

# **Advisory Commissions, Academic Expertise and Democratic Legitimacy: The Case of Norway**

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## **Abstract**

Commissions appointed to examine and propose solutions to major policy problems play a vital role in policy formulation in the Nordic countries. Whereas existing accounts emphasize the corporatist and statist features of these bodies, this article investigates the changing role of academic knowledge within commissions. It does so through an empirical and normative analysis of Norwegian *ad hoc* advisory commissions appointed during the period 1967-2013. Based on a quantitative analysis of commission composition and citation practices, the article finds a growing reliance on academics and academic knowledge in commission work. Moreover, drawing on different reasonable conceptions of democratic legitimacy, the article argues that this trend is problematic mostly from approaches that regard democracy as aggregative, participatory, and intrinsically justified. From the perspectives of deliberative, elite, and epistemically justified democracy 'scientization' is less of a problem; it can even be recommendable.

## **Introduction**

Commissions appointed to examine major policy issues and provide advice about solutions are an important element of policy-making in many political systems. In the Nordic countries, *ad hoc* advisory commissions have played a particularly vital role in the formulation of public policy, to the point that they have been described as a core element of the consensual Nordic model of government (Heclø 1974; Arter 2008; Campbell and Pedersen 2014). Traditionally, these commissions have been studied mainly from two perspectives: a corporatist perspective that sees commissions as institutions for integrating interest groups in the decision-making process (Christiansen et al. 2010) and a state-centered perspective that emphasizes the role of the state in the organization and operation of commissions (Meijer 1969; Lindvall and Rothstein 2006). However, broader societal and political changes over the last decades have put the conventional understanding of commissions under pressure. Scholars have pointed both to a drop in interest representation on commissions as one element of the decline of corporatism (Öberg et al. 2011) and to the politicization of the commission system (Christensen et al. 2009).

A development that has received less attention is the changing role of knowledge within these commissions. Several observers argue that contemporary politics and policy-making has become increasingly reliant on scientific knowledge (Turner 2003; Kitcher 2011). The expanding role of expert bodies such as courts, agencies and central banks (Vibert 2007; Olsen 2010), the rise of powerful global professions (Slaughter 2004; Fourcade 2006), calls for evidence-based policy-making (Nutley et al. 2000; Cairney 2016), and the increasing need to back up political proposals with references to research (Weingart 1999; Boswell 2008; Fischer 2009) can all be seen as expressions of

this trend. We suspect that the growing reliance on academic knowledge also has affected the Nordic commission systems. Some recent analyses show that academics make up a substantial proportion of commission members both in Denmark and Norway (Christensen et al. 2009; Tellmann 2016), and another study argues that there has been a shift from tripartite to expert commissions in Denmark (Campbell and Pedersen 2014). Yet, these studies have not theorized or systematically analyzed the changing role of academic knowledge within advisory commissions over time. Nor have they addressed the normative implications of these changes: Have academics crowded out legitimate political interests from the policy-making process, or should we rather welcome the “scientization” (Habermas 1963/1971) of advisory commissions as an expression of a new and promising way of doing research-based policy-making? Is an increasing reliance on academic knowledge eroding democratic legitimacy, or is it an asset for good democratic governance?

In this article, we address both empirical and normative questions about the changing role of academic knowledge on *ad hoc* advisory commissions through an analysis of Norwegian Official Commissions (*Norges offentlige utredninger – NOU*) appointed during the period 1967-2013. These are commissions appointed by government to look into a specific policy problem and propose appropriate solutions based on a thorough examination of the issue. Commissions usually work for a year or longer, synthesizing existing knowledge and sometimes also commissioning or carrying out new research. Their advice mainly feeds into the policy formulation stage of the decision-making process, that is, *before* concrete policies are proposed by the government. Commissions are composed of members from the civil service, political parties, interest groups, academia or the private sector, and are led by a chairman and supported by a secretariat.

Empirically, we trace the changing reliance on academic knowledge on commissions along two dimensions. The first is the *participation of academics* on commissions, that is, to what extent commission chairmen, members and secretaries are drawn from academia rather than from the civil service, political parties or interest groups. Although the relationship between the participation of academics and the actual use of academic knowledge is surely not one-to-one, the involvement of academics in commission deliberations is conducive to a greater emphasis on academic knowledge in defining policy problems and solutions. The second dimension is the *use of citations to academic literature* in commission reports, that is, to what extent reports make explicit reference to different types of academic publications. The use of citations provides an indication of the extent to which the arguments made by a commission are rooted in academic knowledge, although it must be interpreted with care (see further discussion in the research design section). Normatively, we evaluate the developments in the reliance on academic knowledge in light of different reasonable conceptions of democratic legitimacy, which we elaborate on in the article.

The research questions we pose are: (1) *How did the participation of academics and the use of citations to academic knowledge within Norwegian ad hoc advisory commissions change during the period 1967-2013?* (2) *How did these changes affect democratic legitimacy?* The analysis includes all policy-preparing commissions appointed during this period in a key area of government activity, namely economic policy. This policy area is chosen based on its substantive importance: economic policies not only have a profound impact on socio-economic outcomes; they also influence the scope for other types of government policy. As we argue later in the article, this is also a policy area where academic concerns compete with strong political, bureaucratic and societal interests.

The objective of this article is thus twofold. First, we seek to contribute to the literature on advisory commissions as key institutions in policy-making in the Nordic countries, by developing a knowledge-centered perspective as an alternative to conventional corporatist and state-centered accounts and by examining empirically the changing reliance on academic knowledge within commissions. Second, we aim to contribute innovatively to normative discussions about the place of scientific knowledge in contemporary policy-making, both by combining empirical and evaluative analysis and by replacing general statements about implications for “democracy” with a more fine-grained discussion that takes into account different reasonable ideas of what democratic legitimacy implies (Rawls 1993: 131-172, Peter 2011).

The article is structured as follows. We first review existing literature about Nordic advisory commissions. We then discuss the increased use of academic knowledge in policy-making and what this implies from the perspective of different reasonable accounts of democratic legitimacy. After describing the design of our analysis, we present empirical evidence on the changing role of academic knowledge on Norwegian commissions and subsequently discuss these developments in light of democratic requirements. We conclude by discussing the implications and limits of the analysis.

## **Theoretical discussion**

### ***Conventional Perspectives on Nordic Commissions***

When making political decisions, governments may seek informed policy advice through a number of channels, including the permanent bureaucracy, political advisers, interest group lobbying, think tanks, consultancy reports, government-funded research, and permanent and temporary advisory bodies. The specific configuration of policy advice varies considerably across countries, leading scholars to speak of different ‘policy

advisory systems' (Craft & Howlett 2013) or 'knowledge regimes' (Campbell & Pedersen 2014). For instance, Campbell and Pedersen argue that whereas the U.S. knowledge regime in economic policy is characterized by competition among a multitude of private knowledge providers, the continental European countries rely more on policy knowledge from public and semi-public research organizations and standing advisory bodies.

Although Nordic governments draw on policy advice from numerous sources, temporary advisory commissions have traditionally been seen as an especially important channel for advice (Meijer 1969; Anton 1969; Christensen et al. 2009; Petersson 2015). The function of these commissions is to examine specific policy problems and recommend solutions, for instance about how the pension system should be reformed to meet the challenges of an ageing population. Significantly, commissions usually contribute advice in the early stages of the policy-making process, that is, before the government puts concrete policy proposals on the table. This differs from advisory bodies whose role it is to assess already formulated government proposals, such as advisory councils in Belgium (Fobé et al. 2013). The central and routinized role played by commissions in the formulation of public policy in the Nordic countries has led scholars to characterize them as a core element of the 'Nordic model of government' (Arter 2008).

Traditionally, these commissions have been studied from two main perspectives. First, commissions have been seen as "the foremost institutional expression" of *corporatism*, that is, the institutionalized participation of interest groups in policy-making (Christiansen et al. 2010:29; Rommetvedt et al. 2012). From a corporatist perspective, commissions are arenas for resource exchange between government and organized interests: interest groups are given access to the policy formulation process in

exchange for providing government with policy-relevant information and political support. The consultation of interest groups is a routine step in the preparation of new policies. This perspective was dominant in the literature from the 1970s and 80s about the sprawling network of commissions and advisory bodies in Scandinavia (Moren 1974; Kvavik 1976; Buksti & Johansen 1979; Egeberg 1981). Key expressions of the corporatist nature of the Nordic commission systems were the great number of commissions with interest group representation and the prevalence of bargaining and compromising within these bodies.

Second, commissions have been studied from a *state-centered* perspective emphasizing the control of the bureaucracy over the organization and operation of commissions (Meijer 1969; Nordby 1999; Lindvall and Rothstein 2006). From this perspective, advisory commissions have been seen essentially as an extension of public administration. This view has been closely linked to the notion of the Nordic countries as 'strong states' with long traditions of professional civil servants making and administering policies – often with the help of commissions (Heclo 1974). Significantly, the state controls the organization of commissions in the Nordic countries: not only does the government appoint commissions; it also formulates their terms of reference, picks their chairman and decides on their composition (Meijer 1969, 105; Nordby 1999). State control is further enhanced by the participation of civil servants as commission chairmen, members and secretaries. In fact, the extensive involvement of government officials has been argued to distinguish Nordic commissions from the more independent commissions in countries like the U.K. (Heclo 1974, 43-46).

However, societal and political changes from about 1980 onwards challenged these traditional images of commissions. Most importantly, the decline of corporatism in the Nordic political systems implied that the institutionalized participation of interest



groups in policy preparation and implementation was scaled back (Öberg et al. 2011). One expression of this was a dramatic reduction in the number of advisory commissions and other bodies where interest groups were represented, at least in Norway and Denmark (Nordby 1994; Christiansen & Nørgaard 2003; Christiansen et al. 2010; see Hermansson et al. 1997 for a discussion of the Swedish case). Some observers also point to an increasing *politicization* of the commission institution in this period. A major Danish study argues that the appointment of advisory commissions has gone from being an ‘institutional norm’ to becoming a ‘strategic choice’, with commissions now only being used “when a government finds it strategically convenient” (Christensen et al. 2009, 21). Yet, these diagnoses provide an incomplete picture of the transformation of advisory commissions. A development that has received little attention in the existing literature is the changing role of knowledge within these commissions (with some recent exceptions, such as Innvær 2009, which we discuss below). In the following, we address this gap by discussing the growing reliance on academic knowledge in policy-making and developing a knowledge-centered perspective on advisory commissions.

### ***The Growing Reliance on Academic Knowledge in Policy-Making***

There are conflicting accounts of how the role of academic knowledge in policy-making has changed over recent decades. According to one account, knowledge production is becoming more “socially distributed” (Gibbons et al. 1994) and “democratization of expertise” more widespread (see Maasen and Weingart 2006 for different assessments), replacing the previous dominance of academic expertise with more “pluralist” and “hybrid” forms (Krick 2015, see also Grundmann 2016 on the pitfall of generally equating ‘experts’ with ‘scientists’). Yet, according to another account, contemporary governance relies extensively and perhaps even increasingly on academic expertise

(Turner 2003; Douglas 2009; Kitcher 2011). One sign of such a development is what Frank Vibert (2007) refers to as “the rise of the unelected”: the expanding role of courts, agencies, central banks and other expert bodies inhabited by academics with substantive discretionary powers (see also Olsen 2010). Another is the ascent of academics to high political and bureaucratic offices. Consider for instance the appointment of academic economists as ministers or top civil servants in a number of Latin American and Eastern European countries in the 1990s (Markoff and Montecinos 1993; Fourcade 2006). A further expression is the increased significance of epistemic logics in parliamentary processes and in the public sphere, as civil society organizations and political parties increasingly feel the need to support their proposals with references to academic research (Fischer 2009). These developments form the backdrop for diagnoses of a rising “expertocracy” (Habermas 1996) or “epistocracy of the educated” (Estlund 2008; see also Brennan 2016) – a rule of scientists and professionals – empirically often intertwined with, but analytically distinguishable from, alternative notions of “technocracy” centered on strong bureaucracy and executive dominance (‘a rule of bureaucrats’), corporatist elite bargaining, and/or government by “business people” (cf. “stealth democracy”, see Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002).

On a general level, a main explanation of the growing reliance on academic knowledge is the technological and regulatory complexity and level of specialization of modern society. This complexity makes governments functionally dependent on scientific expertise: without academics and professionals, these societies would not work (Majone 1996; Kitcher 2011). In addition comes the widespread belief in the “problem-solving” function of science and research, that is, that a consistent utilization of scientific expertise and evidence will help solve policy problems and ensure social progress (see Weiss 1986 and Boswell 2008 for critical discussions). This

understanding of the relationship between research and policy-making has also been key to the movement for “evidence-based policy-making” (EBPM), centered on the idea that public policy should be based on scientific evidence established through rigorous testing (e.g. Nutley et al. 2000; see also Cairney 2016 for a recent overview), even if the outcomes and assessments of EBPM-induced reforms so far are mixed (e.g. Hammersley 2005; Smith 2013; Oliver et al. 2014). Moreover, the use of academic knowledge may be promoted by powerful social groups and actors, who are animated by a sincere commitment to research-based policy-making or by the strategic or tactical benefits of using knowledge. It is well known how politicians and officials use expertise selectively to consolidate organizational preferences or legitimize predetermined policy decisions, or symbolically to demonstrate competence and “epistemic authority” (cf. Hunter & Boswell 2015).

Arguments about the significant and, by many accounts, growing reliance on academic knowledge in policy-making can form the basis of a third perspective on Nordic advisory commissions (see also Johansson 1992; Tellmann 2016). From this *knowledge-centered* perspective, advisory commissions can be regarded primarily as institutions for the utilization of academic knowledge in policy-making. Located at the intersection of science and politics, commissions serve as mechanisms for incorporating academic insights into the formulation of policy. Commissions collect and analyze facts about societal problems and utilize knowledge to address these problems. Academics are key participants in this work, bringing special theoretical knowledge and state-of-the-art research to the table. This particular expertise of academics gives them authority in defining policy problems and solutions, and discussions within commissions are guided by arguments based on research and evidence rather than on political ideology or interests.

While existing research on the use of academic knowledge in Nordic advisory commissions is limited, some recent studies suggest a growing involvement of scientific experts in commission work. Data on Danish commissions indicate a steep increase in the participation of academics since 1980 (although this trend is given little weight by the authors) (Christensen et al. 2009). Another study of the Danish economic knowledge regime argues that a shift from tripartite to expert commissions has taken place since the 1980s, with policy-makers relying more on input from experts than from the traditional social partners (Campbell and Pedersen 2014: 203). Moreover, a recent investigation of the Norwegian commission system highlights the role of expertise and presents evidence that academic experts in recent years have been important actors within these commissions (Tellmann 2016). On the other hand, a study of Norwegian commission reports in health policy finds the use of scientific evidence in these documents to be of low quality (Innvær 2009). However, these studies have not systematically analyzed the changing role of academic knowledge within advisory commissions over time. Nor have they evaluated what these changes imply for democratic legitimacy. In the next sub-section, we introduce three dimensions that are central for evaluating democratic credentials.

### ***Experts in Policy-Making and Democratic Legitimacy***

Existing diagnoses of "epistocracy" tend to present it as a tragedy for democracy, leaving us in effect with "façade democracy" (Streeck 2014), "disfigured democracy" (Urbinati 2014), or "post-democracy" (Habermas 2015). On the other extreme are scholars who welcome an increasing role of scientists and academics as a way of overcoming the ignorance of the citizenry and as a precondition for rational and knowledge-based policy-making (Pincione and Tesón 2006; Caplan 2007; Brennan 2016).

It is often noted how grand diagnoses lack a clear empirical basis, but their normative basis is arguably no less problematic. The trouble is sometimes vagueness in definitions of decisive parameters, such as “democracy” or “knowledge-based”. Yet, for our purposes, the most serious shortcoming is how contributors – often quite consciously of course<sup>1</sup> – disregard the fact of reasonable disagreement. “Reasonableness” is a key term in John Rawls’ normative theory of political legitimacy. Due to what Rawls refers to as the “burdens of judgment”, or sources of disagreement inherent in the use of human reason (Rawls 1993: 54),<sup>2</sup> even reasonable persons – persons motivated by good reasons alone – will disagree on how to understand and rank values. Given this condition, a certain “overlapping consensus” of basic principles of justice is within reach: a consensus that reasonable citizens can affirm from within his/her own perspective (Rawls 1993, 131-172). However, in a range of discussions that concern morality, law and policy, citizens will end up disagreeing, not necessarily because they are biased or mistaken, but for good reasons.

Accordingly, in the following, where we cannot take upon us the demanding task of proposing a notion of a democracy that we could expect people to come to an “overlapping” agreement on, we will assess our findings from the point of view of “democracy” approached as a bundle of different reasonable conceptions of democratic legitimacy (see also Peter 2011).

More specifically, we will rely on the in normative political theory well-established distinctions between elite and participatory, aggregative and deliberative,

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<sup>1</sup> Philosophers such as Urbinati and Brennan do not aim at delineating the scope of reasonable discussion, but at defending what they ultimately see as the most correct position.

<sup>2</sup> Rawls lists six sources of reasonable disagreement: 1) Relevant facts in a case can be difficult to assess because they point in different directions. 2) Relevant considerations can be given different weight. 3) To a certain degree our concepts are indeterminate and vulnerable to hard cases. 4) Life experiences shape how we select facts and how we weigh moral and political values. 5) Most often there are normative considerations with different force on all sides of a case and an overall assessment of these considerations can be difficult. 6) Since not all possible positive values can be realized simultaneously, one must range values, and for such rankings we mostly lack clear and uncontroversial criteria.

and intrinsically and epistemically justified democracy (“epistemic democracy”), and evaluate how our findings affect democratic legitimacy depending on the different conceptions of democracy that feed into these three distinctions. The elite/participatory distinction refers to the degree of inclusion in political processes. For participatory democrats, legitimacy depends on citizens’ broad participation and deep involvement in the full policy-cycle (Pateman 1970, 2012). Elite democrats regard viable democratic governance as reliant on the responsible political leadership of societal elites, and the citizens’ primary role in a democracy as ensuring the smooth and peaceful circulation of elites (a classical statement is Schumpeter (1942); a recent account is Achen and Bartels 2016). The aggregative/deliberative distinction refers to the underlying principle of collective decision-making. Aggregative democrats consider democracy as a way of aggregating individual preferences to collective choices (the notion is intimately connected to Arrow 1951/2012; Przeworski 2010 is a recent example). The central procedure is voting, based on the principle “one person, one vote”, where each vote is to be given equal consideration. In contrast, deliberative democracy stresses “the importance of public discussions prior to a vote” (Peter, 2011: 31). Citizens’ political will are not considered synonymous with their revealed preferences, but as the transformed outcomes of processes of argumentation and intersubjective scrutiny (Habermas 1996, Gutmann & Thompson 1998). Finally, the intrinsic/epistemic distinction refers to whether democracy is justified on moral grounds with reference to the intrinsic value of political equality (for a clear-cut justification of this sort, see Urbinati 2014), or whether democracy is regarded as legitimate as far as its procedures have “truth-tracking” or “truth-sensitive” qualities that contributes to improving on decisions (List and Goodin 2001, Christiano 2012).

These distinctions are selected because they are of uncontroversial significance for a discussion of democratic merits under conditions of reasonable disagreement, and because they delineate separable dimensions in assessments of democratic legitimacy. We will refer to them as *the inclusion dimension*, *the mechanism of decision-making dimension*, and *the justification dimension*. To be sure, not all democratic theory positions are covered by these dimensions as we define them.<sup>3</sup> The dimensions can certainly also overlap and some combinations are more common than others. They do however have relative conceptual independence, in that each of them adds distinctive normative concerns. Just as elite democrats, participatory democrats can be variably concerned with the deliberative qualities of procedures; deliberative and aggregative democrats can care more or less about participatory levels; and aggregation or deliberation, broad or narrow participation, can be defended with reference to one or the other reasonable interpretation of norms of democratic equality, and/or as conducive for the quality of decisions and policies. Finally, participatory/elite, aggregative/deliberative and intrinsic/epistemic are not mutually exclusive and can in practice be combined, for example when someone cherishes participation in some parts of the policy-cycle while allowing for elite governance in others, or defends the centrality of free and fair elections in combination with deliberative advisory bodies, or supports universal voting rights with reference to the norm of political equality while also putting considerable weight on policy and decision quality. In the discussion that follows we focus however on the relatively pure versions of the opposing democracy conceptions that define our three selected dimensions, to get a broader picture of what our findings imply for democratic legitimacy under conditions of reasonable disagreement.

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<sup>3</sup> For example have other instrumental benefits of democracy been brought forward, such as more virtuous citizens and political stability.

## Research Design

We examine the changing role of academic knowledge within Norwegian *ad hoc* advisory commissions both empirically and normatively. The analysis is based on a dataset of all *ad hoc* commissions in the field of economic policy appointed during the period 1967-2013 that published an Official Norwegian Report and that had a policy-preparing function (see appendix for details). This comprises 80 commissions with a total of 779 members, 311 secretaries and 3936 citations.

Our rationale for focusing on economic policy is substantive: Governing the economy has become a key concern for policy-makers all over the world given the impact of economic policy on outcomes such as growth, stability and equality. Economic policy also influences the scope for other types of policy, for instance by determining government spending (budget policy) and revenue levels (taxation policy). Certainly, one can question how representative economic policy is for other areas of public policy. Economic policy can be seen as especially amenable to scientific knowledge since it is based on a set of complex relationships that are difficult to grasp for outsiders. Professional economic expertise and advice have enjoyed a special place in government policy-making in the postwar period (Fourcade 2006). One response to this, however, is that we examine changes *over time* within the economic policy area, meaning that we control for stable features of the policy field. Moreover, a number of other policy areas are also highly technical and amenable to academic knowledge, such as health, environment or transport policy. Finally, economic policy is an area where we may also expect a high degree of bureaucratic control and political involvement. In Norway, economic policy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance, which is widely regarded as the most powerful ministry (e.g. Lie & Venneslan 2010). Many economic policy issues also have high political salience, which may lead us to expect politicians to



be interested in controlling inquiries in the field. As such, economic policy provides a suitable context for examining the tension between the reliance on academic knowledge and other concerns in public policy-making.

Empirically, we trace the changing role of academic knowledge within commissions along two dimensions. The first is the *participation of academics* on commissions. This is measured as the share of commission chairmen, members and secretaries drawn from universities and research institutes, and the share of commissions where academics are represented. The participation of academics captures to what extent commissions include people with advanced academic knowledge rather than actors with other types of knowledge or interests, such as civil servants, politicians or interest group representatives. To be sure, there is no perfect relationship between the participation of academics and the actual use of academic knowledge: Academics may be appointed to commissions not because of their scientific knowledge but due to their political affiliation or position on an issue. And other actors, such as civil servants or politicians, may also possess advanced academic knowledge. Yet, on the whole, we expect that the involvement of academics in commission deliberations is conducive to a greater emphasis on academic knowledge in defining policy problems and solutions.

The second dimension is the *use of citations* in commission reports. The use of citations to academic literature is an indication of the extent to which the arguments made by a commission are based on academic knowledge, and the kind of academic knowledge they are based on. Certainly, we cannot expect citations to perfectly mirror the ideas and knowledge underlying a report. Not every premise or argument that goes into a report will be accompanied by an explicit reference. And citing a source does not necessarily imply support for the argument in the source, or even that the piece of knowledge cited actually has been taken into account. Yet, it is reasonable to assume

that citations to some extent reflect the content of the report: A report that makes extensive reference to academic publications will very likely be more profoundly rooted in academic knowledge than a report with few such references. Moreover, the use of citations in general indicates to what extent reports make explicit reference to sources, something that may be identified with an academic style of argumentation. In the citation analysis, we therefore examine the total volume of citations in commission reports and the volume and share of citations to academic knowledge.

There are also other potential indicators of the role of academic knowledge in commission work, such as measures of the scientific quality of reports (see e.g. Innvær 2009) or the extent to which internal commission discussions are dominated by academic arguments (Tellmann 2016). However, we have chosen to examine participation and citations given that these measures get at core aspects of the underlying theoretical concept *and* allow for systematic comparison across a large number of commissions and over time.

Finally, the normative analysis consists of evaluating the developments in the reliance on academic knowledge – the participation of academics and the use of citations – in light of different conceptions of democratic legitimacy, and more specifically along the dimensions of inclusion, decision-making mechanism and justification.

### **The Changing Role of Academic Knowledge in Norwegian Advisory Commissions**

Whereas the total number of advisory commissions in Norway dropped markedly from the 1970s to the 2000s, the number of policy-preparing commissions in the economic field remained stable over time. Table 1 shows the number of *ad hoc* commissions charged with examining economic policy that were appointed in the periods 1967-79,

1980-89, 1990-99 and 2000-13, respectively, as well as the total number of commission members, secretariat members and citations in commission reports in each of these periods. As we see, about 20 commissions were appointed in each period. The number of commission members was also relatively stable over time, whereas the number of secretariat members increased. The number of citations in commission report also increased markedly over time, as will be discussed later.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

### ***Composition of Commissions***

How did the participation of academics on these commissions change over time? We first look at the affiliation of *commission members*. Figure 1 shows the percentage of all commission members that came from academia, the civil service, interest groups, and political parties, respectively, during different periods. (Members from the Norwegian statistics bureau are coded as a separate category, given that they are part of the civil service but are scientifically independent.) The categories are mutually exclusive. See the appendix for details on coding.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The figure shows a marked increase in the proportion of commission members who came from universities and research institutes, from less than one out of ten members before 1980 to more than a quarter of members after 2000. By contrast, civil servants, who made up almost half of all commission members before 1990, accounted for less

than 30 percent of members after 2000. The share of commission members from interest groups fluctuated over time but increased to 23 percent in the period after 2000. Also noteworthy is the declining participation of politicians: while political party representatives made up 10 percent of commission members in the 1970s, this share dropped to four percent in the most recent period. One can of course question whether it makes sense to draw a stark distinction between academics and civil servants in a context where many civil servants hold degrees in economics. Yet, there are some compelling reasons for distinguishing between the two. First, civil servants are formally loyal to their political leadership, meaning that they can be instructed by the minister to take a certain stance within the commission, whereas academics are formally independent. Second, academics can be expected to have deeper and more updated scientific knowledge. As such, the two groups bring different competences and points of view to policy formulation.

The growing presence of academics is also evident if we look at another measure, namely the share of commissions where academics were represented. Figure 2 shows the percentage of commissions that included at least one member from a specific category (academia, the civil service, interest groups, political parties, Statistics Bureau) during different time periods. Note that the percentages in this figure refer to the share of commissions, not the share of commission members. For instance, the value '95 %' for academia in the period 2000-13 means that 95 percent of the commissions appointed in this period included at least one academic. The percentages do not add up to 100 percent since several categories can be represented within the same commission.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The figure shows that whereas academics were present on a little more than half of all commissions before 1990, they were represented on nearly every commission after 1990. We also see that civil servants were present on virtually every commission throughout the period. In other words, both civil servants and academics were guaranteed a place at the commission table in the period after 1990. This was not the case for interest groups, which were only represented on about half of the commissions appointed after 1990 – even though this share increased from the 1990s to the 2000s. Also noteworthy is the increasing presence of another category of experts, namely researchers from the Norwegian statistics bureau, which were represented on 70 percent of the commissions appointed after 1990. The figure also shows that political representation on commissions became increasingly rare: Politicians were represented on only one economic policy commission after 2000.

Beyond the overall composition of commissions, there have been major changes in who *chairs* these commissions. The chairman occupies an important role on Norwegian commissions. Not only does the chairman organize and set the direction for the work of the commission and its secretariat. He or she also represents the commission vis-à-vis the government and the public. Table 2 shows the affiliation of commission chairmen in different periods.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

As we can see, academics have to a large extent replaced civil servants as chairmen of economic commissions. In the 1990s and 2000s, more than half of commission chairmen were drawn from universities and research institutes, as compared to only a few in the 1970s. In addition, a number of chairmen in the most recent period were drawn from

the statistics bureau. By contrast, the number of chairmen from the civil service dwindled over time.

Given the growing participation of academics as commission chairmen and members, do we see the same trend in commission secretariats? The secretariat often carries out a substantial part of the work of the commission, including the collection of data and the drafting of reports. The size of commission secretariats has increased over time, from about one secretary per commission in the 1970s to more than six secretaries per commission after 2000. Table 3 shows the composition of commission secretariats over time.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Interestingly, there was no increase in the participation of academics in commission secretariats. During a period of more than 40 years, academics accounted for only a handful of secretaries. Secretariats were instead completely dominated by civil servants throughout the period. The lion's share of these officials came from the Ministry of Finance, which accounted for nearly two thirds of the secretaries in commissions set up after 2000.

### ***Citations in Commission Reports***

Another expression of the role of academic knowledge on commissions is the use of citations in commission reports. Figure 3 shows the development over time in the number of citations to different sources in commission reports (see appendix for details on coding).

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

First of all, we see that the total volume of citations in commission reports increased exponentially over time, from about 15 citations per 100 pages in the 1970s and 80s to nearly 60 citations per 100 pages in the period after 2000. In other words, commissions increasingly embraced the explicit citing of sources, which can be identified as an academic practice. Moreover, international academic research accounted for the largest volume of citations. Commissions appointed after 2000 on average cited international academic research 20 times per 100 pages, up from 4 citations per 100 pages in the 1970s. The majority of these references were to articles in international scientific journals, primarily in the economics field. National policy documents – such as previous commission reports, legislative proposals and white papers – were cited 12 times per 100 pages in the post-2000 period, up from 3 times per 100 pages in the 1970s. Other important sources of citations were international policy documents and policy research (i.e. publications by international organizations and foreign governments) and national academic and policy research. By contrast, there was only a small number of citations to documents produced by interest groups, think tanks and consultancy firms.

Further analysis provides additional evidence of altered citation practices within commissions. While reports with no or very few citations to existing knowledge were common in the 1970s and 80s, reports from the last 10 years all contained a sizeable number of citations (see figure 4). There was, moreover, a marked increase in the maximum volume of citations in reports, as the five reports with the greatest number of citations all were published after 2000.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Did these developments imply that academic knowledge crowded out other types of knowledge in commission reports? To get at this, table 4 shows the distribution of citations across different sources.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Although the proportion of citations to international academic research increased over time, the increase was not dramatic. The proportion of citations to national academic research dropped somewhat over the same period. The share of citations to national policy documents, by contrast, remained stable over time, belying any strong arguments about a shift towards academic knowledge. As for more policy-oriented research, the share of citations to national policy research decreased over time, whereas the percentage of references to international policy research increased somewhat. The share of citations to documents produced by interest groups, think-tanks, etc. remained small throughout the period. If anything, the figure suggests a moderate shift from national to international sources of knowledge, as international sources came to account for a majority of citations in commission reports after 2000.

Overall, our analysis indicates a growing reliance on academic knowledge within Norwegian advisory commissions in the economic domain. The increasing number of academics appointed as commission chairmen and members, and the presence of academics on nearly every commission in recent decades, point towards a growing participation of academics in the definition of policy problems and solutions within commissions. Moreover, the growth in the total volume of citations in commission reports and in the number of citations to international academic literature suggests both



a more academic style and an increasing reliance on scientific knowledge in commission work. At the same time, statist elements remained important. The bureaucracy's presence on virtually every commission and near-monopoly on secretariat posts suggests a continued scope for bureaucratic influence over commission work, on top of the state's ability to steer the commission through the appointment decision and the formulation of the terms of reference. The fact that national policy documents remained an important source of policy arguments and principles also suggests that political-administrative concerns remained important in commission deliberations. As for the corporatist character of commissions, interest groups maintained a substantial presence. Yet, their place at the commission table was not guaranteed in the same way as that of civil servants and academics. The dearth of citations to interest group publications may also suggest that interest groups had limited importance as providers of knowledge and evidence in commission discussions. As such, the position of organized interests within economic policy commissions may be seen as rather vulnerable.

### ***Democratic Legitimacy***

These findings, moreover, have implications for democratic legitimacy that vary along our three selected dimensions. For participatory democrats who cherish broad inclusion and active lay participation at all stages of the policy-cycle, an increase in academic commission members relative to politicians and interest group representatives constitutes a clear legitimacy problem. From their perspective, the commission system would already be challenged democratically speaking, even without this increase, as advisory commissions consist of a restricted set of members and so allow for limited participation. More academics, civil servants' control of the secretariats, politicians' near

disappearance and the vulnerability of interest group participation only add to an already troublesome situation. Furthermore, the increased use of academic citations and of academic referencing practices suggests that academics are also to a larger extent setting the agenda for commission negotiations and deliberations. This confirms participatory democrats' fear that limited and decreasing lay participation will also result in reduced lay influence on framing and arguments. To be sure, to the extent that academics operate as participatory researchers and regard their commission membership as part of a broader advocacy engagement, even participatory democrats would assess scientization processes more mildly. Yet, for participatory democrats, lay advocacy cannot replace lay presence and participation. And importantly in our case, there is little evidence that economic researchers and professors engaged in economic policy and other commissions conceive of their role in these terms (Tellmann 2016). Elite democrats, on the other hand, will *prima facie* have fewer worries. For them it is not necessarily a problem for legitimacy that elites and elite knowledge disproportionately influence policy-making. Rather, this will typically be regarded as precondition for better – more stable, more effective, more rational etc. – democratic governance. Accordingly, confronted with our findings, elite democrats would have different concerns. A key question for them, obviously, would be what it means for the viability and quality of governance that the composition and premises of commission elites have become significantly more 'academic', and whether a differently premised policy preparation arrangement, relying more substantively on the participation and knowledge of other elites (corporate, parliamentarian, bureaucratic, etc.), would be better.

As for the decision-making mechanism dimension, aggregative democrats would be skeptical of any political arrangement, advisory commissions included, that give

some revealed preferences – those represented around the commission table – more consideration than others, and that compete with vote aggregation in purer versions, for example as this takes place during national elections. Our findings would however most likely increase aggregative democrats’ worries as the larger role of academics and the persistent control of civil servants of the secretariats in combination with less influence from politicians and increased interest group precariousness, would tend to reduce preference representativeness, since academics and bureaucrats typically lack a constituency that would hold them to account. For deliberative democrats, to the contrary, the identified developments would hold some promise. Not only could we expect academics as such to be relatively deliberatively tuned due to their professional role and ethos. The increased manifest use of academic and other references in commission reports could also indicate a firmer orientation towards reason-giving in advisory commissions. Importantly, the growth in references facilitates further scrutiny and critical interrogation as assumptions and arguments are made more explicit and transparent.

Finally, to the extent that our findings indicate a growth in political privileges for academics and a situation increasingly characterized by citizens and groups having unequal political standing, they are *prima facie* problematic from a justificatory perspective that considers democratic norms of political equality as intrinsically valuable. From an epistemic perspective, the greater role of academic knowledge and the continued bureaucratic control over advisory commissions must be given a different initial assessment. That is, the changes in composition and references must be evaluated on the basis of their epistemic merits, and it is not evident that the ascent of academics relative to politicians and interest groups in advisory commissions would result in reports and recommendations that are less “truth-sensitive”. To the contrary, it would

seem that the observed developments are good for policy outcomes, as far as academics, supplemented by civil servants, have a deliberative orientation and bring relevant information and analyses to the table and so contribute to policy preparation processes that are more consistently grounded in reasonable argument and scientific research.

## **Conclusion**

*Ad hoc* advisory commissions play a vital role in the preparation of public policy in the Nordic countries. In this article, we have presented new evidence that indicates a growing reliance on academic knowledge within this kind of commissions. Through an analysis of Norwegian commissions in economic policy, we have shown that both the participation of academics on commissions and the use of citations in general – and to international academic literature in particular – increased markedly from the 1970s to the 2000s. These findings challenge the dominant corporatist and statist accounts of Nordic commissions. Whereas work in the corporatist vein has pointed to a scaling back of the institutionalized participation of interest groups in policy-making and a concomitant decline of the commission system, this study indicates that the commission institution also has undergone a transformation through which academic actors have taken an increasingly prominent place. And although the control of the state over commissions remains significant, this study suggests that government has increasingly needed to lean on outside expertise to ensure the legitimacy of commissions. This constitutes a novel development in the evolution of Nordic commissions, with significant implications for empirical analysis and for the normative evaluation of the commission institution. For participatory democrats our findings indicate less inclusion, and so less democracy. Aggregative democrats will be critical of how greater academic participation reduces preference representativeness. If political equality is the ultimate standard,

more political power to academics and bureaucrats is *prima facie* worrisome, and in need of justification. Yet, given a broader scope of what democracy means and implies, developments come out in a different light. For elite democrats the rise of commission elites as such is perfectly legitimate and even recommendable; the decisive question is whether more academics make policy-making elites better. As for deliberative and epistemic democrats, we could expect them to welcome this trend, inasmuch as academics stick to their prescribed role of bringing validated knowledge to the table and the increased use of references indicates a more deliberative commission culture.

To be sure, there are some important limits to our analysis. First, our quantitative data on commission participation and citations only provides a partial picture of the use of academic knowledge within commissions. For instance, it says little about the reasons for appointing academics or about the character of internal commission deliberations. Yet, recent work based on qualitative interviews with commission members has pointed to the importance of academic expertise and arguments in commission discussions (Tellmann 2016), which increases our confidence that our findings are not a result of the methods and measures used. In any case, the development hinted at here needs to be substantiated by more in-depth qualitative and historical analyses. Second, we have only analyzed commissions within economic policy. The extent to which commissions have come to rely on academic knowledge may vary across policy areas, due to differences in how technical the policy area is, which academic disciplines are dominant and which bureaucratic and societal actors are active in the field. Examining this potential variation is a task for future research. A third limitation is that official advisory commissions only make up one part of the Norwegian 'policy advisory system', which also includes other types of working groups, advice-giving by civil servants and political appointees, the use of consultancy firms, etc. We can therefore not say whether the growing reliance on

academic experts within these commissions has been countered (or reinforced) by other trends, such as an increasing use of external consultants in the public sector. However, considering the government's consistent use of official advisory commissions to look into the most important matters of public policy, the expanding role of academics on these commissions must be seen as a significant development within the Norwegian policy advice regime. Fourth, we have shied away from the issue of whether the growing reliance on academic knowledge should be seen as an expression of instrumental or symbolic knowledge utilization (see Hunter and Boswell 2015), largely because it is difficult to assess this empirically based on our quantitative data. One could interpret the steep rise in the number of academics appointed to the highly visible position of commission chairman, compared to the persistent absence of academics in less visible secretariat posts, as a sign that the participation of academics on commission had certain symbolic aspects. But additional evidence is needed to draw firmer conclusions to this effect.

Finally, a fuller assessment of the democratic legitimacy of Norwegian commissions will need to take more features of the commissions and reports into account. More investigations are needed to establish the precise relationship between the increased role of academic experts and knowledge, preference representativeness and participatory patterns (cf. aggregative and participatory democracy), the extent to which academics actually live up to their prescribed role and ethos and avoid being subsumed to biases and interests (cf. deliberative and epistemic democracy), and the impact of more academic commissions on policy-making effectiveness (cf. elite democracy). The wider political system must also be considered, given that shortcomings in one part of the system may be compensated for in other parts (Parkinson & Mansbridge 2012). Civil society can have a say about commission reports

through hearing and consultation procedures (improving participatory credentials), ministries can put low-quality reports aside (improving epistemic merits), etc. But it can of course also be the other way around: not much is gained participation-wise if stakeholder consultation has no effect on outcomes, and epistemic performance is unlikely to be improved if the least deliberative reports turn out to be the most cherished by decision-makers for strategic or symbolic reasons.

The present study nevertheless has some interesting broader implications. For one thing, it contributes to giving a firmer empirical grounding to diagnoses of contemporary governance as increasingly 'scientized' and 'epistocratic', although within the parameters of administrative control. A couple of lessons for normative analysis can also be drawn. First, normative diagnoses are often accused of lacking sufficient empirical basis, while empirical analyses unreflective of normative issues can be suspected to smuggle in 'silent' value hierarchies and assessments. Our study exemplifies how empirical and normative analyses can be combined, adding both stronger significance and clearer purpose to the empirical study and a more precise factual grounding of the normative assessments. Secondly, under pluralist conditions, normative parameters are reasonably contested. Our normative analysis takes this complexity into account, and delivers assessments that are non-trivial and systematic, depending on conception of democratic legitimacy, while avoiding the dogmatic flavor that inevitably haunts normative analyses that decide for this or that goal interpretation without further argument.

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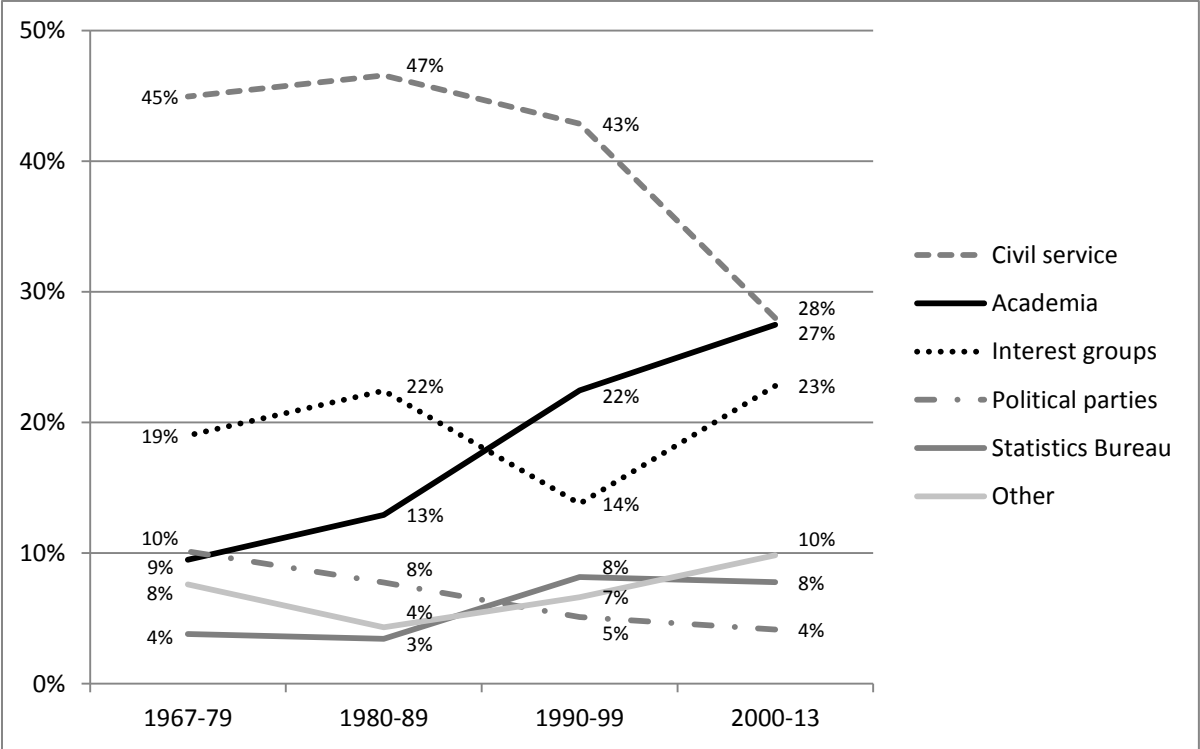
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## Tables and figures

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

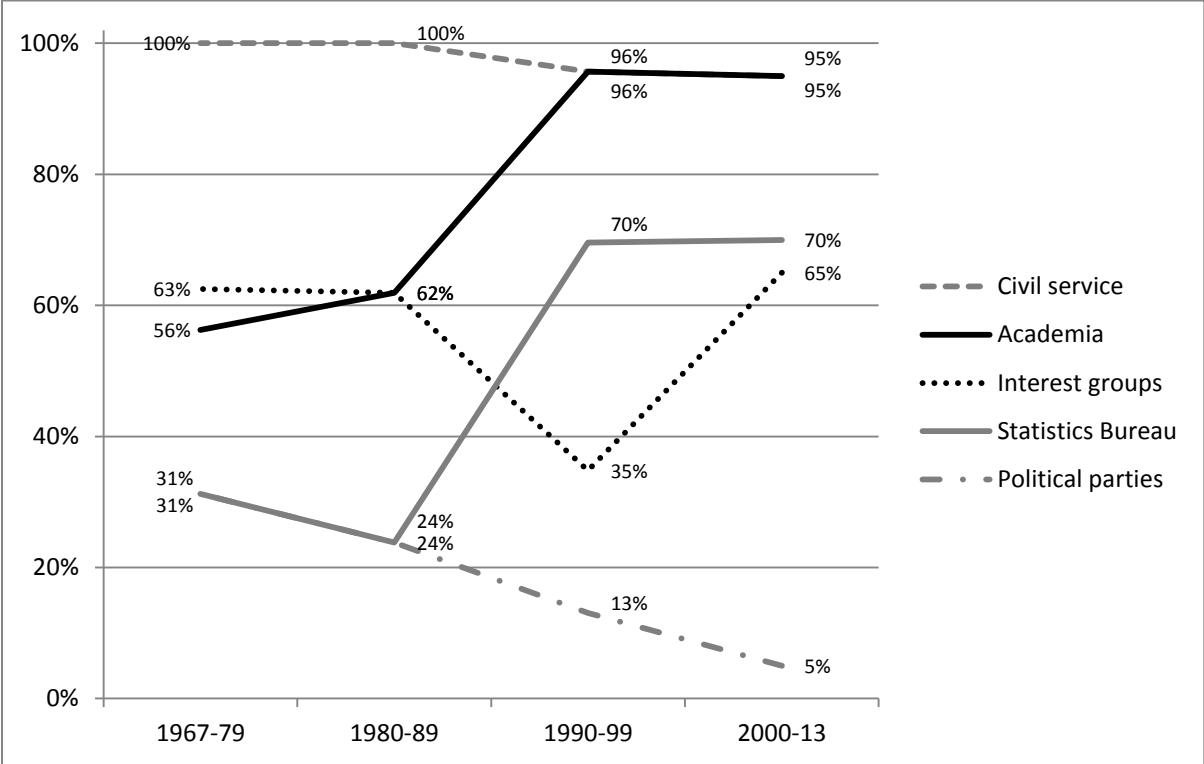
<b>Period</b>	<b>1967-79</b>	<b>1980-89</b>	<b>1990-99</b>	<b>2000-13</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of commissions	16	21	23	20	80
Number of commission members	158	232	196	193	779
Number of secretariat members	19	52	119	121	311
Number of citations	250	512	1145	2029	3936

**Figure 1: Affiliation of commission members. Percent of all commission members.**



*Note: 'Commission members' include commission chairmen but exclude members of the commission secretariats.*

**Figure 2: Share of commissions with at least one member from a specific category (civil service, academia, interest groups, Statistics Bureau, political parties, private sector). Percent of commissions.**



**Table 1: Affiliation of commission chairmen. Absolute numbers.**

	<b>Civil service</b>	<b>Academia</b>	<b>Interest groups</b>	<b>Political parties</b>	<b>Statistics Bureau</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
1967-79	7	3	0	3	2	1	16
1980-89	10	7	0	1	1	2	21
1990-99	6	12	0	0	3	2	23
2000-13	2	11	1	0	5	1	20

**Table 3: Affiliation of secretariat members. Percent of secretariat members.**

	<b>Civil service</b>	<b>(Ministry of Finance)</b>	<b>Statistics Bureau</b>	<b>Academia</b>	<b>Other/missing</b>	<b>N</b>
1967-79	89 %	(47 %)	0 %	11 %	0 %	19
1980-89	98 %	(79 %)	2 %	0 %	0 %	52
1990-99	94 %	(54 %)	3 %	0 %	3 %	119
2000-13	94 %	(63 %)	4 %	1 %	1 %	121



**Figure 3: Number of citations in commission reports, per 100 pages of report. By source.**

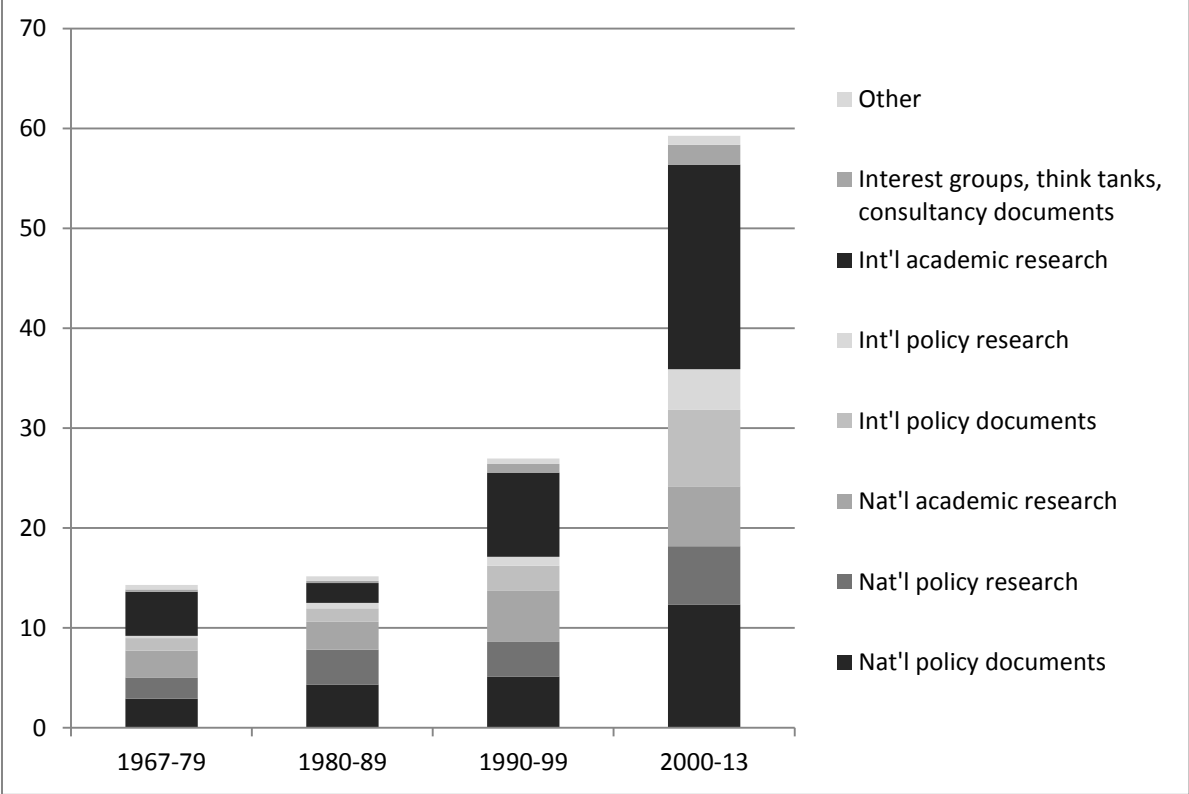
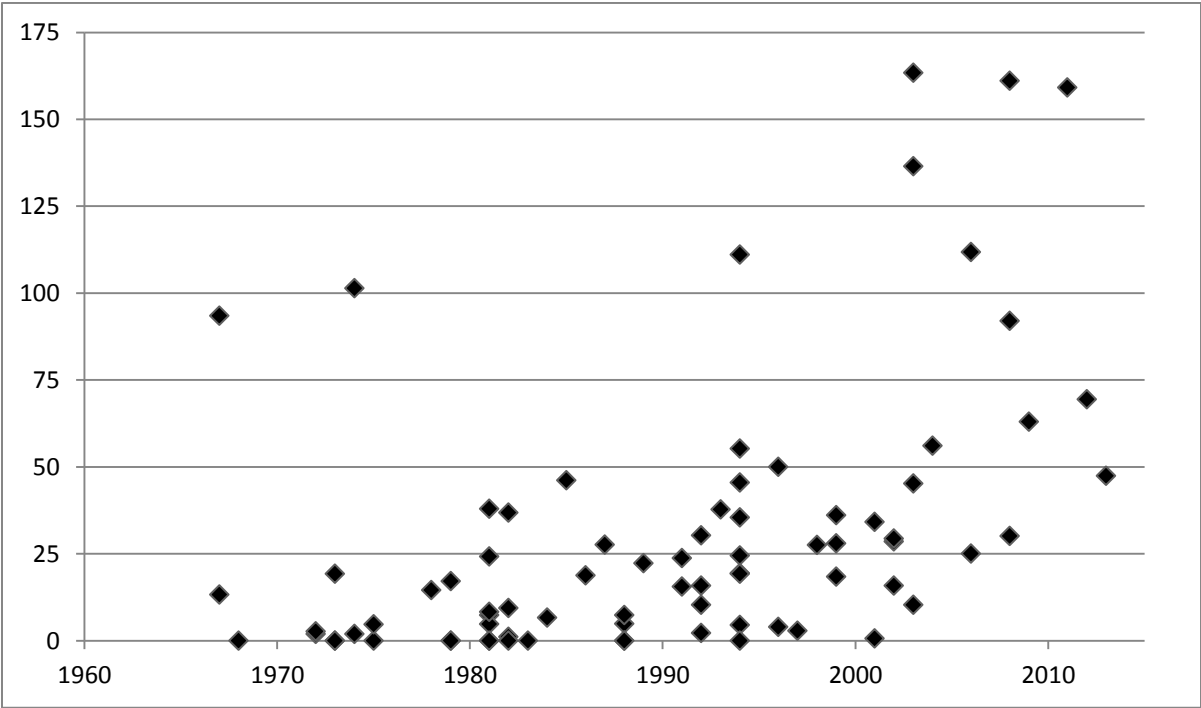


Figure 4: Citations per 100 pages of report, by single report.



**Table 4: Distribution of citations in commission reports by source. Percent.**

	Nat'l policy documents	Nat'l policy research	Nat'l academic research	Int'l policy documents	Int'l policy research	Int'l academic research	Interest gr., think tanks, consultancy	Other	N
1967-79	20 %	15 %	19 %	9 %	2 %	31 %	2 %	3 %	250
1980-89	29 %	23 %	18 %	9 %	4 %	13 %	2 %	3 %	512
1990-99	19 %	13 %	19 %	9 %	3 %	31 %	3 %	2 %	1145
2000-13	21 %	10 %	10 %	13 %	7 %	35 %	3 %	1 %	2029
<i>Total</i>	<i>21 %</i>	<i>13 %</i>	<i>14 %</i>	<i>11 %</i>	<i>5 %</i>	<i>31 %</i>	<i>3 %</i>	<i>2 %</i>	<i>3936</i>

## Appendix: Data and Coding

The analysis is based on pdf versions of Official Norwegian Reports (*Norges Offentlige Utredninger – NOU*) collected from the websites of the National Library of Norway ([www.nb.no](http://www.nb.no)) and the Norwegian government ([www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no)). The analysis includes all *ad hoc* commissions appointed during the period 1967-2013 that published an Official Norwegian Report, that submitted their report to the Ministry of Finance, and that had a policy-preparing function. Having a policy-preparing function means that the commission was charged with examining policy questions. This excludes commissions whose primary task was to draft legal texts (*lovutvalg*). The rationale for leaving out law-drafting commissions is our interest in the role of experts in shaping the *substance* of policy. While law-drafting commissions may shape the legal framework in an area, they have little influence on the choice of overarching policy goals and means. We also exclude five commissions that had nothing to do with economic policy or for which data are missing. In the analysis, the unit of observation is the commission report. Commissions that produced multiple reports are thus counted multiple times. This concerns four commissions, which produced a total of 13 reports. All these reports are included since they often concerned separate issues and were written by a slightly different group of members.

NOU reports are official documents and are recognized as a legal source in Norwegian jurisprudence. Reports normally include information on the composition and work of the commission, its considerations and proposals, and references to relevant documents and literature. The composition of the commissions is coded as follows:

(1) *Members*: The analysis includes members of the commission at the time of appointment plus members who joined the commission later and did not replace existing members.

(2) *Affiliation*: The affiliation of members, chairmen and secretaries is coded primarily based on the organization or job title given in the reports, which indicates in which capacity the members participate in the commission. ‘Academia’ includes anyone working in a scientific position at a university, university college or research institute. ‘Civil service’ refers administrators in public organizations at all levels. ‘Political parties’ includes anyone who at the time of appointment was a minister, under-secretary of state (*statssekretær*), member of parliament (MP) or deputy MP, or mayor. Where information in the report is insufficient, other sources are used to establish affiliation.

The citation analysis includes all references that are listed either in a bibliography or footnotes in the commission reports. Multiple citations to the same document in one report are excluded. Citations are coded according to the following scheme:

**Table A1: Coding scheme for citation analysis**

	<b>Policy documents</b>	<b>Policy research</b>	<b>Academic research</b>
<b>National</b>	NOU reports, government bills and acts, laws, etc.	Research from national government bodies, studies commissioned for government reports*	Research from Norwegian academic journals, books, etc.
<b>International</b>	Reports, acts from foreign governments and international organizations	Research from foreign government bodies and international organizations	Research from international academic journals, books, etc.

\* Publications from interest groups, think tanks and consultancy firms are coded as a separate category.