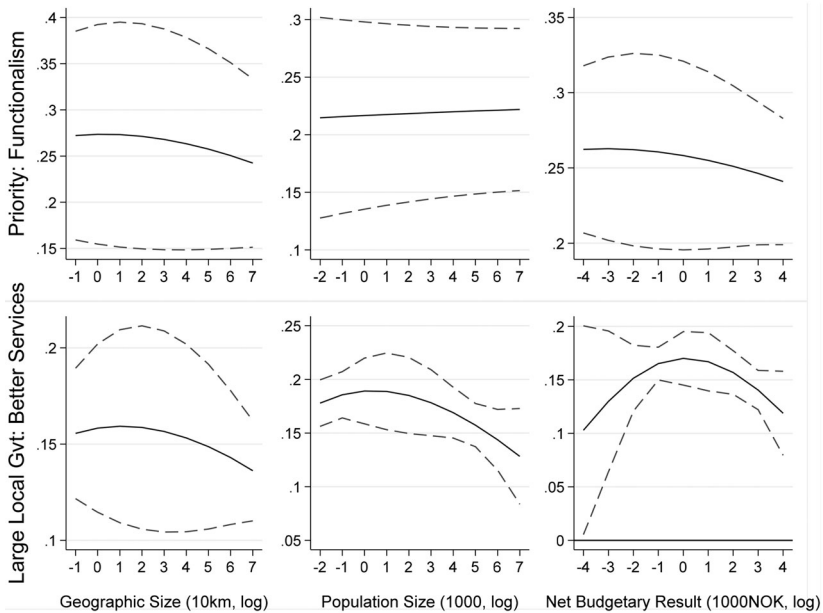


Figure 3. Conditional functionalist effects of municipal size on amalgamation stance

Figures 3 and 4 consist of 12 two-way interactions, separated according to the functional and community/identity variables. They contain all possible combinations of the central independent variables and municipal scales (geography, population, economy). Full models in table format are provided in the supplementary appendix (A5 and A6).

The scale characteristics of the municipality, though variably, show some influence on the independent variables. Figures 3 and 4 show that generally, the municipality's characteristic dampens the effect observed between territorial logics and the probabilities of support and aversion towards amalgamation. The logics behind the local representatives' amalgamation stance matters less as a preference determinant when the municipality's size, be it geographic, population or economic, increases. A notable exception is found in the interaction between population size and functional prioritization (Figure 3, column 2, row 1). In more populous municipalities, prioritizing functionality is a stronger motivation to support amalgamation (OR = 1.029). This could be because representatives in larger municipalities are more susceptible to perceive and observe scale benefits larger local governments provide, thus making them more inclined to support amalgamation, bringing more municipalities 'into the fold'.

Another exception is the moderating influence of a municipality's finances on the perception that smaller local governments provide greater citizen influence (Figure 4, column 3, row 2). Whereas the other moderators

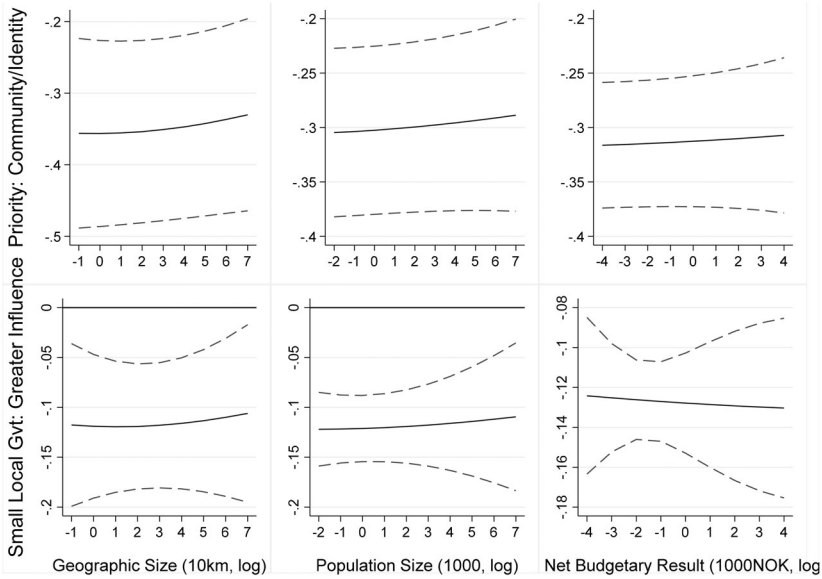


Figure 4. Conditional community/identity effects of municipal size on amalgamation stance. Conditional average marginal effects modelled through two-way interaction regressions. Dashed lines denote 95% confidence intervals. Values on Y-axis denote the marginal effects of independent variables on the dependent variable, depending on logarithmic municipal scale values on the X-axis. $N = 2070$ for all models in Figure 3. $N = 2067$ for all models in this figure.

(geography and population) weaken the community/identity variables' effect on the dependent variable, it is in this instance strengthened (OR = 1.039). As a municipality becomes more financially secure, the local representatives' attitudinal inclination towards the virtue of small local government size becomes a stronger impetus for opposing amalgamation. This effect is perhaps not too surprising. Ensuring financially secure – or economically robust – municipalities was a central aim of the LGR. As such, if a municipality does not require greater financial security than it already enjoys, less may be the perceived need to enlarge the municipality. Instead, the representative virtue of small local government size can be maintained, because it does not stand at odds with the need for improved financial management. The municipality's economy also shows an interesting influence on the perceived virtues of larger government size (Figure 3, column 3, row 2). Local representatives are more likely to support amalgamation if they perceive that larger local governments provide better services. This effect grows stronger as the municipality's financial results improve. But the effect has a ceiling, with the greatest effect observed at (log) net budgetary result = 0 ($dy/dx = .170$). Once the municipality's economy improves beyond that, the effect

diminishes (to $dy/dx = .12$ at the net budgetary result ($\log = 4$). This may indicate that municipalities, up to a point, may see amalgamation as a potential for improving their economic situation, reducing the risk of fiscal stress. The potential to improve public services through amalgamation is thus an expression of want for financial security. If municipal finances are already reliable, however, the perceived service benefits of larger local governments on economic grounds are no longer as prevalent.

The second explanatory factor extracted from the full models and treated as interacting variables has to do with the local status of the respondents. Three variables have been selected as they directly relate to the representative's position in the local political milieu, and the risks to those positions' amalgamation may pose. These are the individual's position in the local party (*Municipal party group rank*) and in the municipal council itself (*Municipal council rank* and *Committee membership*).

Through the internal reorganization necessitated by amalgamation, local representatives become stakeholders by being subjects of a reshuffling of political structures. Political competition may increase in larger government units, adding an electoral-strategic and competitive dynamic to the desirability of amalgamation. This can for instance happen by a proliferation in the number of parties vying for votes (Koch and Rochat 2017), but also internally, as multiple local parties amalgamate to reflect the new jurisdiction. Hence, the treatment of these variables as potential moderating forces draws upon the idea that institutional stakeholders are incentivized to take a conservative approach towards institutional change (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2006). After all, for the individual municipality, municipal amalgamation represents a radical change, perhaps the most fundamental change a government system can undergo: ceasing to exist (Blom-Hansen 2010, 51). Strategies may be implemented to reduce opposition driven by personal stakeholder dynamics, such as pension schemes or retaining certain positions and offices for a limited time (Swianiewicz, Gendzwil, and Zardi 2017, 50). But these are not a guaranteed feature of amalgamation, are dependent on local arrangements, and can only temporarily alleviate such concerns. Government representatives may as such remain resistant towards change because they will want to remain in and retain control over their environments (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2006). How then, do such dynamics materialize when local representatives must decide on whether to drastically alter their environments?

Figures 5 and 6 display 12 two-way interactions wherein variables relating to local status are treated as moderators. For full regression models, see supplementary appendix (A7 and A8).

The short answer is, not much. The overall picture presented by Figures 5 and 6 is that the representative's position in the local political milieu has only miniscule influence on the (more important) governance values

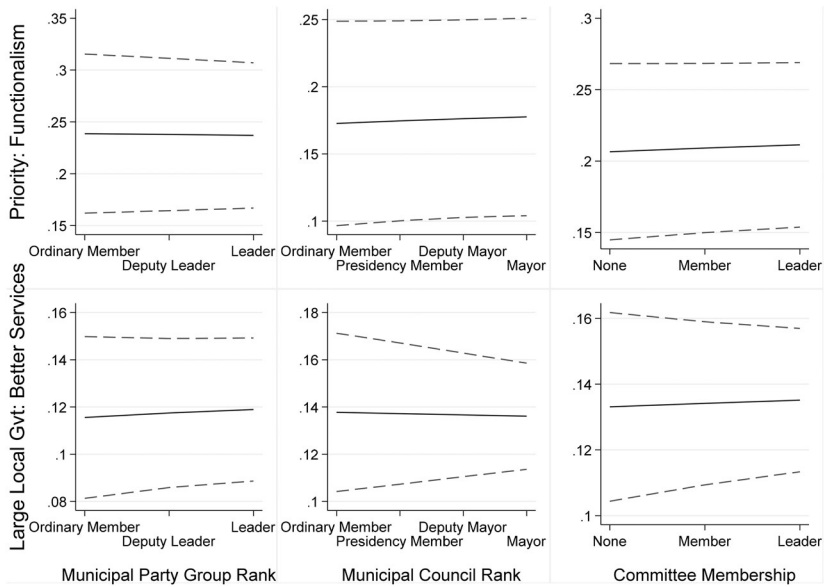


Figure 5. Conditional functionalist effects of local status on amalgamation stance.

expressed by the functionalist and communitarian approaches. Generally, it does not substantially matter where they sit to determine where they stand on the logics of territorial design to explain their amalgamation preferences. The predictive capacities of these logics remain largely unaltered between ordinary member and elites in the local political milieu. Indeed, the initial modelling revealed a general lack of direct effects between these variables and the dependent variable (see Appendix A4). As such, the representative's position in local politics generally does not matter where they stand on the question of amalgamation – directly or indirectly. Nevertheless, a few cases warrant some attention.

A functionalist priority is a marginally stronger driver of amalgamation support in the municipal council and committee leaderships than among their ordinary members (Figure 5, column 2, row 1, OR = 1.282, and column 3, row 1, OR = 1.112, respectively). Similarly, the effect of the perceived virtue of larger government as an amalgamation motivator is strengthened, though this also at a negligible level, and only among local party and council committee leaderships (Figure 5, column 1, row 2, OR = 1.081, and column 3, row 2, OR = 1.007).

As for the logic of community/identity, if small government size is seen as an arena for increased citizen influence, and this increases aversion towards amalgamation (see Figure 2), then this is seen as even more of a reason to resist amalgamation among committee members and leaders. Conversely,

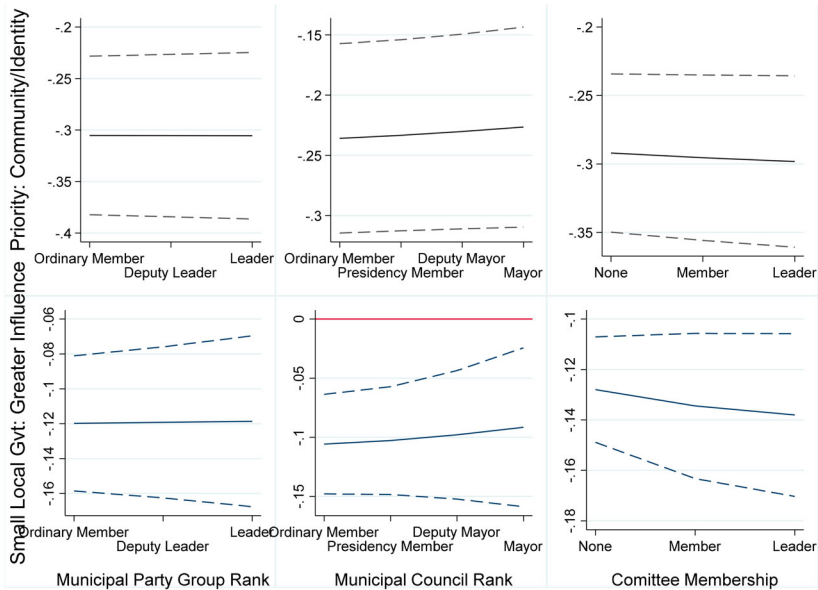


Figure 6. Conditional community/identity effects of local status on amalgamation stance. Conditional average marginal effects modelled through two-way interaction regressions. Dashed lines denote 95% confidence intervals. Values on Y-axis denote the marginal effects of independent variables on the dependent variable, depending on the local party and council status values on the X-axis. Individual level $N=2070$ and 2067 for all models in Figure 5 and this figure, respectively.

this is less so the case among those higher ranked in the council itself (Figure 6, column 3, row 2, OR = 1.075 and column 2, row 2, OR = 0.926, respectively).

A final inquiry into the potentially conditional nature of representatives' amalgamation stance explores the outcomes of local referenda. Although the national government had the final say, the reform primarily relied on the voluntary acceptance of the municipalities to amalgamate.¹² As described in the preceding section, local advisory referenda, opinion polling and other forms of citizen engagements were conducted to gauge the population's views on amalgamation. The involvement of citizens in this way can be seen as resulting from and anchored to historical legacies of strong and enduring norms of local democracy and self-rule in the Norwegian system (Baldersheim and Rose 2010; Gustafsson 1998; Sellers, Lindström, and Bae 2020). Indeed, in 1995, a parliamentary decision stated that, as a principle, any municipal amalgamation should be based on the consent of the citizens in the affected municipalities (Baldersheim and Rose 2010, 88). Outcomes of local referenda can therefore be expected to influence a representative's attitudinal inclination towards the logics of functionalism and community/identity as motivators of amalgamation preferences, because they may provide an authoritative democratic impetus

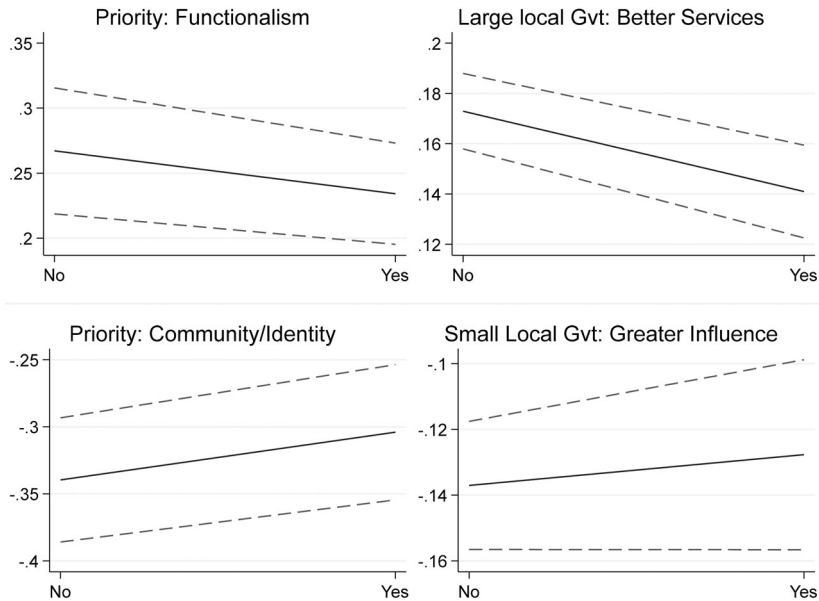


Figure 7. Conditional effects of referendum on amalgamation stance. Conditional average marginal effects modelled through two-way interaction regressions. Dashed lines denote 95% confidence intervals. Values on Y-axis denote effects on the marginal predicted mean, or the predicted effects of the independent variable X on the dependent variable Y , depending on local referenda outcomes on the X -axis, Z . $N = 2070$ and 2067 in functionalism and community/identity models, respectively.

on their decisions (Folkestad et al. 2021). How strong then, are the logics of territorial design in the face of an electorate's stated preferences? The final set of interaction is undertaken with the outcome of the local referenda and opinion polling. Figure 7 displays four interaction models to this end, with full models in table format provided in the supplementary appendix (A9).

The electorate's view is influential. The direct, bivariate relationship between the referendum and the dependent variable shows that municipalities that vote yes in the referendum are associated with a threefold increase in the odds of representatives' support of amalgamation ($OR = 3.3$). The intercept, or a no-outcome of the referendum, returns the odds of supporting amalgamation closer to that of a coin toss ($OR = 0.8$), indicating that should the citizens oppose amalgamation plans, that cannot as strongly predict the outcome one way or another, although it does lean the representative towards an oppositional attitude. The local representatives will then instead rally functionalism or community/identity issues as sources of their support or aversion towards amalgamation. Once the citizens support amalgamation, however, the effects the territorial logics have on the

representatives' amalgamation preferences are reduced. The grounds on which one supports amalgamation moves from the costs/benefits-debate the logics represent in the direction of the wishes of the electorate. However, two points must here be conceded. First, the effects of functionalism and community/identity logics are not reduced to non-significance. They still play a role in shaping the representative's amalgamation preference. Second, although the directionality of both logics' effects is in a sense similar (they are both weakened), it does not necessarily mean that similar dynamics are at play.

The functionalist-leaning representatives are more supportive of amalgamation. Theoretically, an electorate in favour of amalgamation could put further strength to their position, as they could perceive to receive a democratic confirmation to their views that amalgamation will bring functional benefits. Yet the effects of the functionalist variables are dampened (OR = 0.75 and 0.65 for *'Priority: Functionalism'* and *'Large Local Gvt: Better Services'*, respectively). This could mean that functionalist notions do not necessarily leave the representatives' minds, but that the source of their amalgamation supports shifts in the direction of the preferences of the citizenry. In this sense, amalgamation plans can be 'anchored' to not only expected functional benefits but to the will of the people, thus adding a democratic legitimacy to their functionalist goals. There is such a lesser need to rally functionalist ideas to make the decision, although they still contribute. Meanwhile, those basing their amalgamation stance on the community and identity logic, will, in the event of a *yes*-result, see their aversion not shared by the citizenry. Despite this, the aversion endures among representatives who prioritized community/identity issues. However, its force is weakened with an electorate in favour of reform (OR = 1.44 and 1.12 for *'Priority: Community/Identity'* and *'Small local Gvt: Greater Influence'*, respectively). This may in a sense create a tension for the representatives, and on what they see as the right course of action.

Concluding discussion

Bordered administrative units are not necessarily set in stone. Local territories especially may be pressured to change over time, driven by domestic or international developments. But the decision to change is a political choice. And choosing to amalgamate one's municipality with neighbouring units is in a sense a potentially existential decision for local politicians. It is a decision that involves the abolishment of an existing government unit and the creation of a new one. The stance a local representative takes on amalgamating their municipality must be the result of a calculation of benefits and costs such a change will bring. But what benefits, and what sort of costs? This study operationalizes these through a framework of antithetical logics of

territorial architecture. These logics hold that benefits of amalgamation may be associated with ideas of the functionality of governance, emphasizing efficiency, financial management, and municipal service quality. Costs are seen as the potential detriment of local identities, democracy, and reduced opportunities for citizens' influence over local politics. The 2014–2020 Norwegian Local Government Reform represents a case of amalgamation reform where these issues were notably present. Hence, the Norwegian case offers a recent and relevant insight into the dynamics at play in the local political milieu during times of territorial reform.

The logics of territorial design offer useful explanations of local politicians' amalgamation preferences. Statistical modelling shows that prioritizing and supporting ideas of functionality greatly increases the likelihood that a local representative will support amalgamation. Emphasizing notions relating to community and identity, meanwhile, strongly reduces this likelihood. Whilst these findings are in keeping with theoretical expectations, they shed light on the dynamics involved in local politics, and on why municipalities may amalgamate. Moreover, it is interesting to observe how logics of the territorial architecture of government provide such strong drivers and shapers of amalgamation preferences. Many amalgamation reforms in recent years have taken a top-down coerced rather than voluntary approach. Given the general requirement of local voluntary cooperation to implement amalgamations, the Norwegian case offers a useful insight into the dynamics involved when local representatives are faced with a decision that may upend their jurisdiction's territory. This study shows how functionalist and communitarian mindsets among local representatives are not only present but also have a predictive capacity in determining the course of a municipality's future as an enlarged unit (or not). As such, it also identifies that, in the case of voluntary amalgamations, local representatives will desire amalgamation in the name of expected scale effect benefits. Should enough representatives within one or more involved municipal councils instead hold a communitarian leaning, resistance will likely increase, and amalgamation (at least when decided at and by the local level) becomes less likely.

But although these preference drivers are strong, they are not entirely static and unconditional. Indeed, the arguments they represent are prone to weaken or strengthen, depending on various exogenous observables: they depend at times on the municipality's characteristics, somewhat on the representative's position in the local political milieu, and strongly on the preferences of the electorate.

The specific findings in this study are prone to some limitations. The first is the obvious limitations of the data, as they concentrate on a single country case, a single reform, and at a specific time. The second relates to data collection. The municipal councils made their amalgamation decisions in or by June 2016. In June 2017, the national parliament

made its decisions, as the formal authority to make territorial changes rested with it. The survey was distributed in the autumn of 2018, with amalgamations set to take place a little over a year later. In effect, the respondents were asked to express their attitudes and preferences well after the actual decisions were made. Would a respondent from a soon-to-be amalgamated municipality relate similar preferences as if their municipality was not being amalgamated? Could their answers be seen as self-justification for the decisions that had already been made? While it is impossible to empirically assess this in the available data, it must be acknowledged as a potential challenge. Third, the survey measured the respondents' governance orientation (functional or communitarian) as they related to the LGR specifically, rather than as attitudinal measurements of the local government's role more broadly. Though such variables would provide valuable additional input, their attitudes toward relevant topical issues regarding amalgamation specifically, as a response to the reform they faced, is nevertheless of central relevance and interest to explore. After all, amalgamation reforms are specific to their time and place, and their form and scope depend on national and local contexts. But the issues of functionality and community/identity are not unique to the Norwegian setting. Indeed, territorial reform is often framed through notions related to scale effects, functionality, community, identity, and democracy – across time and countries (Erlingsson, Ödalen, and Wångmar 2020; Swianiewicz 2021b). The findings of this study are as such travelable.

They invite further research of the local political sphere during times of territorial reform and how different logics act as shapers of territorial reforms locally, but also of how local representatives' more general governance orientations may shape territorial political preferences, and by extension, the domestic territorial architecture of government. Is a local representative's status and placement in the local political environment more important as a predictor of territorial preferences in some political systems than others? Can feelings of local community, identity and democracy motivate and support amalgamation efforts in certain contexts? Further cross-country comparative research into the dynamics at play in the local political milieu and how these respond to the logics at play in the discussion of territorial reform, as well as further studies of local representatives' roles, views, and preferences when facing amalgamation decisions is encouraged.

Notes

1. Economic and political/legal frameworks at the national level may also be influential (Swianiewicz 2021a).

2. The two are not necessarily seen as independent forces (Bolgherini, Casula and Marotta 2018).
3. Typical examples include the effects amalgamation have on administrative costs (Blesse and Thushvanthan 2016, Nakazawa 2013, Reingewertz 2011, Roesel 2017) or on public service quality (Allers and Geertsema 2014, Steiner, et al. 2018).
4. This notion has also been formulated as a postfunctional theory of governance (Hooghe and Marks 2016)
5. Their potential interacting dynamics (as well as those outlined in H1a and H1b) are elaborated on in the supplementary appendix (A10)
6. The Labor Party withdrew their support following the party's general conference in 2015, due to the government's intended use of coercion to compel amalgamations (Klausen, Askim and Vabo 2016, 43).
7. These conditions were not formally or specifically defined but related to structural appropriateness and retaining an overall territorial cohesion (Rec. 2014, 42).
8. Five amalgamations took place ahead of schedule: one in January 2017, four in January 2018.
9. Following the 2021 general election, the Conservative-led government was replaced by a Labor/Centre Party government. The new government has declared its willingness to support reversing amalgamations if desired by the municipal council.
10. Local employment made up a fifth category. This category has been omitted as it does not correspond directly to either functionalist or community/identity frames.
11. The remaining four percent prioritized local employment.
12. The national parliament subjected 13 municipalities (making up 96 respondents in the survey data) to amalgamation against their will.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank participants at the Nordic Municipal Research Conference NORKOM, as well as colleagues at NORCE Norwegian Research Centre for valuable input in the writing and editing processes. Thanks also to the reviewers for their generous remarks and constructive feedback.

Disclosure statement

The data set in this work was made available through the Norwegian Research Council funded project Reshaping the Map of Local and Regional Self-Government. A study of the Norwegian Local Government Reform (NLGR) processes 2014-2019, which concluded in 2021. The author participated in the project and was granted access to the data through it, though this study is not a part of or funded by the project. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Thomas Myksvoll  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7885-4132>

References

- Allers, M., and B. Geertsema. 2014. *The Effects of Local Government Amalgamation on Public Spending and Service Levels: Evidence from 15 Years of Municipal Boundary Reform.* SOM Research Reports; vol. 14019-EEF. University of Groningen, SOM Research School.
- Askim, J., J. E. Klausen, S. I. Vabo, and K. Bjurstrøm. 2016. "What Causes Municipal Amalgamation Reform? Rational Explanations Meet Western European Experiences, 2004–13." In *Local Public Sector Reforms in Times of Crisis*, edited by G. Bouckaert, and S. Kuhlmann.
- Baldersheim, Harald, and Lawrence Rose. 2010. "Territorial Choice: Rescaling Governance in European States." In *Territorial Choice*, edited by Harald Baldersheim, and Lawrence Rose, 1–20. London: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9780230289826_1.
- Blesse, Sebastian, and Baskaran Thushvanthan. 2016. "Do Municipal Mergers Reduce Costs? Evidence from a German Federal State." *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 59: 54–74. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2016.04.003>.
- Blom-Hansen, Jens. 2010. "Municipal Amalgamations and Common Pool Problems: The Danish Local Government Reform in 2007." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 33 (1): 51–73. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2009.00239.x>.
- Bolgherini, Silvia, Mattia Casula, and Mariano Marotta. 2018. "Municipal Reaction to Functional Rescaling in Italy." *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 31 (4): 448–465. doi:10.1108/IJPSM-12-2016-0204.
- Bowler, Shaun, Todd Donovan, and Jeffrey A. Karp. 2006. "Why Politicians Like Electoral Institutions: Self-Interest, Values, or Ideology?" *The Journal of Politics* 68 (2): 434–446. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00418.x.
- Brajnik, Irena Bačlija, and Roman Lavtar. 2021. "Factors Contributing to Municipal Splits in Slovenia." *Miscellanea Geographica* 25 (1): 54–61. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2020-0026>.
- Brenner, Neil. 2003. "Metropolitan Institutional Reform and the Rescaling of State Space in Contemporary Western Europe." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 10 (4): 297–324. doi:10.1177/09697764030104002.
- Brenner, Neil. 2004. *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, D. 2006. "What is Education's Impact on Civic and Social Engagement?" In *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement: Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium*, 25–126. Paris: OECD.
- Christensen, Tom, Anne Lise Fimreite, and Per Lægred. 2014. "Joined-Up Government for Welfare Administration Reform in Norway." *Public Organization Review* 14 (4): 439–456. doi:10.1007/s11115-013-0237-8.
- Dahl, Robert A., and Edward R. Tufte. 1973. *Size and Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Denters, Bas, Michael J. Goldsmith, Andreas Ladner, Poul Erik Mouritzen, Lawrence E. Rose, and Peter Geurts. 2014. *Size and Local Democracy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- De Vries, Michiel S, and Iwona Sobis. 2014. "Consolidation in Local Government. An International Comparison of Arguments and Practices." *Administration: Journal of the Institute of Public Administration of Ireland* 61 (3): 31–50.
- Dhimitri, Eva. 2018. "Analysis Related To Optimal Size of Municipality and Efficiency - A Literature Review." *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10 (1): 131–138. doi:10.26417/ejis.v10i1.p131-138.

- Distriktssenteret. 2021. *Folkeavstemninger om kommunesammenslåing*. 7 April. Accessed June 6, 2022. <https://distriktssenteret.no/kommunereformen/folkeavstemninger/>.
- Distriktssenteret. 2022. *Innbyggerundersøkelser*. 8 April. Accessed June 6, 2022. <https://distriktssenteret.no/artikkel/innbyggerundersokelser/>.
- Dollery, Brian, and Lin Crase. 2004. "Is Bigger Local Government Better? An Evaluation of the Case for Australian Municipal Amalgamation Programs." *Urban Policy and Research* 22 (3): 265–275. doi:10.1080/0811114042000269290.
- Erlingsson, Gissur Ó., Jörgen Ödalen, and Erik Wångmar. 2021. "How Coerced Municipal Amalgamations Thwart the Values of Local Self-Government." *Urban Affairs Review*, doi:10.1177/1078087420921458.
- Fimreite, Anne Lise. 1996. *Desentralisering, toppstyring og lokalt selvstyre: en studie av endring i to norske og to britiske kommuner som følge av reformene Frikommuneforsøket og Education Reform Act 1988*. PhD Thesis, Bergen: University of Bergen.
- Fimreite, Anne Lise, and Ynge Flo. 2018. "Kan Kommunen Reformeres ute Reform?" *Stat og Styling* 28 (2): 32–35. doi:10.18261/ISSN0809-750X-2018-02-12.
- Folkestad, B., J. E. Klausen, J. Saglie, and S. B. Seggaard. 2021. "When do Consultative Referendums Improve Democracy? Evidence from Local Referendums in Norway." *International Political Science Review* 42 (2): 213–228. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512119881810>.
- Gendźwiłł, Adam, Anna Kurniewicz, and Paweł Swianiewicz. 2021. "The Impact of Municipal Territorial Reforms on the Economic Performance of Local Governments. A Systematic Review of Quasi-Experimental Studies." *Space and Polity* 25 (1): 37–56. doi:10.1080/13562576.2020.1747420.
- Gendźwiłł, Adam, and Paweł Swianiewicz. 2016. "Does Local Democracy Perform Better in Smaller Jurisdictions? Survey Evidence from Poland." *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government* (Maribor: Institute for Local Self-Government and Public Procurement Maribor 14: 7594. doi:[https://doi.org/10.4335/14.4.759-782\(2016\)](https://doi.org/10.4335/14.4.759-782(2016))).
- Gustafsson, Harald. 1998. "The Conglomerate State: A Perspective on State Formation in Early Modern Europe." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 23 (3-4): 189–213. doi:10.1080/03468759850115954.
- Heywood, Andrew. 2015. *Political Theory – An Introduction*. 4th. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Higdem, Ulla, Hans Christian Høyer, Erik Neslein Mønness, and Jon Helge Lesjø. 2020. "Changing Attitudes Towards Territorial Municipal Reforms – The Case of Inland Norway." *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government* 18 (2): 271–292. doi: [https://doi.org/10.4335/18.2.271-292\(2020\)](https://doi.org/10.4335/18.2.271-292(2020)).
- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. 2009. "Does Efficiency Shape the Territorial Structure of Government?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 225–241. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.12.041107.102315.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. 2016. *Community, Scale and Regional Governance. A Postfunctionalist Theory of Governance. Vol. II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Johnston, Ron, Kelvyn Jones, and David Manley. 2018. "Confounding and Collinearity in Regression Analysis: A Cautionary Tale and an Alternative Procedure, Illustrated by Studies of British Voting Behaviour." *Quality & Quantity* 52: 1957–1976. doi:10.1007/s11135-017-0584-6.
- Keating, Michael. 1995. "Size, Efficiency, and Democracy: Consolidation, Fragmentation and Public Choice." In *Theories of Urban Politics*, edited by G. Stoker, and H. Wolman, 117–134. London: Sage.

- Keating, Michael. 1997. "The Invention of Regions: Political Restructuring and Territorial Government in Western Europe." *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 15: 383–398. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1068/c150383>.
- Keating, Michael. 2021. "Rescaling Europe, Rebounding Territory: A Political Approach." *Regional & Federal Studies* 31 (1): 311–502. doi:[10.1080/13597566.2020.1791095](https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2020.1791095).
- Klausen, Jan Erling, Jostein Askim, and Signy Irene Vabo. 2016. "Kommunereformene i Norge." In *Kommunereform i Perspektiv*, edited by Jan Erling Klausen, Jostein Askim, and Signy Irene Vabo, 25–46. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Koch, Philippe, and Philippe E. Rochat. 2017. "The Effects of Local Government Consolidation on Turnout: Evidence from a Quasi-Experiment in Switzerland." *Swiss Political Science Review* 23 (3): 215–230. doi:[10.1111/spsr.12269](https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12269)
- Kushner, Joseph, and David Siegel. 2005. "Citizen Satisfaction with Municipal Amalgamations." *Canadian Public Administration* 48 (1): 73–95. doi:[10.1111/j.1754-7121.2005.tb01599.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2005.tb01599.x).
- Larsen, Erlend. 2016. *Tre Kommuner Blir til en – Suksesskriteriene bak nye Sandefjord*. Stokke: E-Forlag.
- Leckie, George. 2013. "Three-Level Multilevel Models – Concepts." *LEMMA VLE Module 11*: 1–47. <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmm/learning/course.html>.
- Lidström, Anders. 2007. "Territorial Governance in Transition." *Regional & Federal Studies* 17 (4): 499–508. doi:[10.1080/13597560701691896](https://doi.org/10.1080/13597560701691896).
- Łukomska, Julita. 2021. "Striving for a Restitution of the Former Splendor? Reasons for Municipal Splits in Poland." *Miscellanea Geographica* 25 (1): 71–81. doi:[10.2478/mgrsd-2020-0047](https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2020-0047).
- Manifesto for the Norwegian Government. 2013. "Manifesto for the Norwegian Government." <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a93b067d9b604c5a82bd3b5590096f74/plattform.pdf>.
- Manifesto for the Norwegian Government. 2019. "Manifesto for the Norwegian Government formed by the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party." <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/7b0b7f0fcf0f4d93bb6705838248749b/granavolden-platform-english.pdf>.
- Myksvoll, Thomas, Michaël Tatham, and Anne Lise Fimreite. 2022. "Understanding Bureaucratic Support for Coerced Institutional Change." *Governance* 35 (4): 11191–113820. doi:[10.1111/gove.12647](https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12647).
- Nakazawa, Katsuyoshi. 2013. "Cost Inefficiency of Municipalities After Amalgamation." *Procedia Economics and Finance* 5: 581–588. doi:[10.1016/S2212-5671\(13\)00068-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(13)00068-3).
- Norris, Donald F. 2001. "Prospects for Regional Governance Under the New Regionalism: Economic Imperatives Versus Political Impediments." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23 (5): 557–571. doi:[10.1111/0735-2166.00106](https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2166.00106).
- Poel, Dale H. 2000. "Amalgamation Perspectives: Citizen Responses to Municipal Consolidation." *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 23 (1): 31–48.
- Rec. 300 S (2013–2014). 2014. "Recommendation by Standing Committee on Local Government and Public Administration."
- Reingewertz, Yaniv. 2011. "Do Municipal Amalgamations Work? Evidence from Municipalities in Israel." *Journal of Urban Economics* 72 (2-3): 240–251. doi:[10.1016/j.jue.2012.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2012.06.001).

- Roberta, Ryan, Catherine Hastings, Bligh Grant, Alex Lawrie, Ní Shé, and Liana Wortley. 2015. "The Australian Experience of Municipal Amalgamation: Asking the Citizenry and Exploring the Implications." *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 75 (3): 373–390. doi:[10.1111/1467-8500.12182](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12182).
- Roesel, Felix. 2017. "Do Mergers of Large Local Governments Reduce Expenditures? Evidence from Germany Using the Synthetic Control Method." *European Journal of Political Economy* 50: 22–36. doi:[10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2017.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2017.10.002).
- Rose, Lawrence E., Jan Erlin Klausen, and Marte Winsvold. 2017. "Holdninger til Kommunereform: Hva er Utslagsgivende?" In *Lokalvalget 2015: Et Valg i Kommunereformens Tegn?*, edited by Jo Saglie, and Dag Arne Christensen, 267–300. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag.
- Saglie, Jo, Signe Bock Segaaards, and Dag Arne Christensen. 2021. *Lokalvelt 2019: Nye kommuner - nye valg?* Cappelen Damm.
- Sellers, Jefferey M., Anders Lindström, and Yooil Bae. 2020. *Multilevel Democracy: How Local Institutions and Civil Society Shape the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Peter, and David Mayston. 1987. "Measuring Efficiency in the Public Sector." *Omega* 15 (3): 181–189. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-0483\(87\)90068-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-0483(87)90068-5).
- Sommet, Nicolas, and Davide Morselli. 2017. "Keep Calm and Learn Multilevel Logistic Modeling: A Simplified Three-Step Procedure Using Stata, R, Mplus, and SPSS." *International Review of Social Psychology* 30 (1): 203–218. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5334/irsp.90>.
- Spáč, Peter. 2021. "Reversing the Past. Municipal Splits in Slovakia After 1989." *Miscellanea Geographica* 25 (1): 28–36. doi:[10.2478/mgrsd-2020-0045](https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2020-0045).
- SSB. 2018. . SSB. Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/09293/tableViewLayout1/>.
- Stein, Jonas, Troy Saghaug Broderstad, and Hilde Bjørnå. 2022. "Territorial Reforms, Mobilisation, and Political Trust: A Case Study from Norway." *Local Government Studies*. doi:[10.1080/03003930.2021.2025360](https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2021.2025360).
- Steiner, Reto, Claire Kaiser, Carmen Navarro, and Chris Tapscott. 2018. "Is Local Always Better? Strengths and Limitations of Local Governance for Service Delivery." *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 31 (4): 394–409. doi:[10.1108/IJPSM-05-2018-226](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-05-2018-226).
- Swianiewicz, Pawel. 2010a. "Territorial Fragmentation As a Problem, Consolidation As a Solution?" In *Territorial Consolidation Reforms in Europe*, edited by Pawel Swianiewicz, 1–23. Budapest: Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute.
- Swianiewicz, Pawel. 2018. "If Territorial Fragmentation is a Problem, is Amalgamation a Solution? - Ten Years Later." *Local Government Studies* 44: 1–10. doi:[10.1080/03003930.2017.1403903](https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2017.1403903).
- Swianiewicz, Pawel. 2021a. "From Post-Communist Democratic Laissez-Faire to Prevention of Territorial Fragmentation: Tightening the Rules of Municipal Splits in Central and Eastern Europe After 1990." In *From Post-Communist Democratic Laissez-Faire to Prevention of Territorial Fragmentation: Tightening the Rules of Municipal Splits in Central and Eastern Europe After 1990*. *Miscellanea Geographica* 25 (1): 51–1713. doi:[10.2478/mgrsd-2020-0046](https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2020-0046).
- Swianiewicz, Pawel. 2021b. "Territorial Restructuring: Amalgamations, Secessions and the Financial Crisis." In *A Research Agenda for Regional and Local Government*, edited

- by Mark Callanan, and John Loughlin, 35–48. Cheltenham: Elgar Research Agendas. doi:[10.4337/9781839106644.00008](https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839106644.00008).
- Swianiewicz, Pawel, A. Gendzwil, and Alfonso Zardi. 2017. *Does Size Matter? Toolkit of Territorial Amalgamation Reforms in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Swianiewicz, P., A. Gendźwiłł, K. Houlberg, and J. E. Klausen. 2022. *Municipal Territorial Reforms of the 21st Century in Europe. 1st*. London: Routledge. doi:[10.4324/9781003022589](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003022589).
- Takagishi, Yukihiko, Masatsugu Sakata, and Toshinori Kitamura. 2012. "Influence of the Municipal Merger on Local Government Employees' Stress Response in Japan." *Industrial Health* 50 (2): 132–141. doi:[10.2486/indhealth.MS1290](https://doi.org/10.2486/indhealth.MS1290).
- Tatham, Michaël. 2017. "Disentangling Actors from Their Environment? Pitfalls and Added-Value of the Strategic-Choice Approach." *International Journal of Public Administration* 40 (14): 1197–1210. doi:[10.1080/01900692.2017.1295269](https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2017.1295269).
- Tatham, Michaël, and Michael W. Bauer. 2016. "The State, the Economy, and the Regions: Theories of Preference Formation in Times of Crisis." *Journal of Public Administration Research And Theory* 26 (4): 631–646. doi:[10.1093/jopart/muv035](https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muv035).
- Tatham, Michaël, and Michael W. Bauer. 2021. "Hungry for Power? Regional Elites and the Architecture of Government." *Governance* 34: 621–642. doi:[10.1111/gove.12542](https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12542).
- Tatham, Michaël, Liesbet Hooghe, and Gary Marks. 2021. "The Territorial Architecture of Government." *Governance* 34: 607–620. doi:[10.1111/gove.12603](https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12603).
- Tavares, Antonio F. 2018. "Municipal Amalgamations and Their Effects: A Literature Review." *Miscellanea Geographica* 22 (1): 5–15. doi:[10.2478/mgrsd-2018-0005](https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2018-0005).
- Terlouw, Kees. 2016. "Territorial Changes and Changing Identities: How Spatial Identities are Used in the up-Scaling of Local Government in the Netherlands." *Local Government Studies* 42 (6): 938–957. doi:[10.1080/03003930.2016.1186652](https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2016.1186652).
- Vabo, Signy Irene, Terje P. Hagen, Lars Erik Borge, Bent Aslak Brandtzaeg, Halvor Holmli, Helene M. Ohm, and Mergrethe Hagerupsen. 2014. "Kriterier for god kommunestruktur: Delrapport fra ekspertutvalg."
- Vetter, Angelika, and Norbert Kersting. 2003. "Democracy Versus Efficiency? Comparing Local Government Reforms Across Europe. Vol. 4." In *Reforming Local Government in Europe. Urban and Research International*, edited by Angelika Vetter, and Norbert Kersting, 11–28. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. doi:[10.1007/978-3-663-11258-7_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-11258-7_1).
- Xu, Yuanshuo, and Mildred E. Warner. 2015. "Understanding Employment Growth in the Recession: The Geographic Diversity of State Rescaling." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 8 (2): 359–377. doi:[10.1093/cjres/rsv001](https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsv001).