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Expertisation or greater representation? Evidence from Norwegian advisory commissions

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ABSTRACT

Policy-making in democratic systems involves the consultation of affected interests as well as relevant expertise. Yet, who provides decision-makers with input and how this has changed over time is a matter of contention. Whereas society-centred accounts point to the involvement of interest groups in policy formulation, epistemic accounts emphasise the participation of academic experts in the analysis and design of policy. Yet, there are few systematic empirical analyses of the developments over time in the participation of these two groups of actors in the policy formulation process. The article attempts to fill this gap by examining participation patterns in Norwegian temporary advisory commissions. Analysing a newly compiled database covering more than 1500 commissions from the period 1972–2016, the article finds a marked rise in the participation of academics over time and a stable or declining representation of interest groups.

KEYWORDS

Experts; policy-making; expertisation; interest groups

Introduction

Policy-making in democratic systems involves the consultation of affected interests as well as relevant expertise. Yet, who provides decision-makers with input and how this has changed over time is a matter of contention. On the one hand, society-centred accounts emphasise the input of groups representing various societal interests. In order for policies to be legitimate and effective, government needs the knowledge and political support of relevant stakeholders (Peters & Barker, 1993; Thomas, 1995). The neo-corporatist system of institutionalised interest group participation in policy formulation and implementation is often seen as the apex of this phenomenon. Recent literature points to a new representative wave, with intensifying stakeholder consultation involving a broader range of societal interests (see e.g. Arras & Braun, 2017; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007). On the other hand, epistemic accounts highlight the contribution of academic knowledge to the formulation of policy. Due to the complexity of modern society and expectations about rational decision-making, policy-making has become increasingly reliant on scientific

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expertise (Kitcher, 2011; Turner, 2003; Weingart, 1999). Decision-makers need specialised knowledge in order to understand cause-and-effect relationships, formulate effective policies and meet public demands for 'knowledge-based' political decisions.

The goal of the article is to assess these competing accounts empirically. While theoretical diagnoses of developments in policy-making abound, systematic empirical analyses are rare. Although some studies examine the participation of interest groups and academic experts in policy advice in conjunction (e.g. Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011), they only provide snapshots and do not examine trends over time. In other words, there is a lack of longitudinal analyses of these trends. Have academics crowded out interest groups as providers of policy input, or is it rather the other way around? The article attempts to fill this gap by examining changes in participation patterns over time in bodies providing government with policy advice.

The Nordic countries offer a suitable context for examining these competing expectations given their strong traditions for both corporatist interest representation (Blom-Hansen, 2000; Christiansen et al., 2010) and technocratic policy-making (Heclo, 1974). The article concentrates on a type of body that has played a particularly important role in policy formulation in the Nordic countries, namely *ad hoc* advisory commissions (Arter, 2008). More specifically, it analyses changes in expert and interest representation within Norwegian temporary advisory commissions known as Norwegian Official Commissions (*Norges offentlige utredninger – NOU*). These commissions are appointed by government to examine a specific policy problem and propose appropriate solutions, and can include civil servants, interest groups, academics, politicians and other groups. The analysis is based on a newly compiled database of Norwegian Official Commissions, which covers the period 1972–2016 and includes more than 1500 commissions spread across all policy areas.

The article examines the following research question: *How did the participation of interest groups and academics in Norwegian advisory commissions change during the period 1972–2016?* To answer this question, the article traces the participation of interest group representatives and academics as commission members over time. It examines changes in the overall participation of these groups and also explores how these patterns vary across policy areas. The analysis shows a marked rise in the participation of academics over time and a stable or declining representation of interest groups. These findings provide empirical support for arguments about the expertisation of policy-making. By contrast, they offer few indications of a new upswing in stakeholder participation in the formulation of public policy. However, more fine-grained analyses are necessary to draw any definitive conclusions.

The article proceeds as follows: The next section presents two competing accounts of the changing participation in policy-making, which emphasise, respectively, the role of societal interests and scientific experts. After a brief discussion of the Norwegian commission system, the data and methods are described. The empirical section presents and discusses the changes in the participation of societal groups and academics in these commissions over time. The article concludes with some considerations about the implications and limits of the analysis.

Theoretical discussion: competing accounts of participation in policy formulation

Who provides political decision-makers with advice about policy? Existing accounts provide competing answers. Based on different basic assumptions about policy-making,

societal and epistemic perspectives point to different resources as crucial in policy formulation, different sources of legitimacy, and different actors as central in the provision of information and advice (see Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011). In the following, we explore how these perspectives can explain and account for the involvement of different actors across time as well as across policy areas.

Society-centred accounts

A first theoretical perspective emphasises the involvement of societal interests in the formulation of public policy. Involving strongly concerned stakeholders and the most relevant target groups in policy-making increases the likelihood that decisions are democratic, effective and legitimate (see Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007). Consulting citizens and stakeholders with local or sectoral knowledge and expertise can produce better decisions, and increases the chances that policies are realistically grounded. It facilitates smooth and successful policy implementation, also when the decision goes against the stakeholders, as having had a say in policy formulation can ease stakeholders' acceptance of a final policy outcome (Thomas, 1995). Moreover, taking into account the views of affected parties help governments to appear more open, democratic and legitimate. If governments are willing to allow groups in society to put forward their ideas for serious consideration, then policy-making is likely to be seen as properly democratic and legitimate, rather than imposed along preconceived lines (Peters & Barker, 1993, p. 1). The relationship between government and stakeholders is often conceptualised as an exchange relationship, where interest groups are given access to the policy-making process in exchange for policy-relevant information and political support for the passage and implementation of policy (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015; Bouwen, 2002).

Many countries have long traditions for stakeholder involvement in policy planning and formulation. The neo-corporatist literature from the 1970s and 1980s highlighted the institutionalised participation of interest groups in the formulation and implementation of policy (Bouwen, 2002; Lehmbruch & Schmitter, 1982). Organised interests were routinely and extensively consulted in the preparation of policy, and interest groups were represented on a wide range of advisory boards, commissions and councils. Boards and commissions were sites for bargaining and compromising between different interest groups over policy, with the government as mediator. Participation was heavily skewed in favour of core economic interest groups, such as the main trade unions and employers' associations. However, later literature pointed to the decline of corporatism and a shift towards a more open and pluralist system. This implied a scaling back of traditional structures and an increase in other forms of interest groups consultation (such as lobbyism) (Christiansen et al., 2010; Rommetvedt, 2017; Rommetvedt, Thesen, Christiansen, & Nørgaard, 2012).

More recently, scholars have pointed to a renewed increase in the access of societal stakeholders to policy-making. This 'representative shift' is considered part of what has been portrayed as a broader shift from 'government' to 'governance': from a vertical and hierarchical to more horizontal and cooperative forms of 'steering', where the government sustains coordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors such as corporate interests and civil society (Pierre, 2000, pp. 3–4). Complementing traditional parliamentary and administrative policy-making, new participatory mechanisms have been proliferating

in the last decades, examples being public dialogue meetings, population surveys, citizen juries, public remises and other kinds of forums for public mediation and impact assessment (Dryzek, 2000, p. 164; Weale, 2001, pp. 416–217). Another expression of an increased consultation practice is that stakeholders gain access to policy-making arenas that were previously off bounds. For instance, the European Union has developed an extensive system of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including European Commission expert groups that comprise interest groups (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011; Metz, 2015) and EU agencies' involvement of stakeholders through public consultations, stakeholder bodies and representation on management boards (Arras & Braun, 2017). Furthermore, there has been a shift from the participation of groups representing economic interests towards the involvement of a broader range of civil society groups representing different values and causes (e.g. Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015). Societal and political changes have spurred mobilisation of citizens and stakeholders on issues such as environmental change, immigration, health and elderly care. As a result, new interest groups, NGOs and civil society organisations have appeared on the political scene and gained access to policy formulation arenas (Binderkrantz, 2008; Fisker, 2013).

All in all, empirical scholarship within a society-centred perspective leaves us with certain expectations about the trends in participation over time. First, we would expect interest group participation in policy advisory bodies to decline from the 1970s/80s onwards. Second, recent arguments about stakeholder participation may lead us to expect interest group participation to grow again in the most recent period. Finally, we anticipate some variations across policy fields. One would expect to see a variegated pattern of change in interest group participation, with the presence of interest groups declining in economic fields (e.g. economic policy, industrial policy, agriculture), while increasing in other areas (e.g. environment and health and elderly care).

Epistemic accounts

By contrast, epistemic perspectives highlight the role of academic knowledge in the formulation of public policy.[1] Decision-makers rely on input from academic experts for several reasons. For one, politicians need specialised knowledge to understand cause-and-effect relationships and deal with the complexity and uncertainty related to public policies (Haas, 1992). Given that the government administration seldom has sufficient or sufficiently specialised knowledge, they have to reach out to academics and other researchers for technical information and advice (Majone, 1996). For another, seeking advice from scientific experts is a way to bolster credibility and legitimacy, by signalling that policy-making is based on neutral, objective knowledge. As the concepts of intelligent choice and rationality are cornerstones in modern policy-making, a government that fails to receive, process and act on as sound knowledge as possible can appear as a poor and illegitimate one (Feldman & March, 1981). Finally, governments might seek the advice of academics for political-strategical reasons. Expert knowledge can serve as political ammunition for advocating pre-determined policy preferences or to postpone or bury a decision on a topic (Boswell, 2008, 2009; Schrefler, 2010; Weiss, 1979).

While academic knowledge has always played a role in policy-making, a number of scholars argue that policy-making in recent decades has become increasingly reliant on scientific knowledge – a phenomenon referred to as the 'scientification' (Weingart,

1999) or 'expertisation' (Turner, 2003) of politics. Today, a growing number of issues are simply so technical that advanced knowledge is indispensable for the formulation of policy. Think for instance about the regulation of pesticides or the design of pension systems. The increasing technological and regulatory complexity and level of specialisation in modern societies even leads scholars to argue that expertise dependency constitutes a 'basic fact' of modern societies (Holst & Molander, 2017). To be sure, some scholars argue that 'expertise' is not limited to academic knowledge; it also involves other types of knowledge and skills, such as the more applied knowledge of administrators or lay expertise, as well as hybrid forms of expertise (see Grundmann, 2017 for a review). However, the main theoretical and empirical focus of this article is on academic knowledge.

Modern-day policy-making, then, draws on academic experts and expertise to an unprecedented extent and in manifold ways. An important expression of this trend is the increasing power and autonomy of expert bodies like courts, regulatory agencies, central banks and international financial institutions (Majone, 1996; Marcussen, 2006; Vibert, 2007). Another is the rise and influence of expert professions within governments and international organisations, such as the ascent of economists to powerful bureaucratic and political positions in recent decades (Babb, 2004; Christensen, 2017; Chwieroth, 2009; Fourcade, 2006). Scholars also point to a growing need to back up political arguments with knowledge and research (Weingart, 1999). Moreover, the idea that public policies need to be based on the best available knowledge and evidence in order to be effective gained ground in recent decades, as exemplified by the campaign for 'evidence-based policy-making' (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007). To be sure, there are also tendencies that run counter to this trend. The distrust and outright rejection of facts and expertise in the Trump administration in the U.S. and in the Brexit campaign in the U.K. can be seen as a powerful reaction to the expanding role of experts (Nichols, 2017).

Nevertheless, the bulk of theoretical arguments points to an increasing role for academic experts in policy formulation. We therefore expect the participation of academic experts in policy advisory bodies to increase over the period from the 1970s until the 2010s. As for patterns across policy areas, there are reasons to expect that policy issues often regarded as 'technical' (e.g. economy, trade and environmental issues) are more prone to expertisation due to the functional demand for specialised economic knowledge *and* a growing need to display economic knowledge in order for policy-making to be perceived as legitimate (Fourcade, 2006; Markoff & Montecinos, 1993). Before these broad expectations are investigated, we describe the empirical context and the research design.

Nordic decision-making systems and ad hoc commissions

The Nordic countries offer a suitable context for examining these competing expectations given their strong traditions for both interest representation and technocracy. The Nordic decision-making systems have traditionally been seen as neo-corporatist in character, with interest groups participating extensively and regularly in the preparation and implementation of policy (Blom-Hansen, 2000; Christiansen et al., 2010). At the same time, policy-making in the Nordic countries has frequently been characterised as technocratic, with a strong emphasis on finding rational solutions to policy problems based on relevant knowledge and thorough investigation (Arter, 2008; Heclo, 1974). This duality makes it

an appropriate setting for comparing developments in interest group and expert involvement in policy-making.

Governments seek outside policy input through various types of advisory and consultation bodies. Scholars have paid increasing attention to how the specific configuration of advisory institutions varies across countries, giving rise to typologies of 'policy advisory systems' (Craft & Howlett, 2013) or 'knowledge regimes' (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014). A particular feature of the Nordic knowledge regimes is the emphasis on temporary advisory commissions as a channel for advice (Anton, 1969; Christensen, Mouritzen, & Nørgaard, 2009; Christensen, Gornitzka, & Holst, 2017; Petersson, 2015). *Ad hoc* commissions have been seen as a vital part of the decision-making process on major policy issues, and more broadly, as a key element of the 'Nordic model of government' (Arter, 2008).

Given the important role of temporary advisory commissions in the decision-making process in the Nordic countries, we focus our analysis on this institution. More specifically, we examine *ad hoc* advisory commissions in Norway, which are known as Norwegian Official Commissions. These commissions are appointed by Cabinet or a ministry to investigate a specific policy issue and propose solutions. The work of the commission is defined by the terms of reference provided by the ministry. A commission usually works for a year or more, synthesising existing knowledge and in some cases also carrying out or commissioning new research. The recommendations of the commission are presented in a report that is submitted to the relevant ministry and made publicly available. This advice usually feeds into the early stages of the decision-making process, that is, before concrete policies are proposed by the government. On average, nearly 35 commissions were appointed annually over the period 1972–2016, making the Norwegian commission system far more extensive than for instance commissions systems in the Westminster countries (see Craft & Halligan, 2017). Moreover, existing studies show that these commissions can have a significant influence on policy. For instance, commissions played a decisive role in the design of a series of major economic reforms from the 1980s onwards (Christensen, 2017; Lie & Venneslan, 2010).

In existing research, the Norwegian commission system has been analysed from both corporatist and epistemic perspectives. On the one hand, commissions have been described as 'the foremost institutional expression' of corporatism in the Scandinavian countries and analysed as venues for the institutionalised involvement of interest groups in policy-making (Christiansen et al., 2010, p. 29; Egeberg, 1981; Rommetvedt et al., 2012). On the other hand, recent work has highlighted the epistemic aspects of these commissions, arguing that the commissions can be seen as deliberative bodies through which expert arguments are brought into policy-making (Tellmann, 2016) or pointing to the growing participation of academics in commissions in particular policy fields like economic policy (Christensen, 2018; Christensen & Holst, 2017). However, these two perspectives have so far not been examined in conjunction.

To be sure, there are limitations to what an analysis of Norwegian Official Commissions can tell us. First of all, the findings cannot easily be generalised to decision-making systems outside of the Nordic countries, given differences both in political-administrative institutions and the organisation of policy advice. Even within the Nordic countries trends may vary across countries. Second, while *ad hoc* commissions occupy a central position in the policy formulation process, especially on major policy issues, they do not provide a full picture of the trends in the participation of interest groups and academic experts.

The analysis does not capture developments within other channels, such as written consultations or interest group lobbying towards political or administrative bodies. There may well be developments in these parts of the system that run counter to the trends observed in official commissions. Finally, examining participation on advisory commissions does not allow us to draw conclusions about the actual policy impact of the groups participating on these commissions. However, access is an important precondition for influence, and it is not far-fetched to expect that major shifts in access to the policy formulation process will have implications for patterns of influence over policy.

Data and coding

Data

We trace changes in the commission system by investigating the member composition of commission over time – from the 1970s and up until today – and across different policy areas. The analysis is based on a dataset comprising all *ad hoc* commissions that delivered a policy report throughout the period 1972–2016. All NOUs are publicly available and can be accessed from the webpages of the Norwegian government and the National Library of Norway.[2] Based on the information reports provide, we have constructed a dataset comprising all commissions and their members.[3] The dataset includes information about the affiliation of members, as well as characteristics of the report itself. The total numbers of reports and members coded are displayed in Table 1.[4]

Norwegian advisory commissions can be divided into two main categories: policy-preparing commissions and law-drafting commissions (*lovutvalg*). Whereas the first type of commissions examine and provide recommendations about policy questions, the primary task of the law-drafting commissions is to draft legal texts. The different tasks of the two types of commissions and the fact that government recognises law-drafting commissions as a distinct type of commissions makes it appropriate to keep these two categories apart. Given our interest in the formulation of overarching policy objectives and solutions, we look exclusively at policy-preparing commissions in the analysis.[5]

Furthermore, some commissions produced several reports. In the analysis, however, the unit of analysis is reports, and commissions that produced multiple reports are therefore counted multiple times.

Operationalisation

Our main interest concerns how the member composition of commissions has changed over time, both overall and in different policy fields. We operationalise *members* as

Table 1. Number of NOU commissions and members, 1972–2016.

	1972–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2016	Total
All NOUs						
Reports	452	406	294	251	127	1530
Members	3512	3315	2676	2663	1424	13590
Policy-preparing NOUs[a]						
Reports	364	316	206	158	81	1125
Members	2907	2635	1872	1619	922	9954

[a]Law-drafting commissions excluded.

persons appointed to the commission initially, as well as persons who were appointed to the commission at a later point in time and did not replace an existing member. As for *composition,* we base our analysis on the affiliation that is listed in the report. Members are classified as affiliated with one of the following eight groups:[6]

(1) *Academics:* Members in academic positions at universities and research institutes.
(2) *Interest groups*: Members representing interest groups such as labour unions, business associations, professional associations and other non-governmental organisations.
(3) *Civil and public servants*: Civil servants employed in ministries and agencies, as well as public servants such as doctors, teachers and police officers. The group also includes employees of state enterprises, public prosecutors and military personnel.
(4) *Private sector*: People employed by firms operating in the private sector, consultancy firms, etc.
(5) *Liberal professions*: Judges and lawyers in private practice.
(6) *Politicians*: Members of parliament, politicians at the regional and local level (deputy representatives included), state secretaries, political advisors.
(7) *Others, unspecified:* e.g. foreign members, priests, members of other public commissions, artists and authors, fishermen etc.
(8) *Others, missing information:* As we base our classification on the information provided by the reports (which may provide insufficient information about the members) some of our units appear as missing in the analyses below. We list the numbers of missing members as a separate category.

Another crucial element is in what *policy field* the commissions operate. We base our categorisation of policy-fields on the ministry appointing the commission. Over the period 1972–2016, ministries have been established, terminated, reorganised and renamed a number of times. To allow for comparison over time, we have assigned the various ministries that have existed in this period to 16 core ministries (e.g. Education; Health and Social Services; Justice). The detailed classification is available upon request.

Results

Is policy formulation in Norway marked by a 'representative wave' or by a development towards 'expertisation'? In the following, we analyse these questions by presenting the overall participation for interest groups and academics on advisory commissions over time, before examining the same patterns by policy areas. First, we start by showing the absolute number of participants from different categories on commissions in five-year intervals from 1972 until 2016 (Figure 1).

It is important to bear in mind that the number of policy-preparing commissions dropped markedly over time: from a yearly average of 45 in the 1970s to 12 reports on average in 2012–2016. The number of members fell accordingly. Nevertheless, the figure shows some rather clear trends in the absolute participation of interest groups and academics on commissions. As for the interest group representatives, their presence dropped noticeably over the period: they occupy less than half as many seats on commissions in the 2010s (98 seats) as in the 1970s (236). There is furthermore no evidence of a recent upswing or 'representative wave', as interest groups hit their low in terms of seats in

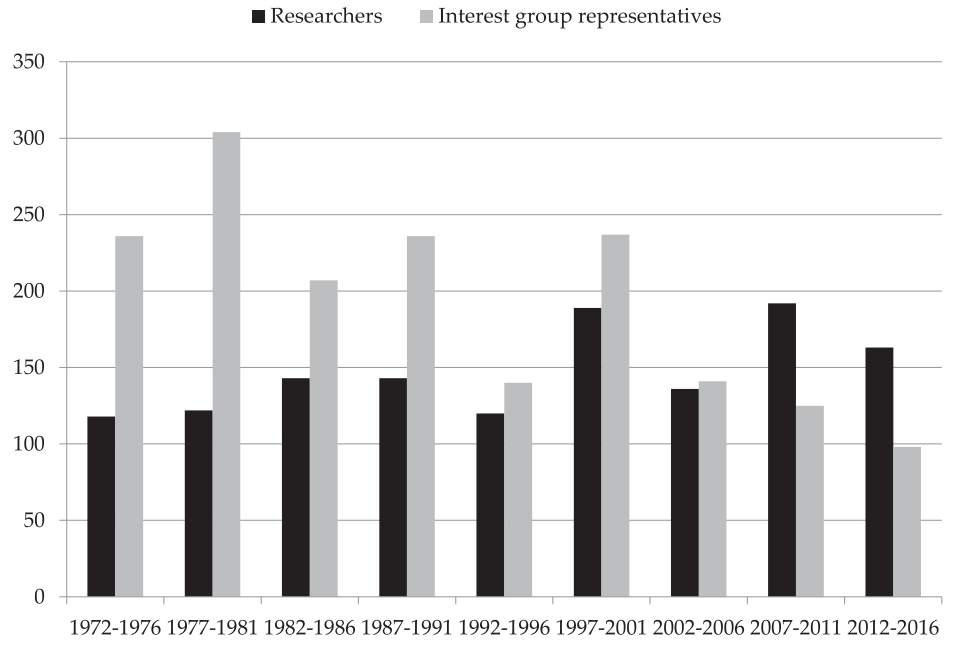

Figure 1. Number of researchers/academics and interest group representatives on commissions. 1972–2016.

the two most recent time periods. By contrast, the absolute number of academics on commissions increased gradually over time. The participation of academics even overtook that of interest groups in the most recent decade, which constitutes a remarkable development. Most importantly, this upward trend is visible despite the drop in the total number of commissions, which testifies to their relatively high increase in access to policy formulation.

In Figure 2, we turn from absolute to relative numbers, and show the number of interest group representatives and academics as a share of the total number of members.

Overall, the number of interest group representatives has remained rather stable throughout the period. Relative to other categories, the presence of interest groups increased somewhat from the beginning of the period until 1997–2001, but dropped again in the last 15 years, to 16 percent in the most recent period. These developments do not conform to the theoretical expectations about interest group participation, as we do neither detect a fall after the 'golden age' of corporatism in the 1970s and 1980s, nor a new wave of stakeholder representation in the recent decades.

The picture looks rather different for the relative presence of academics on commissions. The figure shows that the share of academics increased dramatically over time, from 7 percent in the 1970s to 26 percent in the latest decade. Academics even constituted the largest group of commission members in the period 2007–2011, surpassing civil servants. The growth is nearly linear, with the share of academics increasing in every five-year period apart from the most recent one.

The figure also shows that while civil servants traditionally made up the by far largest group of commission members, their share decreased markedly the last 15 years: from

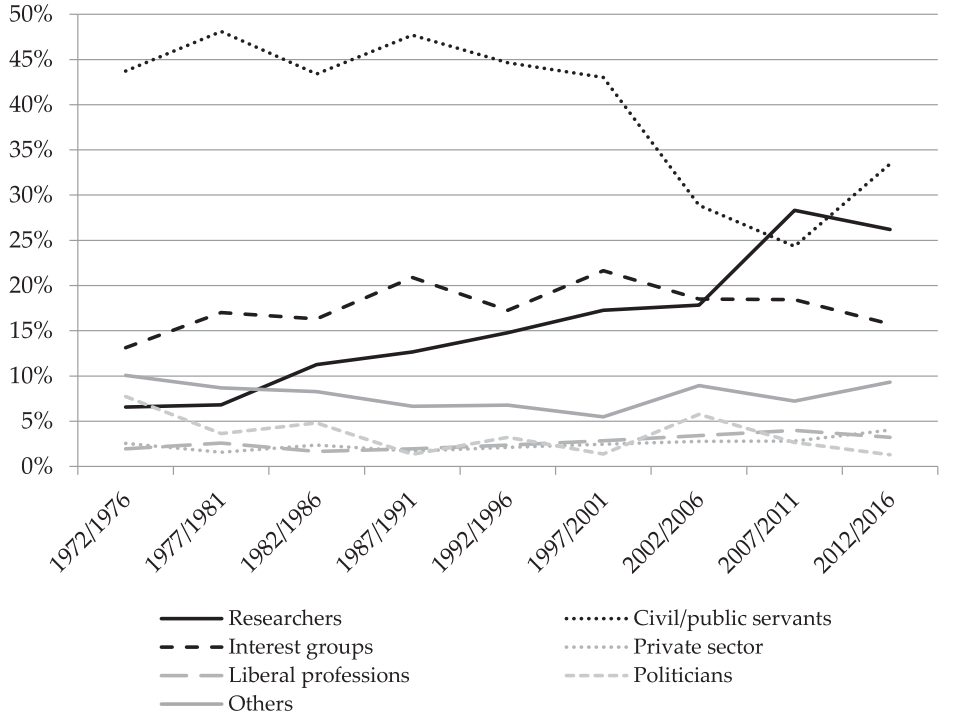

Figure 2. Affiliation of commission members 1972–2016. Percent of total number of members.

between 40 and 50 percent in the 1970s–1990s to around 30 percent in the 2000s and 2010s. Moreover, the number of private sector participants has remained low over the entire period, and other categories such as politicians and liberal professions (mostly lawyers in private practice) also account for a modest share of members.

What do the participation patterns look like when broken down by policy area? Table 2 shows the share of commission members from different categories within different policy fields, for the entire period 1972–2016.

The table reveals that the share of interest group representatives varied considerably between policy areas. Interest group representatives make up the largest share in commissions reporting to the Ministry of Labour (42.3 percent), the Ministry of Industry and Trade (23.7 percent) and the Ministry of Fisheries (23.5 percent). By contrast, the interest group share is smallest in commissions reporting to the Prime Minister's Office (0 percent) and the Ministries of Defence (7.8 percent), Education (7.9 percent) and Justice (9.5 percent).

Turning to the participation of academics, their share of seats was greatest in commissions appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (29.3 percent) and the Prime Minister's Office (24.3 percent), but both ministries appoint a relatively limited number of commissions. Of the ministries that appointed a large number of commissions, the share of academics was highest in commissions reporting to the ministries of Education (18.2 percent), Justice (17.1 percent) and Finance (16.9 percent). Academic presence was less pronounced in commissions appointed by the ministries of Transportation (3.9 percent), Defence (4.8 percent) and Petroleum and Energy (7.5 percent).

Table 2. Affiliation of commission members in different policy areas 1972–2016. Percent of total number of members.

	Civil serv.	Acad.	Interest groups	Private	Liberal	Politic.	Others	Missing	Total (%)	Total (N)
Finance	44.5	16.9	18.8	3.6	3.2	4.0	5.0	4.0	100	1045
Justice	38.8	17.1	9.5	2.4	13.0	1.1	11.1	7.0	100	369
Foreign Affairs	26.8	29.3	11.4	7.3	2.4	4.9	12.2	5.7	100	123
Transportation	51.2	3.9	14.5	6.2	2.6	5.4	5.9	10.4	100	387
Petroleum and Energy	49.1	7.5	13.7	4.2	2.8	0.9	5.2	16.5	100	212
Agriculture	28.4	11.4	16.4	1.9	6.5	0.6	21.0	13.9	100	324
Environment	50.5	15.1	9.9	1.7	1.2	3.8	6.2	11.7	100	598
Defence	51.1	4.8	7.8	0.4	1.1	14.1	8.5	12.3	100	270
Education	32.7	18.2	7.9	1.1	1.0	2.6	15.7	20.8	100	1424
Prime Minister's Office	39.6	24.2	0.0	0.0	4.4	2.2	8.8	20.9	100	91
Industry and Trade	36.2	7.9	23.7	10.0	1.5	2.4	9.0	9.2	100	619
Fisheries	42.7	10.2	23.5	0.8	1.6	0.0	12.2	9.0	100	255
Health and Social Services	54.0	14.6	16.5	0.5	1.0	2.3	4.3	6.8	100	1463
Administration	38.0	14.8	21.7	1.4	3.1	1.3	7.4	11.1	100	1050
Local Government	39.2	8.8	19.1	1.4	2.9	13.3	5.5	9.6	100	1053
Labour	35.7	9.6	42.3	1.6	0.8	0.3	2.7	6.9	100	622
App. by parliament etc.	57.1	2.0	14.3	0.0	4.1	18.4	4.1	0.0	100	49
Total (N)	4162	1326	1724	232	247	391	806	1066		9954

In Figures 3–5 below, we add a time dimension to these observations. The figures show the changes over time in the participation of interest groups and academics on commissions by policy field, as measured by the share of total commission members. In order to have enough data for each time period, we here look at the numbers per decade (rather than in five-year intervals). To be able to draw conclusions, we only show results for policy areas that have a certain amount of commissions/members and that are comparable across time. We examine the changes in participation patterns for three policy areas: Finance, Education, and Health and Social Services. In each of these three areas, there

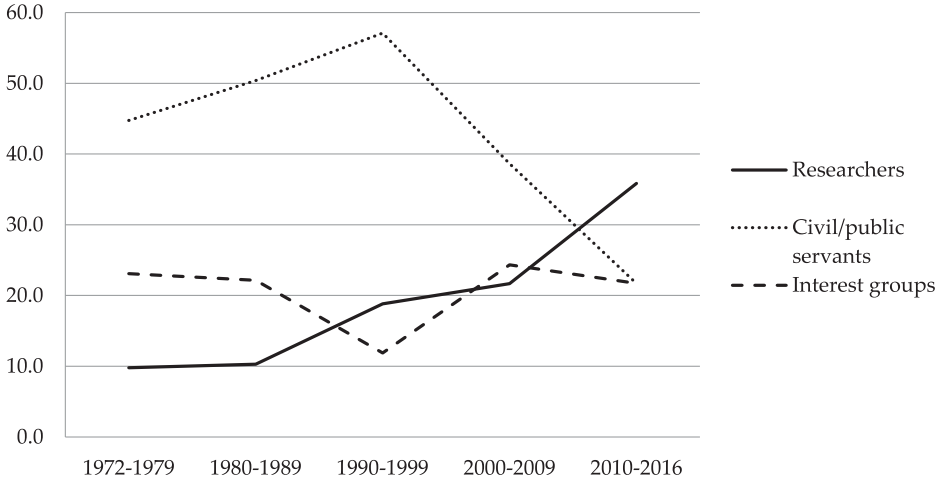

Figure 3. Finance: Affiliation of commission members 1972–2016. Percent of total number of members.

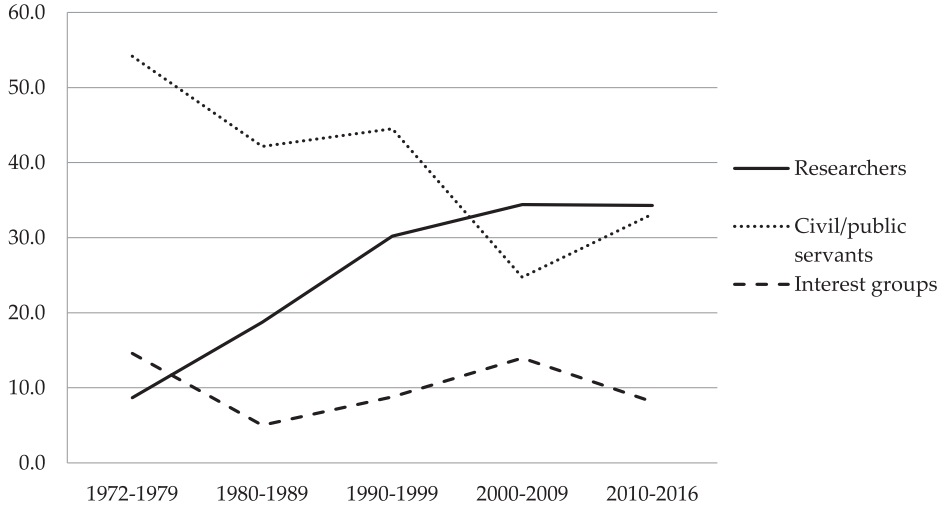

Figure 4. Education: Affiliation of commission members 1972–2016. Percent of total number of members.

were more than 100 commission reports in total, more than 100 commission members per decade, and the area of responsibility of the ministries remained relatively stable over time. For ease of interpretation, we only show the shares of the three main categories of participants: civil servants, interest groups and academics.

Across all policy areas, there was an increase in the participation of academics. The trend is most evident for commissions reporting to Finance and Education, where the share of academic members increased more than threefold over the period. In the most recent period, academics even hold the largest share of seats on commissions. In Health and Social Services, a similar trend was visible until 2000, but the share dropped

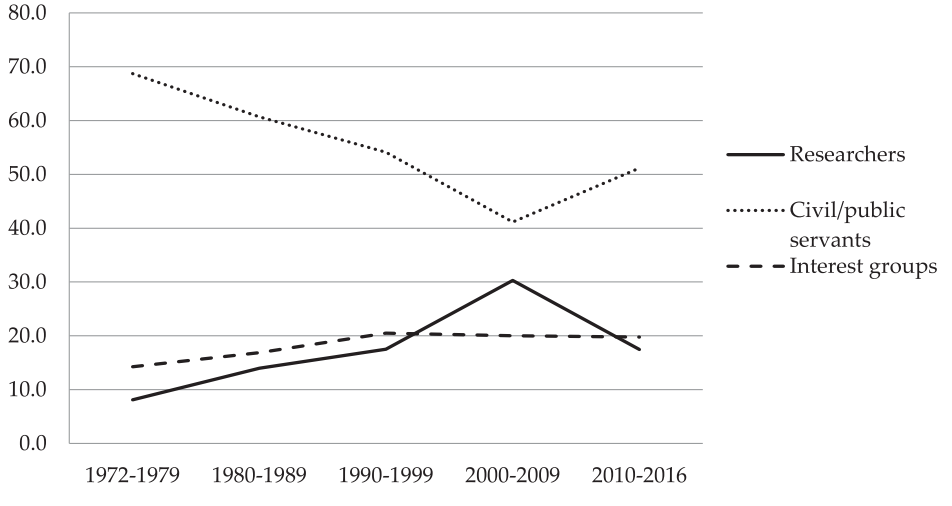

Figure 5. Health and social services: Affiliation of commission members 1972–2016. Percent of total number of members.

again to less than 20 percent in the most recent period. Nonetheless, the figures indicate that the rising participation of academics in advisory commissions was a rather general phenomenon, manifest across three major policy areas that differ in important respects.

The development in interest group participation was more variegated. In the fields of Finance and Education, interest groups' share of seats declined from the 1970s onwards. The numbers were halved from the 1980s to the 1990s in the field of Finance, and the same development occurred for educational commissions from the 1970s to the 1980s. Adding to the somewhat complex picture, the share increases in 2000–2009, before dropping slightly in the 2010s. These developments to some extent fit the expectations from the interest group literature, namely that of a decline in interest group presence after the era of corporatism and a resurgence of stakeholder participation in the most recent years. However, the drop in the most recent period is difficult to reconcile with such an account. By contrast, in Health and Social Services, interest group participation actually increased from 15 percent in the 1970s to 20 percent in the 1990s and remained stable thereafter. Here, no 'corporatist decline' is evident. In other words, the developments in interest group participation make up a rather varied picture and only partially conform to the theoretical expectations.

Discussion and conclusion

What do these results tell us about the changing participation of interest groups and academics in policy advisory bodies? Do we see an 'expertisation' of policy-making or greater involvement of stakeholders?

First of all, the analysis provides strong evidence for an increased role for academic experts in policy-making. The practice of consulting academic experts in Norwegian policymaking has grown at a steady pace over the last 40 years. The numbers speak for themselves: the share of academics has increased more than threefold, with academics outnumbering actors affiliated with interest groups, the private sector and the political sphere.

The expertisation trend is further substantiated by our policy areas analyses. Even if participation patterns within Health and Social Services commissions constitute a partial exception, the growth in the share of academics is visible across policy areas. What is striking is that these areas are very diverse, including commissions investigating issues ranging from pension, tax and economic growth, to school reforms, vocational training and universities. This may be an indication that the expanding role of experts is not limited to policy fields usually seen as 'technical'.

Turning to interest group participation, the trend is less clear. In absolute terms, the participation of interest group representatives dropped considerably over time. This lends support to the notion of corporatist decline from the 1970s and 1980s onwards, and to the argument that commissions less of an important arena for interest group involvement now than it used to be (see e.g. Rommetvedt, 2017). Yet, in relative terms, there is no uniform decline in the participation of interest groups from the 1970s onwards. Overall, the share of commission members representing interest groups grew slightly from the 1970s to the late 1990s. This was also the trend in the area of Health and Social Services. By contrast, the share of interest group representative in Finance and Education commissions dropped over the same period.

Are there signs of a new wave of stakeholder involvement in the most recent period? There are few indications of this in our analysis. Overall, our relative and absolute numbers show no signs of resurgence in interest group participation in the most recent decades. To be sure, there were signs of an uptick in interest group participation in the policy areas of Finance and Education after the 2000s. However, these observations do not provide any strong evidence for a new representative wave in policy-making.

Finally, it is worth noting the trend in the commission participation of civil servants – the third major category of members. While this article has focused on developments in academic and interest group participation, it should not be forgotten that commissions were heavily populated by civil servants. Civil servants made up almost half of all commission members at the beginning of the period. Yet, their share declined markedly over time. Even if they remained the largest group of members overall, they were surpassed by academics in both Finance and Education commissions. While examining these dynamics is beyond the scope of this article, the changing role of bureaucrats on commissions surely warrants closer attention.

Summing up, our analyses of Norwegian advisory commissions lend support to the claim that contemporary policy-making is characterised by greater reliance on scientific knowledge. The Norwegian government invites academic experts to provide policy input at a higher rate than before. This development may be driven by a need for specialised knowledge beyond the in-house capacities of the civil service or by a desire to enhance the legitimacy of policies in the face of increasing public expectations about knowledge-based policy-making. However, there is little evidence for a direct link between the rise of experts and the decline in the participation of societal stakeholders, that is, that experts have crowded out interest groups. Although the commission system is not the corporatist arena it used to be in the heyday of corporatism, the incorporation of societal interests in policy-making persists. As such, it may be useful to think of these as two distinct trends. On the one hand, the corporatist system of interest consultation has been scaled back over the last four decades. On the other hand, the consultation of academic experts through advisory commissions has gradually been expanded.

One limit of this analysis is that we have not examined the different types of interest groups involved in advisory bodies. If we were to break down the interest category into a more detailed classification, the picture might look different: it may well be that 'traditional' interest groups related to labour, economic and business interests gradually have been replaced by groups mobilised around specific issues or causes, such as environmental issues or elderly care. Furthermore, societal interests may be incorporated into committees' work by other means than merely participation, such as remiss procedures (*høring*), public consultations, public web pages, reference groups, population surveys, and other mechanisms for letting societal stakeholders voice their concerns and opinions. Unpacking the types of interest groups participating and the forms of interest representation on commissions is a task for future research.

Another important limit is that we have only examined one of a range of channels and mechanisms for policy advice. Our data on advisory commissions does not pick up other forms of interest group participation in policy-making, such as parliamentary lobbying or direct contacts with ministries and agencies. This also goes for the use of academic expertise in policy-making, which may occur through other channels such as policy advice from the permanent bureaucracy, government research bodies or commissioned research. As a

result, the observed trends towards more expert participation and less interest representation on commissions do not necessarily imply that Norwegian policy-making in general has become 'expertised'. However, these trends arguably make up an important part of the overall picture.

To what extent can our findings be extended beyond the Norwegian case? We believe that the findings have relevance for understanding changes within Nordic decision-making systems more broadly, given the similarities of these systems and the importance of *ad hoc* commissions in all the three Scandinavian countries. That corporatism has declined but far from disappeared from the Nordic countries is well documented in the literature and consistent with our findings (Blom-Hansen, 2000; Christiansen et al., 2010). As for the role of experts in policy advice, the picture is not as clear. Data from a major study of commissions in Denmark shows a growing participation of academics (Christensen et al., 2009). Yet, the study emphasises the political-strategic aspect of commissions and interprets this development mainly as an expression of strategic expert use. In the Swedish commission system, the main trend over time is the growing share of commissions consisting of a single investigator, who is often a judge or civil servant (Petersson, 2015). The possibility to generalise our results beyond the Nordic context is limited, as political institutions and policy advisory systems differ considerably from the Nordic setting. However, it is interesting to observe that our finding of a greater reliance on scientific expertise in policy advice resonates with developments in other polities and other parts of the political system, such as the recourse to technocratic governments in Southern Europe (Alexiadou, 2018) or the scientisation of central banking at the European level (Marcussen, 2006).

To conclude, the main contribution of this article is that it provides quantitative empirical evidence on the long-term developments in the involvement of interest groups and academics in policy formulation. Despite its obvious limits, the analysis is an explicit attempt to submit overarching theoretical diagnoses of developments in policy-making to systematic empirical investigation. We believe that further empirical work along these lines is an important avenue for future research. This also involves moving from the type of descriptive-analytical question addressed by this article about trends over time to explanatory questions about the determinants of these trends.

Notes

1. We use 'epistemic accounts' to refer to positive arguments about the role of expert knowledge in policy-making. This should not be confused with normative arguments that emphasise whether policy-making produces good decisions or outcomes.
2. www.regjeringen.no/en/find-document/norwegian-official-reports ; www.nb.no/en
3. With some exceptions: 1) Reports not available online and reports written by a ministry, a research institute, a consultancy firm or similar are excluded. This concerns a small number of reports: only 19 reports in total. 2) Some NOU reports come with appendices and/or summaries of findings that are published as a separate report in the series. In these cases, only the main report is included in the dataset.
4. We would like to thank Ragnhild Grønning and Jorunn Skodje for their help with collection and coding of data.
5. Data on the overall composition of all commissions, including law-drafting commissions, is presented in appendix A1.
6. The groups are mutually exclusive. In case of doubt, the member appears as 'missing'.

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Appendix

Table A1. Affiliation of members, including law-drafting commissions.

	1972–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2016	N
Researchers	7	10	14	17	23	1739
Civil/public servants	43	44	46	33	32	5555
Interest groups	14	17	18	23	19	2454
Private sector	2	2	2	3	3	295
Liberal professions	4	5	6	7	7	750
Politicians	6	4	2	3	1	449
Other categories	9	8	6	6	8	1039
Missing info	9	7	5	5	4	874
Missing	6	3	1	2	3	434
%	100	100	100	100	100	
N	3511	3315	2676	2663	1424	13589