Territorial Reforms and Voting against the Government: Evidence from the Norwegian Local Government Reform

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Paper prepared for presentation at the MPSA (Virtual) Annual Conference, April 14-18, 2021

**Brief Overview**
This paper examines the causal effects of voluntary and compulsory territorial reforms on citizens’ voting behavior in local and regional elections in Norway.

**Abstract**
Territorial reforms are often implemented to generate scale efficiencies, but recent findings reveal that larger jurisdictions may have severe consequences for democracy. Studies reveal that turnout, the quality of representation, and citizens’ satisfaction with democracy decline and vote share for protest parties surge after territorial reforms. Most of these findings concern top-down territorial reforms whereby the central government imposes jurisdictions to reform or merge. The impact of bottom-up and voluntary territorial reform on democracy is much less researched. We argue that the impact of territorial reforms on democracy is positive when the process is bottom-up whereas it is negative for a top-down process. The recent county and municipal mergers in Norway provide for a unique opportunity to compare in a quasi-experimental setting the impacts of a top-down (county) and a bottom-up (municipal) merger process on voting behavior in county and local elections. Our empirical strategy is two-fold. First, we explore municipal-level election data through difference-in-differences regressions to assess the effects of territorial reforms on vote shares for opposition parties. Second, we exploit individual-level survey data to examine the impact of bottom-up and top-down territorial reforms on voting for opposition parties. Our results show that territorial reforms negatively impact the performance of government parties at the aggregate level. Moreover, individuals that attribute a higher importance to the issue of territorial reforms for their vote choice are also more likely to vote for opposition parties.

**Keywords:** Territorial Reform, Political Behavior, Polity Size, Government-Opposition, Local Democracy

**Words:** 10,577 (incl. references, footnotes, tables, and figures, excl. appendix)
INTRODUCTION

The appropriate size and scale of political jurisdictions has been subject to a long-running debate in political science and economics (Alesina & Spolaore 2003, Dahl & Tufte 1974, Hooghe & Marks 2016). A general trade-off has been identified between economies of scale in larger jurisdictions and a more efficient realization of communities’ political preferences, due to higher preference homogeneity, in smaller ones (Alesina & Spolaore 2003). More recently, scholars have shown that efficiency concerns are not the only, and maybe not even the most important, variable to consider when trying to explain the size of a political jurisdiction or the scale at which a public policy problem is dealt with. Concerns of community and communal identity are at least as important in shaping the jurisdiction size and the multilevel governance (Hooghe & Marks 2016).

Territorial reforms are an interesting empirical setting to study the role of efficiency and communal identity when it comes to questions of polity size and policy scale. Territorial reforms most often occur at the local level (Baldersheim & Rose 2010) and recent years have seen an explosion in research on the effects of local territorial reforms (Gendzwi et al. 2020, Tavares 2018). While the positive effects of territorial reforms on economic performance and cost savings – the main justification for these undertakings – are rather limited, an increasing number of studies documents the adverse consequences that territorial reforms have on (local) democracy and political communities. Across a variety of contexts, scholars document that turnout in elections decreases after territorial reforms (Bhatti & Hansen 2019, Koch & Rochat 2017, Lapointe et al. 2018, Rodrigues & Tavares 2020), that inequalities in political representation increase (Harjunen et al. 2021, Jakobsen & Kjaer 2016, Saarimaa & Tukiainen 2016, Voda & Svacinová 2020) and that citizens become more alienated and disaffected with politics (Hansen 2013, Hansen 2015, Lassen & Serritzlew 2011, Yamada & Arai 2020).

Despite these impressively unanimous findings on the negative political consequences of territorial reforms, we know rather little about the impact of territorial reforms on electoral outcomes. If citizens are more disaffected with politics after territorial reforms and if they are less well represented, we could expect that they turn to protest parties or that they at least withdraw their support from the incumbent parties responsible for a reform. This is what Blesse and Rösel (2019), Fitzgerald (2018), and Rösel (2017) show. They all find that in jurisdictions that underwent a territorial consolidation reform, voters are more prone to vote for radical right parties. Moreover, two studies from Japan show that the two major national parties perform less well electorally in municipalities that were subject to a merger (Horiuchi et al. 2015, Shimizu 2012).

In this paper, we expand on this research on the electoral consequences of territorial reforms. We assess whether incumbent parties suffer electoral losses and opposition parties experience electoral gains after territorial reforms. In addition, we consider an important aspect of territorial reforms that has been largely neglected in existing studies on their political consequences: whether a reform is decided on bottom-up or top-down. In many countries, such as Denmark, Germany, or Sweden, large-scale territorial reforms have been implemented top-down by regional or national governments. In other countries, such as Finland, Japan, or Switzerland, higher government tiers provided incentives for territorial consolidation but left it to the respective jurisdictions whether or not they want to engage in territorial reforms.
(Baldersheim & Rose 2010). From the perspective of democratic legitimacy and acceptability, the way a territorial is implemented might make a big difference for how citizens react to it. We can expect that citizens subject to a top-down reform react more negatively to such a reform than citizens facing a bottom-up reform.

We focus on the recent Norwegian local government reform to examine the electoral effects of bottom-up and top-down territorial reforms. The Norwegian case is unique in that it provides a setting in which a bottom-up and a top-down reform were implemented simultaneously. Between 2014 and 2018, the Norwegian government incentivized municipal mergers through financial means – which led to the reduction in the number of Norwegian municipalities from 426 to 352 in the beginning of 2020. At the same time, it also forced counties – the middle tier in the Norwegian multilevel structure – to merge. This led to a reduction in the number of counties from 19 to 11 by 2020. This setting thus allows us to examine the impact a bottom-up and a top-down merger (or their combination) has on electoral outcomes and political behavior.

We use both aggregate- and individual-level data sources. First, using difference-in-differences regressions, we examine how bottom-up and top-down mergers impact the vote shares of the opponent and the proponent parties of the territorial reform in local and county elections. In a second step, we use data from the Norwegian Citizen Panel to examine whether individuals’ vote choice was affected by the territorial reforms and whether this effect varies with individuals’ position towards the reforms and the importance they attribute to them.
THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF TERRITORIAL REFORMS

Existing Research

The political consequences of territorial reforms have been subject to a growing number of studies (Tavares 2018). Most of these studies find that territorial reforms which lead to the amalgamation of existing jurisdictions have adverse effects on different outcomes relevant to democracy (Harjunen et al. 2021, Lassen & Serritzlew 2011, Rodrigues & Tavares 2020). We can distinguish three types of political consequences that have been studied extensively: turnout, political representation, and individual-level perceptions of democracy.

The most frequently studied political outcome after territorial reforms is probably turnout. Leveraging quasi-experimental settings, scholars have studied the effects of municipal mergers on turnout in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Portugal, and Switzerland (Bhatti & Hansen 2019, Heinisch et al. 2018, Koch & Rochat 2017, Lapointe et al. 2018, Rodrigues & Tavares 2020). Most of these studies find that turnout decreases in jurisdictions affected by consolidation reforms as compared to unaffected jurisdictions. Moreover, some studies report a more negative effect in jurisdictions that were subject to a more “intense” merger – i.e. those jurisdictions which make up a smaller share in terms of population size in the merger coalition (Bhatti & Hansen 2019, Koch & Rochat 2017, Lapointe et al. 2018). This heterogeneous effect of territorial reforms is attributed to the fact that for a large jurisdiction merging with a small one, almost nothing changes as a result of a merger. However, for a small jurisdiction merging with a large one “it will change the entire political system” and hence the merger shock for the local electorate is much more pronounced (Koch & Rochat 2017), 218).

A second group of studies focuses on the effects of territorial reforms on political representation. They examine how well pre-merger jurisdictions are represented in the political bodies of the post-merger jurisdiction. Voters tend to support candidates that come from their pre-merger jurisdiction in local elections and they tend to engage more in such territorial voting, the smaller and more peripheral their jurisdiction is in the new post-merger jurisdiction (Jakobsen & Kjaer 2016, Saarimaa & Tukiainen 2016). Arguably, this is the case because voters from these pre-merger jurisdictions fear that their territorial interests are overlooked if they are not properly represented in the political bodies of the post-merger jurisdiction. This fear seems to be justified. Harjunen et al.’s (2019) study on public service provision across different parts of Finnish post-merger jurisdictions shows that smaller and more peripheral pre-merger jurisdictions that are less well represented in local councils experience a decrease in public sector jobs after a merger. Moreover, these representational effects can be long-lasting. Voda and Svačinova (2020) show that some pre-merger jurisdictions in the Czech Republic that experienced a merger in the 1960s and 1970s under Soviet rule are still underrepresented in post-merger jurisdictions’ political bodies in the 2000s.

Finally, scholars study individual-level perceptions of local democracy after municipal mergers. Most of these studies use panel data from Denmark that was collected before and after the local government reform in 2007 (Hansen 2013, Hansen 2015, Lassen & Serritzlew 2011). They find that citizens’ feeling of internal political efficacy, i.e. the belief of being competent to understand and participate in politics, drops in merged municipalities (Lassen & Serritzlew 2011) and that citizens’ trust in local politicians, as well as their satisfaction with local
democracy decreases in merged compared to non-merged municipalities (Hansen 2013, Hansen 2015). In all three studies, these negative effects on citizens’ perceptions of local democracy are stronger in relatively small municipalities which experienced a larger population change and hence a more intense merger. Recently, Hansen and Kjaer (2020) have shown that these negative effects also exist for Danish citizens’ local attachment, i.e. their identification with the local community. Beyond Denmark, Yamada & Arai (2020) provide descriptive evidence that Japanese citizens in small, merged municipalities report to interact less frequently with and have less positive impressions of local politicians than citizens in comparable non-merged municipalities. In sum, territorial reforms that lead to a consolidation of political jurisdictions thus seem to negatively affect local democracy. This is particularly the case when the changes in terms of population size that come with these reforms are drastic.

A question that has received less attention in the study of the effects of territorial reforms is whether and how the latter affect political behavior and in particular vote choice. The few studies that have assessed the impact of territorial reforms on electoral outcomes focus on voting for radical right parties and on voting against major national political parties. Two studies look at the effects that county consolidation reforms have on voting for the German radical right party Alternative for Germany and the Austrian Freedom Party (Blesse & Rösel 2019, Rösel 2017). They find that after the reform was implemented, radical right parties’ vote share increased in German counties, but not in Austrian ones. Relatedly, Fitzgerald (2018) assesses the effect of upscaling authority in particular policy areas from local governments to inter-municipal institutions (carried out by the French government around 2000) on the vote outcome in the 2002 French presidential election. She finds that the radical right Front National candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen performed significantly better in municipalities affected by such a reform. The explanation provided for these effects is that citizens in consolidated jurisdictions feel more alienated from and disaffected with politics and thus turn to protest parties.

In a slightly different vein, two studies document electoral losses of the two major parties in merged municipalities after a municipal consolidation reform in Japan (Horiuchi et al. 2015, Shimizu 2012). At the same time, local lists and independent candidates fare better in these municipalities. In contrast to the studies on radical right parties, they attribute this electoral loss of established parties to their difficulties to maintain local bases and party organizations in merged municipalities.

In sum, these studies suggest that territorial reforms can have important electoral consequences that under some circumstances might undermine the stability of local and regional democracy. Moreover, they suggest that established, and in particular incumbent, parties might suffer from territorial reforms.

Variations of Territorial Reforms: Bottom-up vs Top-Down

The previous literature overview has shown that territorial reforms can have important political consequences for local democracy in general and for election outcomes in particular. We have seen that the effects generally tend to be stronger for jurisdictions that experience a stronger “merger shock”, for example relatively small municipalities that merge with bigger ones. However, we know little about the variation territorial reform effects depending on other
reform characteristics. In particular, the process through which these reforms are implemented – top-down or bottom-up – might be relevant in this respect.

Citizens’ reaction to territorial reforms might depend on the process via which they are implemented. Can the affected jurisdictions decide themselves whether they want to engage in a merger? Or is this decided by higher government tiers? For example, the studies that find a surge of protest votes after territorial consolidation all focus on reforms that were implemented top-down (Blesse & Rösel 2019, Fitzgerald 2018, Rösel 2017). In these cases, higher government tiers decided which jurisdictions had to merge as part of a large-scale reform – leaving little to no room for the affected jurisdictions to voice and act upon their preferences. Similarly, the many studies examining the effects of the 2007 Danish local government reform focus on a case in which a national government decided to set a lower bound for local government size (30,000 inhabitants) and all municipalities below this threshold (safe for a few exceptions due to topographical reasons) were forced to merge (Bhatti & Hansen 2019, Hansen 2013, Lassen & Serritzlew 2011). This is a very different approach than the one pursued by the Finnish and the Japanese national government, or by Swiss cantonal governments. All of them encourage municipal mergers through financial incentives, but leave it to local governments whether they want to react to these incentives or not (Saarimaa & Tukiainen 2014, Strebel 2019, Yamada & Arai 2020). While existing studies find negative effects on turnout and effects on electoral outcomes both after top-down and bottom-up mergers (Bhatti & Hansen 2019, Blesse & Rösel 2019, Horiuchi et al. 2015, Koch & Rochat 2017), it is plausible that the process through which a territorial reform is implemented might be relevant for its political consequences. Feelings of political alienation and disaffection as a result of a merger might be particularly widespread if such a reform is implemented top-down. In such a case, citizens might feel voiceless and subject to the seemingly arbitrary decisions made by distant technocrats. By contrast, in the case of bottom-up reforms – where decisions are taken by the affected jurisdictions themselves and where citizens might even be consulted or deciding through the means of referendums (Folkestad et al. 2021, Strebel 2019) – feelings of powerlessness and disaffection might be less widespread and hence the political consequences less grave.

These variations of territorial reforms might be particularly consequential for electoral outcomes. When a territorial reform is decided top-down without the involvement of the affected jurisdictions or even against their explicit will, the electoral consequences for incumbent parties might be more severe than in cases when these mergers are decided bottom-up.

Based on these considerations, we can formulate a set of hypotheses:

\[ H_1 \] In jurisdictions that are affected by a territorial reform, opposition parties perform better and incumbent parties perform worse.

\[ H_{1.1} \] In jurisdictions that experience a top-down merger, opposition parties fare better and government parties worse than in jurisdictions that experience a bottom-up merger.

In addition, and based on the unequivocal results of existing studies, we also expect that the effect of a territorial reform on electoral outcomes is stronger in jurisdictions that experienced a stronger merger shock.
H\textsubscript{1.2} Voting for opposition parties is stronger in pre-merger jurisdictions that make up a relatively small part of the population of a post-merger jurisdiction.

When it comes to the effects that territorial reforms have on the voting behavior of individual citizens, we can propose additional hypotheses. First, the propensity to vote for opposition parties or against incumbent parties might be particularly high for citizens that find the merger reform an important issue for their vote choice and for those that are opposed to the merger reform.

H\textsubscript{2.1} Citizens who attribute a higher importance to the territorial reform for their vote choice are to vote for opposition parties and less likely to vote for government parties.

H\textsubscript{2.2} Citizens who are opposed to the merger reform are more likely to vote for opposition parties and less likely to vote for government parties.
RESEARCH DESIGN

The Norwegian Local Government Reform

To assess the effects that territorial reform procedures have on election outcomes and political behavior, we focus on the recent local government reform in Norway. While the territorial structure and subnational organization of Norway remained largely unchanged since the 1960s, the coalition government of the Conservative and the Progress party that won the national elections of 2013 announced that they attempt to reform local and regional government structures. The reform concerned both local and county structures. Seven years later, the number of Norwegian local governments had decreased from 428 to 356 and the number of counties from 19 to 11 (Folkestad et al. 2021). The two types of reforms followed a different process. Local government mergers were, generally, voluntary. The national government provided financial incentives for amalgamation, but the local governments could decide whether they wanted to merge or not. Many of them did so via local consultative referendums (Askim et al. 2020, Folkestad et al. 2021). By contrast, county mergers were proposed by the national government and decided on by the national parliament. In some cases, especially in the Finnmark county, there was strong resistance against the county merger. Despite this contestation, the government coalition ultimately managed to secure enough support in the national parliament to implement the new county structure by 2020. However, the local and the county reform was not uncontested in the national parliament. The most fervent opponent against the mergers was the Centre party (Fitjar 2019), but also the Labour party took a stance against the merger reform, after having initially been favorable to it (change of position in 2015). Nevertheless, the final part of the reform package, the county mergers, was approved by national parliament in September 2018, whereas the municipal mergers had already been approved by the end of 2017 (Klausen et al. 2021). In addition to the Conservative and the Progress party, the reforms were support by the Liberal and the Christian Democratic party – which ultimately gave the minority government coalition of the Conservative and the Progress party enough votes to carry out their reform program. In sum, the Norwegian territorial reform provides us with variation with respect to the process through which they are decided, as well with respect to political parties’ position on the reform.

Data: Local and County Election Outcomes and Norwegian Citizen Panel

We rely on two different data sources. To test the first set of hypotheses, we engage in a longitudinal municipal-level analysis of local and county election outcomes with data from the last four local and county elections (2007, 2011, 2015, 2019). For the second set of hypotheses, we use cross-sectional data from wave 16 (November 2019) of the Norwegian Citizen Panel, which was fielded shortly after the 2019 local and county elections and notably includes

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1 It is important to note that not all municipal mergers were voluntary. In some cases, municipalities were forced to merge by the national government (Askim et al. 2020, Fitjar 2019) and in other cases municipal councils went against the decisions made in the local consultative referendums (Folkestad et al. 2021). Unfortunately, at this point we have not yet identified which municipalities fall into which category, but in any case it concerns only a minority of municipalities. This will be added at a later point and will allow us to further refine the analysis.

2 https://www.newsinenglish.no/2018/05/16/huge-majority-votes-against-finnmark-troms-merger/
questions on the importance of municipal mergers for citizens’ vote choice as well as on their position towards the territorial reforms.

The outcome variables in our study are municipalities’ and citizens’ voting behavior in local and county elections. We are particularly interested in how incumbent and opposition parties fare as a result of their support or opposition to the territorial reform. We thus assess four different outcome variables: i.) support for the Centre party (the main opponent of the reform), ii.) support for opposition parties (the combined vote share of Labour, Centre, Left Socialist, Green, and Red Party), iii.) support for the Conservative party (the main proponent of the reform), and iv.) support for the government coalition and its supporters (the combined vote share of Conservative, Progress, Christian Democratic, and Liberal Party) (Klausen et al. 2021).

**Treatment: Local and County Merger Decisions**

It is important to note that the treatment we are looking at is *not* the implementation of the merger, since that only happens in January 2020 and hence after our study period. Rather, we assess the effect of the *merger decisions*. As indicated in the description of the Norwegian local government reform above, the final part of the reform plan was decided on in September 2018. By that time, local and county residents thus knew whether their municipality or county would be merged or not and when that merger would be carried out. Moreover, in the 2019 municipal and county elections, voters were electing the local and county councils for the post-merger, i.e. the new, jurisdictions. We can thus assume that in the September 2019 elections voters were generally aware and had knowledge of the change that was about to take place in January 2020.

By contrast, at the time of the last local and county election in 2015, voters could not yet be aware of whether their jurisdiction will be affected by the territorial reform plans or not. While the minority government coalition had announced its plans for local government reform already in October 2013, the deadline to submit initial local government merger proposals was only in July 2016 (Klausen et al. 2021). Voters did thus not yet have information on whether their jurisdiction would merge or not by the time of the 2015 elections.

| Table 1. Typology of Exposure to Territorial Reforms |
|----------------------------------------|--------|----------------|
| County Merger                        | No     | Yes            |
| (top-down)                            | Control Group | County Only |
| N=79                                  | N=224                          | 303       |
| (20%)                                | (57%)                          | (77%)     |
| Municipal Merger (bottom-up)          | No     | Yes            |
|                                      | Municipal Only | Both         |
|                                      | N=16                           | N=73       |
|                                      | (4%)                           | (19%)      |
|                                      | (19%)                          | (23%)      |
|                                      | Total                           |            |
|                                      | 95                              | 297         |
|                                      | (24%)                          | (76%)      |
|                                      | 392                             | (100%)     |

*Note.* N refers to number of municipalities before the territorial reforms (Year=2017).

We look at the effect of the two reforms at the same time, the bottom-up (municipal) and top-down (county) merger decisions. This means that there are four possible ways of being affected by the territorial reform (see Table 1). A first group of municipalities, the control group,
is not affected by the territorial reform. A second group, the smallest one, is only affected by a municipal merger. A third group, the largest one, is only affected by a county merger. And finally, a fourth group is subject to both a municipal and a county merger.

We have excluded a number of municipal merger coalitions from the analysis for different reasons. First, five municipal merger coalitions involved municipal splits. Two municipalities were split into five different parts and these parts were merged with different other municipalities. Since we do not have data on the population size and other characteristics of these split-parts and could hence not calculate indicators at the level of the merger coalition, we excluded them. Second, we exclude municipalities that merged between the year 2000 and 2014, since these municipalities had a recent merger experience and could hence not serve as valid control municipalities. We also excluded one merger coalition that involved a municipality that merged between 2000 and 2014. Third, we also had to exclude a number of merger coalitions for which there was no disaggregated district-level election data available for the year 2019. Given that in the 2019 local and county council elections voters voted for the councils of the post-merger municipalities and counties, results at the municipal level are reported for these new post-merger municipalities. To obtain the election results for the pre-merger municipalities, we thus had to use district-level data (electoral districts within the municipalities) and attribute them to the pre-merger municipalities. This was generally straightforward, as the electoral districts remained the same as in previous elections. However, 9 post-merger municipalities were not subdivided into districts and hence we could not identify the results for the pre-merger municipalities and had to exclude these municipalities from the analysis. In sum, the exclusion of these municipalities leads to a reduction of our sample size from 426 pre-merger municipalities to 392.
RESULTS

Merger Decisions and Election Outcomes: Difference-in-Differences Analysis

For the aggregate-level analysis at the level of the municipality, we rely on difference-in-differences regressions. This is a standard way of examining the effects of government interventions with longitudinal data (Angrist & Pischke 2009), 227-233) and is widely used to study the effects of municipal mergers (Bhatti & Hansen 2019, Blesse & Rösel 2019, Heinisch et al. 2018, Lassen & Serritzlew 2011). Our difference-in-differences estimations are all based on the following equation:

\[ y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Treatment}_i + \beta_2 \text{After}_t + \beta_3 \text{Treatment}_i \times \text{After}_t + \lambda_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \]

\( y_{it} \) represents the outcome variable, i.e. the electoral result for a particular party or group of parties, for a given municipality \( i \) in year \( t \). \( \alpha \) is a constant term, \( \beta_1 \) is the coefficient for the variable representing the treatment. We examine the effect of the municipal and the county merger decisions separately, as well as in combination (typology of table 1). \( \beta_2 \) is the coefficient of the binary variable representing the pre-/post-treatment period, i.e. the election years 2007-2015 (pre-treatment) and 2019 (post-treatment). Most importantly, \( \beta_3 \) represents the coefficient for the interaction between the treatment and the treatment status variable. This is our difference-in-differences estimator and it indicates how the dependent variable changes in a treated municipality when we move from pre- to post-treatment status compared to the same change in a control municipality. In addition, the model includes municipality (\( \lambda_i \)) and election-year (\( \delta_t \)) fixed effects and \( \varepsilon_{it} \) represents the error term. Given that our outcome variables are vote shares, we use standard OLS regression models. In what follows, we will focus on \( \beta_3 \) in all the figures we present, since this is the outcome of interest.

Recall our hypotheses from above concerning the performance of opposition parties in the course of merger reforms. First, we argued that opposition parties fare better in municipalities that underwent a reform as opposed to those that did not. Second, we hypothesized that this effect is stronger when the merger reform is decided on top-down rather than bottom-up. And, finally, we also argued that this effect is stronger for municipalities that experience a more intense merger, i.e. municipalities that make up a relatively small part of the post-merger jurisdiction in terms of population size.  

Figures 1 and 2 show the results for the first two hypotheses. From Figure 1a we can see that the Conservative party and government parties perform less well in municipalities that will be merged compared to municipalities that are not affected by the merger. In a municipality that will be merged, the Conservative party obtains 2 percentage points less of the vote share than in a municipality that is not affected by the merger – compared to the pre-treatment local elections. The same change for government parties amounts to 3.5 percentage points. This is evidence for our baseline hypothesis H1. By contrast, county mergers seem to have a less pronounced impact on county election outcomes. While we can see that the change in

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3 Figures A.1 and A.2 show the time trends in the vote share of different parties from 2007 to 2019, separated by treated and control group. In general, the pre-treatment time trends are very similar which is an indication that the parallel trends assumption holds.
incumbent parties’ vote share from the pre- to the post-treatment elections is significantly negative (and the one of opposition parties positive) in municipalities that are affected by a county merger compared to municipalities that are not, the results for the Centre and the Conservative party do not seem to be affected by county merger decisions. Moreover, the difference-in-differences estimate for government parties only amounts to a 1.5 percentage point change in county elections – compared to the 3.5 percentage point change after municipal mergers. This goes against our hypothesis $H_{1.1}$ that top-down mergers have a stronger impact on electoral outcomes than bottom-up ones.\footnote{Rather, it seems that the level at which the merger takes place, i.e. in one’s immediate surroundings (municipality) or the larger region (county), makes a bigger difference for whether a merger decision leads to anti-incumbent voting.}

Figure 1. Effects of Municipal and County Merger Decisions on Local and Regional Election Results

a. Municipal Merger Decision*After  
b. County Merger Decision*After

Note. Dots represent regression coefficients of the difference-in-differences estimator; lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2. Effects of Territorial Reform Exposure on Local and Regional Election Results

Note. Dots represent regression coefficients of the difference-in-differences estimator; lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

This is also confirmed when we look at the effects of municipal and county merger decisions combined (Figure 2). The difference-in-differences estimator for the groups that
involve municipal merger decisions (left and right panel) are much larger than the ones for the group that involves county mergers only (middle panel). Moreover, it seems that the effects of municipal mergers on voting for opposition and against government parties is stronger when they municipalities are not also affected by a county merger reform (circle-shaped coefficients, left panel). The county merger reform alone only has a barely statistically significant effect on voting against government and for opposition parties in county elections (diamond-shaped coefficients, middle panel). Finally, the difference-in-differences estimator for municipal mergers and for both mergers is negative for the Centre party in county elections. However, we do not have clear expectations about how a municipal merger should impact county elections and vice versa. In sum, the aggregate-level analysis yields support for the first hypothesis: opposition parties perform better and government parties worse after municipal mergers, and to a lesser extent after county mergers. This is evidence for our first hypothesis H\textsubscript{1}. Yet, we do not find evidence that top-down mergers have a stronger impact on vote choice than bottom-up mergers – rather to the contrary. This contradicts hypothesis H\textsubscript{1,1}.

Figure 3. Effects of Municipal Merger Decisions by Merger Intensity (Municipal Merger Decision*After)

Note. Dots represent regression coefficients of the difference-in-differences estimator; lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Non-Intense Mergers: pre-merger municipality makes up >50% of merger coalition population; Intense Mergers: pre-merger municipality makes up <50% of merger coalition population.

We can now examine in more detail whether the effect of the municipal merger decision varies depending on the “intensity” of the municipal merger.\textsuperscript{5} For this analysis, we follow Hansen and Kjaer (2020) and divide municipalities into three groups: the control group without municipal mergers, municipalities that do not experience an “intense merger” (i.e. those that

\textsuperscript{5} Due to the low number of county mergers, we do not repeat this exercise for the county mergers.
make up more than 50% of the post-merger municipality’s population), and those that do experience an intense merger (i.e. those that make up less than 50% of the post-merger municipality’s population).

Figure 3 shows the results of this analysis by merger intensity. We can see that particularly the vote outcome of the Centre party depends on whether we look at municipalities that experience an intense merger or not. In municipalities with non-intense mergers, the change in the Centre party’s vote share from the pre- to the post-treatment election tends to be less favorable than in municipalities that did not experience a merger, whereas in municipalities that experience an intense merger, the same change tends to be in favor of the Centre party. This can thus explain the null effect for the Centre party in figure 1a. For the vote share of the Conservative party and government parties in general, the results are similar across both groups of treated municipalities. This analysis thus only partially supports H_{1.2}: while the main opposition party, i.e. the Centre party, performs better in municipalities subject to an intense merger, we do not find similar differences for the main government party (i.e. the Conservatives) or for government parties in general.6

Merger Decisions and Citizens’ Political Behavior: Individual-level Analysis

For the individual-level analysis, we rely on the Norwegian Citizen Panel (NCP) wave 19 which was fielded in October 2019 a month later than the municipal and county elections which were held on 9 September 2019. Table 2 displays the vote choice for 11,376 and 10,868 respondents who indicated which party they voted for in the municipal and county elections, respectively. Respondents are grouped by whether they are resident in a merger municipality or county.7 Although the differences in average vote share are highly statistically significant, the substantive differences are quite small (two percent or less) and in the opposite direction than hypothesized for the municipal vote. The Centre Party received on average a nine percent higher vote share in county elections in counties that were merged. The Conservative Party received on average a two percent and government parties a five percent lower vote share.

Table 2 clearly reveals that being resident in a merged municipality or county as such does not have a large impact on the municipal or county vote. This is not surprising because citizens can be in favor or against a merger. Citizens were also asked whether they support the

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6 We have also assessed whether the effect of territorial reform decisions varies across Norwegian regions. Stein et al. (2019, 2020) have shown that the centre-periphery dimension is relevant for local and regional electoral outcomes and for trust in national politicians. Northern Norwegians are generally more distrustful of national politicians and they were more prone to vote for the Centre party in the 2019 elections. To a lesser extent, this is also true for South-West Norwegians. Figures A.2 and A.3 show the effects of the territorial reform on electoral outcomes by region. From Figure A.2, we can see that particularly in South-West Norway, the municipal merger decisions had a positive effect on support for the Centre and for opposition parties, whereas they had a negative effect on support for the Conservative party and government parties. Moreover, figures A.2 and A.3 show that in Northern Norway the county mergers have an impact on parties’ electoral performance in county elections in the expected ways. Again, the Centre party and opposition parties tend to benefit, whereas the Conservative party and government parties tend to lose. This makes sense against the backdrop of the county merger being highly contested in the former county of Finnmark (Stein et al. 2020).

7 Unfortunately, the case numbers do not allow us to make the more refined distinction into four different groups like in Table 1 at the individual level. Notably, we lack individuals that experienced neither a municipal nor a county merger.
municipal or county merger or not. The results are striking. Respondents who oppose the merger have a four (municipal elections) to 17 (county elections) higher probability to vote for the Centre Party and an eight to 24 percent higher probability to support an opposition party. In stark contrast, respondents who support the merger have a 13 to 19 percent higher probability to vote for the Conservative Party and an eight to 24 percent higher probability to vote for a government party. These results reveal clearly that the merging of jurisdictions has an impact on the municipal and county vote and is in line with our hypothesis H2. Moreover, and in contrast to the aggregate-level analysis, the larger differences in probabilities for county elections provides strong evidence for our hypothesis H1 that a forced top-down (county) merger has a larger impact on the vote than a voluntary bottom-up (municipal) merger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Average probability to vote for a party depending on whether a respondent is resident in a merged [..]</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted for</td>
<td>no  yes  sig.</td>
<td>no  yes  sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>13%  12% ** 8% 17% ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Party</td>
<td>66%  64% *** 61% 66% ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Party</td>
<td>20%  22% ** 23% 21% **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Party</td>
<td>34%  36% *** 39% 34% ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Average probability to vote for a party depending on whether a respondent supports the [..] merger</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted for</td>
<td>no  yes  sig.</td>
<td>no  yes  sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>13%  9% * 25% 8% ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Party</td>
<td>69%  61% ** 77% 53% ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Party</td>
<td>14%  27% *** 12% 31% ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Party</td>
<td>31%  39% ** 23% 47% ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *p<.05 **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

Unfortunately, the question of whether a respondent supports the merger was only asked to respondents who previously indicated that they were living in a municipality (N = 597) or county (N = 958) that would be merged. A question on the importance of the municipal/county merger issue for the municipal/county party choice was fielded to the whole sub-sample of the NCP (N = 1,401 for respondents who indicated their municipal vote choice and N = 1,320 respondents who indicated their county council vote choice). Respondents who indicate that

---

8 The questions were ‘Do you support the merger of counties?’ and ‘Do you support the merger of counties?’ and respondents could answer ‘yes’ (= 1), ‘no’ (= 0), or ‘do not know’ (= 0).

9 At the time of the municipal and county elections and of the survey only the decision to merge a municipality or county could be known. The mergers would take effect of 1 January 2020, four months after the elections and three months after the survey.

10 The questions read ‘How important were the following issues when you casted your vote in the [municipal/county] council elections?’ which was followed by a list of issues over which the municipality or county has competences or which played an important role during the campaign. For the municipal vote question the issues were the following: municipal mergers, road tolls, schools, merging of counties, property tax, elderly care, public transport, environment/climate, and culture/sports. For the county council vote question the issues were the following: county mergers, road tolls, schools/education, labour places, local economy, environment/climate, and culture/sports. For each of these issues respondents could indicate whether it was
the merger issue was important when they cast their municipal/county council vote have a 14 to 17 percent higher probability to vote for the Centre Party and a three to nine percent higher probability to vote for an opposition party in municipal and county council elections, respectively. The Conservative Party has on average a three to five percent and government parties three to nine percent lower probability to receive the vote from respondents who find the issue of municipal/county mergers important. These results confirm the merger issue has a clear impact on the municipal and county vote ($H_{2.1}$) and that this impact is larger for a forced top-down (county) merger than a voluntary bottom-up (municipal) merger ($H_{1.1}$).

Table 4. Average probability to vote for a party depending on whether a respondent finds the issue of [...] mergers important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voted for</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th></th>
<th>County</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no yes sig.</td>
<td>no yes sig.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>9% 23% ***</td>
<td>9% 26% ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Party</td>
<td>63% 66%</td>
<td>60% 69% ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Party</td>
<td>23% 20%</td>
<td>24% 19% **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Party</td>
<td>37% 34%</td>
<td>40% 31% ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<.05 **p<.01, ***p<.001.

To establish whether the importance of the merger issue has impacted the municipal/county council vote we ran several models in which we modelled the vote for the Centre Party, the Conservative Party, an opposition party, or a government party ($0 = no; 1 = yes$) as dependent on the importance of finding the merger issue important ($0 = no; 1 = yes$) interacted with the importance of different vote motivations. We distinguish between four different types of vote motivations which are based on whether voters use their vote retrospectively or prospectively in relation to municipal/county or national politicians and parties. Voters can use their municipal or county vote to sanction or reward municipal/county or national politicians for their actions and policies for the past years. Or voters can use their municipal or county vote to make sure that municipal/county interests are best represented for the coming years or that the national government will be supported in the municipality/county for the coming years. We assessed the importance of these vote motivations through the following question.

There can be several arguments to vote for particular municipal council or county council representatives. Below you may find several of those arguments. How important were these motivations for you when you chose your party or list during the local elections?

- I use my vote to reward or punish municipal politicians for their behavior and decisions of the past four years.
- I use my vote to reward or punish county council politicians for their behavior and decisions of the past four years.
- I use my vote to reward or punish national politicians for their behavior and decisions of the past two years.
- I use my vote to ensure that municipal representatives will act in the best interest of my municipality during the coming four years.

important (= 1; very important and important) or not (= 0; somewhat important, slightly important, and not important at all) when they casted their municipal or county council vote.
-I use my vote to ensure that county council representatives will act in the best interest of my municipality during the coming four years.

-I use my vote to ensure that national government policy will be supported by representatives in my municipality/county during the coming two years.

For each of the six motivations respondents could indicate whether this motivation is very important, important, somewhat important, slightly important, or not important at all. We have recoded these answers into whether these vote motivations were important (= 1; very important and important) or not important (= 0; somewhat important, slightly important, or not important at all). We estimate the following logit models:

\[ y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Importance merger issue}_i + \beta_2 \text{Vote motivation}_i + \beta_3 \text{Importance merger issue}_i \times \text{Vote motivation}_i + \beta_4 \text{Support merger}_i + \beta_5 \text{Centre – periphery perception}_i + \beta_6 \text{Attachment}_i + \beta_6 \text{Merger}_i + \lambda_i + \epsilon_i \]

\( y_i \) represents the outcome variable, i.e. an individual’s choice to vote for a certain party or group of parties or not. \( \alpha \) represents a constant term. \( \beta_1 \) is the direct effect of finding the municipal/county merger issue important\(^{11}\) or not on vote choice, \( \beta_2 \) is the direct effect of an individual’s vote motivation on vote choice, and \( \beta_3 \) represents the interaction between the two.

We include three important control variables: \( \beta_4 \) is the direct effect of supporting a municipal or county merger and the inclusion of this variable enables to observe the impact of our main variables of interest beyond the question of whether a respondent supports a merger or not\(^{12}\); \( \beta_5 \) is the direct effect of centre-periphery perceptions which is an important control variable when studying the vote in Norway\(^{13}\); \( \beta_5 \) is the direct effect of attachment to the municipality or county\(^{14}\); and \( \beta_5 \) is the direct effect of whether a respondent is resident in a municipality or county subject to a merger.\(^{15}\) \( \lambda_i \) is a set of individual-level control variables – gender (1 = female; 0 = male), age (2 = 60 years or more; 1 = 30 to 59 years; 0 = 29 years or

\(^{11}\) See footnote 8.

\(^{12}\) The questions whether a respondent supports a municipal and county merger were only asked to respondents who had indicated that they were resident in a municipality or county that would be merged. We included the respondents who were not asked to answer these questions in the group of respondents who answered the question with ‘no’ or ‘do not know’ (= 0).

\(^{13}\) The survey question read ‘To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The central government pays too little attention to the rural areas of Norway [utkant-Norge]?’ Respondents agree (= 2; agree very much, agree, and agree somewhat), neither agree nor disagree (= 1), or disagree (= 0; disagree somewhat, disagree, and disagree very much). The Center Party is generally seen as the party that stands up for and represents the rural parts of Norway [utkant-Norge] and the inclusion of this control variable is important to distinguish between a vote for the Centre Party or an opposition party because of a general feeling of discontent with the national government from an impact of a respondents’ perceptions on the importance of the merger issue in interaction with a respondents’ motivation underlying her municipal or county council vote.

\(^{14}\) The question ‘How strong is your attachment to:’ was followed by seven items: the neighbourhood you live in, the municipality you live in, the county you live in, the region you live in, Norway, the nordic countries, Europe. We use the items ‘the municipality you live in’ and ‘the county you live in’ and we group respondents by whether they indicated to be attached (= 1; strong attachment and attached) or not (= 0; somewhat attached, slightly attached, no attachment).

\(^{15}\) A dummy variable that indicates whether a respondent is resident in a municipality or county that merged. The models that analyze the municipal vote include the county merger dummy and the models that analyze the county council vote include the municipality merger dummy.
less), and education (1 = university education; 0 = less than university education)—and $\varepsilon_i$ represents the error term. Descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables are provided in Table A.1 in the appendix.

In figures 4a-d (municipal council vote) and 5a-d (county council vote) we present the predicted probabilities to vote for the Centre Party, the Conservative Party, an opposition party, or a government party depending on whether a respondent finds an issue important (I) or not (~I) in interaction with the importance of a certain type of vote motivation indicated by a respondent: holding municipal/county (4a/5a) representatives accountable (A) or not (~A), holding national (4b/5b) politicians accountable (A) or not (~A), ensuring that municipal/county representatives (4c/5c) act in the best interest of the municipality/county (R) or not (~R), and ensuring that that national government policy (4d/5d) will be supported by municipality or county representatives.

**Figure 4. Vote Motivation*Importance Municipal Merger Issue, Local Elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. Holding municipal officials accountable*merger importance</th>
<th>b. Holding national government accountable*merger importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph a" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph b" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph c" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Graph d" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The probability to vote for the Centre Party is higher for respondents who find the issue of municipal mergers important and it is nine percent higher for respondents who do not hold municipal representatives accountable when they cast their local vote (23 versus 12 percent) whereas it is fourteen percent higher (30 versus 16 percent) for respondents who do (Figure 4a). The difference between these two predicted probabilities (i.e. 30 versus 23 percent) does not reach the threshold of statistical significance (p < 0.068). We find very similar impacts of
holding national representatives accountable (Figure 4b). We do not find statistically significant effects of the impact of holding municipal or national representatives accountable on voting for the Conservative Party, an opposition party, or a government party (Figures 4a and 4b).

The probability to vote for the Centre Party is also higher when respondents find it important to ensure that municipal interests are best represented (Figure 4c). Respondents who find this vote motivation important and who find the issue of municipal mergers an important issue have the highest probability to vote for the Centre Party (28 percent). The probability to vote for opposition parties is also higher for respondents who use their vote prospectively in relation to municipal representatives but this is independent of whether a respondent finds the issue of municipal mergers important. We find no impact on the probability to vote for the Conservative Party but respondents who do not cast a prospective municipal vote and find the issue of municipal mergers important are more likely (54 per cent) to vote for a government party.

We find a strong impact of using the vote to ensure that national government policy will be supported in the municipality (Figure 4d). The probability to vote for the Centre Party or an opposition party is significantly higher and the probability to for the Conservative Party or a government party is significantly lower when respondents find it important to ensure that national government interests are best represented.

16 The confidence intervals for the predicted probabilities for respondents who do not cast a prospective vote (~R) and who find the issue of municipal mergers important (I) are large because there are relatively few of them (28 out of a total of 1,401 respondents).
government party is significantly lower for respondents who find this vote motivation important (R) compared to those who do not (~R). The differences between predicted probabilities are not statistically significant between respondents who find the issue of municipal mergers important (7 per cent) or not (12 percent) except for the probability to vote for the Conservative Party among voters who do not use their vote in a prospective manner (~R).

We now turn to the county council vote (Figures 5a-d). The overall patterns for the Centre Party, the Conservative Party, opposition parties, and government parties are similar as to those for the municipal council vote (Figures 4a-d). The probability to vote for the Centre Party increases significantly when a respondent finds the issue of county mergers important (I) and no matter whether she uses her vote to hold county council representatives responsible (A; from 11 to 24 percent) or not (~A; from 11 to 26 per cent) or national representatives (A; from 11 to 28 per cent) or not (~A; from 11 to 22 percent). As a result, the probability to vote for opposition/government parties is also higher/lower when a respondent holds county council or national representatives accountable when she casts her county council vote but most of the differences between predicted probabilities do not reach statistical significance. However, those differences in predicted probabilities that do reach statistical significance point into the hypothesized direction. For example, the probability to vote for a government party is 24 percent when a respondent finds the issue of county mergers important but does not hold county council representatives accountable when she casts her vote. This probability increases to 35 per cent when a respondent does hold county council representatives accountable when she casts her vote but when she also finds the issue of county mergers not to be important.

Figures 5c and 5d clearly reveal that the Centre Party was a particularly popular party among voters who find the issue of county mergers important (I) and when they are concerned with ensuring that county interests are best represented (R + I; 26 per cent) and when they (simultaneously) are not concerned that national government interests are best represented (~R + I; 30 percent) when they cast a county council vote. We find particularly strong impacts of prospective voting in relation to the national government. Voters who find it important to make sure that national government interests are best represented in their county when they cast their county council vote have a significantly lower probability to vote for the Centre Party or opposition parties. In addition, finding the issue of county mergers important moderates this impact and increases or decreases the predicted probability in the hypothesized directions. That is, the predicted probabilities to vote for the Centre Party is nine to eleven percent higher and for opposition parties seven to nine percent higher for voters who find the issue of county mergers not important when compared to voters who do. Similarly, the predicted probabilities to vote for the Conservative Party is three to five percent lower and for a government party is seven to nine percent lower for voters who find the issue of county mergers not important when compared to voters who do.
CONCLUSION
The political consequences of territorial reforms have been subject to a growing number of studies. There is rather unequivocal evidence that territorial consolidation – i.e. the amalgamation of existing jurisdictions – has negative consequences for democracy. Turnout decreases, the quality of representation declines, and citizens become more alienated and disaffected with democracy. Surprisingly, however, only few studies have assessed how such reforms impact the outcomes of elections – apart from whether citizens participate or not. Moreover, we lack knowledge about the impact of the way territorial reforms are implemented. Can jurisdictions decide themselves whether they want to merge or not, or are they forced to do so by higher government tiers?

Focusing on the Norwegian local and regional government reform that occurred between 2014 and 2019, we assess the role of bottom-up (municipal) and top-down (county) mergers and electoral outcomes. An aggregate-level difference-in-differences analysis at the level of the pre-treatment municipalities shows that opposition parties fare better and government parties fare worse in municipalities that were subject to a municipal merger and to a county merger. However, against our expectation, the top-down county merger did not have a stronger effect on electoral outcomes. A cross-sectional examination of individual’s vote motivations suggests, however, that the impact of the territorial reforms at the county level are much more pronounced than the impact of municipal mergers on individual’s vote choice. These results show that territorial reforms impact electoral outcomes in relevant, yet complicated, ways.
REFERENCES


Saarimaa, T. & Tukiainen, J. (2014), ‘I don’t care to belong to any club that will have me as a member. Empirical analysis of municipal mergers’, *Political Science Research and Methods* 2(1), 97–117.


APPENDIX

Figure A.1. Parallel Trends, Local Elections

a. Centre Party

b. Opposition Parties

c. Conservative Party

d. Government Parties
Figure A.2. Parallel Trends, County Elections

a. Centre Party

b. Opposition Parties

c. Conservative Party

d. Government Parties
Figure A.3: Predicted Probabilities

a. Municipal Mergers, Local Elections

b. County Merger, County Elections

Note. Predicted probabilities come from a difference-in-differences regression model without municipality and year fixed effects, since their estimation is not substantively meaningful (and possible) when fixed effects are included. Therefore, the results deviate somewhat from the results for the difference-in-differences estimator.
Figure A.4 Effects of Municipal and County Mergers by Norwegian Region

a. Municipal Merger Decisions*After  
b. County Merger Decisions*After

Note. Dots represent regression coefficients of the difference-in-differences estimator; lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The results for the municipal mergers in Northern Norway and for the county mergers in Central Norway should be interpreted with much caution. In Northern Norway, only four municipalities are subject to a municipal merger, whereas in Central Norway only the city of Oslo is not affected by a county merger. This explains the large confidence intervals.

Figure A.5. Effects of Territorial Reform Exposure by Norwegian Region

Note. Dots represent regression coefficients of the difference-in-differences estimator; lines represent 95% confidence intervals. In Northern and Central Norway, there are no municipalities that are only affected by municipal mergers, therefore the corresponding difference-in-differences estimators could not be computed.
Table A.1 NCP Data: Descriptive statistics dependent and independent variables logit models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Municipal council vote (N = 1,401)</th>
<th>County council vote (N = 1,320)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote for Centre Party</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote for Opposition parties</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote for Conservative Party</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote for Government Parties</td>
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<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal merger</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>County merger</td>
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<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance municipal/county merger</td>
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<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for municipal/county merger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holding municipal/county councillors accountable</td>
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<td>Holding national politicians accountable</td>
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<td>Ensuring municipal/county interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring national government interests</td>
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<td>Centre-periphery perceptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>1.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure A.6: Living in a Merged Municipality/County*Importance of Municipal/County Merger for Vote Choice

a. Merged Municipality*Importance, Local Elections
b. Merged County*Importance, County Elections