

# REFORMING THE NORWEGIAN POLICE BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

Community Police or Emergency Police?

Tom Christensen • Per Læg Reid • Lise H. Rykkja



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Uni Research Rokkansenteret  
Nygårdsgaten 112  
5008 Bergen  
Tlf. 55 58 50 00  
E-post: [rokkansenteret@uni.no](mailto:rokkansenteret@uni.no)  
<http://rokkan.uni.no/>

# REFORMING THE NORWEGIAN POLICE BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

Community Police or Emergency Police?

TOM CHRISTENSEN<sup>1</sup>

PER LÆGREID<sup>2</sup>

LISE H. RYKKJA<sup>3</sup>

STEIN ROKKAN CENTER FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

UNI RESEARCH AS, BERGEN

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<sup>1</sup> University of Oslo

<sup>2</sup> University of Bergen

<sup>3</sup> Uni Research Rokkan Centre

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## Abstract

This paper examines the reform of the police in Norway from 2012 to 2015 using a qualitative analysis of central public reports and official documents leading up to the reform. These include the report from the official Inquiry Commission into the police response to the terrorist attacks of July 2011, a public commission established in 2012 to analyze challenges within the police and the resulting government proposal and parliamentary discussion that culminated in a final decision for a new police structure in 2015. While governance capacity and the need for a stronger emergency police was a main concern throughout the process the importance of governance legitimacy and to maintain a community police became more important at the end. The organizational thinking is explained based on a structural and institutional theoretical perspective. The analysis shows that cultural change, leadership change and structural change were prominent instruments for improving the police, but emphasized differently during the process. The arguments for the different instruments were not elaborated to any great extent by any of the actors and therefore took on a more symbolic flavor. The analysis demonstrates that political context, agenda settings, attention shifting and situational factors as well as path dependency are important drivers of the police reform.

## Preface

This paper is written as part of the project «Organizing for Societal Security and Crisis Management. Building Governance Capacity and Legitimacy (GOVCAP) funded by The Norwegian Research Council. The paper was presented on the SOG panel on 'Organizing for internal security and crisis management' at the IPSA World Conference, Poznan, Poland, July 24–28 2016

## Introduction

Public organizations may change gradually through continuous small evolutionary changes or adjustments, through conscious changes made by political-administrative leaders, as a result of external shocks, or through a combination of all three. The 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway constituted such a shock and triggered a change process oriented towards crisis management involving a broad spectrum of collaborating political and administrative bodies. The attacks also motivated an internal reform of the police, one of the public organizations most closely involved in handling the crisis.

An official Inquiry Commission into the events of 22 July 2011 revealed critical weaknesses in crisis management capacity in the Norwegian system (NOU 2012:14). In its report, the Commission identified problems of attention, communication, and coordination as well as a dysfunctional performance management system. The Commission did not fault the organizational structure, but suggested a change in culture, values, opinions, and leadership – in the public authorities in general and within the police in particular. This rather broad and partly ambiguous conclusion set off change processes on different levels, but ultimately resulted in rather limited changes in the broader formal crisis management apparatus (Fimreite, Lango Lægneid and Rykkja 2014).

The terrorist attack and the Commission report also triggered a more specific and substantial change process in the police organization. A public commission (The Police Analysis) was launched in 2012. In its report in 2013 (NOU 2013:9) the main solution, rather contrary to the conclusions of the 22 July Commission, was to change the organizational structure of the police, mainly by strengthening the central agency and merging regional police districts as well as local police stations. The decision making process was concluded in 2015 after a broad debate in parliament. The focus of this paper is an analysis of this decision making process. We will, however, not dig into the ongoing implementation process.

We will use a structural/instrumental and a cultural/institutional perspective to analyze the reform process as well as the final reform decision. We address the tension between centralization and decentralization, between governance capacity and governance legitimacy, and between the need for an emergency police force to manage major crises and a community police force to engage in crime prevention in close contact with citizens.

## The main questions are:

- What characterized the change process in the Norwegian police force from 2012 to 2015 – What central actors were involved, and what was their organizational thinking?
- How did the agenda setting between different values and goals (centralization–decentralization, capacity/legitimacy, emergency police/community police) change over time?
- How can we explain the patterns of participation and organizational thinking more generally, and the main definition of the role of the police more specifically, based on structural and institutional perspectives?

First, we give an outline of our theoretical perspectives. We combine a structural and an institutional perspective to understand the process, focusing on formal structure and instrumentality on the one hand, and cultural and broader societal features on the other. Second, we examine the background to the reform, looking at the police reform of 2001 and the report of the Inquiry Commission in 2012. Third, we describe the content of the Police Analysis (NOU 2013: 9), the government's proposal to parliament, the report from the parliamentary select committee and the final debate and decision in parliament. Fourth, we analyze the process based on our theoretical starting points. The main data sources are public documents, including those issued by the expert commissions, relevant white papers and parliamentary documents and debates.

## Theory – structural and institutional perspectives

Discussions of crisis management and public security emphasize the importance of studying both governance capacity and governance legitimacy (Christensen, Læg Reid and Rykkja 2016a). Governance capacity in crisis management concern formal organization, i.e. vertical or horizontal specialization and coordination, and the resources made available to help the public apparatus to cope with a crisis instrumentally, but also informal arrangements such as culture or established praxis. Governance legitimacy concerns whether public leaders are able to enlist citizens' trust in their ability to handle crises. The relationship between capacity and legitimacy may not be a straightforward one and can result in conflicts and changes. On the one hand, the work of the police may be seen in a public security perspective, with a focus on organization, capacity and preparedness to deal with crime more generally or terrorism more specifically. On the other hand, the police also need closeness to the citizens, popular trust and legitimacy.

As it was being processed, the police reform acquired the label 'the community police reform', implying proximity to citizens and their needs and concerns, despite strong elements of centralization and an enhancement of the emergency police force. Thus, the politics of attentions and the dynamics of agenda setting might be an important aspect of the police reform process (Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

A *structural-instrumental perspective* on reforms in public organizations primarily focuses on the importance of the formal structure and instrumental thinking (Christensen, Læg Reid, Roness and Røvik 2007). According to March and Olsen (1976), two aspects of decision-making processes are important: first, the *structure of participants*, which frames the *activation process* (i.e. who participates) and second, the *access structure*, which frames the *definition process* (i.e. which problems and solutions are addressed in the decision-making process). According to the structural perspective, political and administrative leaders play a central role in controlling decisions on and implementation of reforms. They are assumed to score high on rational calculation, meaning that they have clear goals and intentions, clear organizational thinking, and goals concerning the effects of the reforms that are mostly fulfilled (Dahl and Lindblom 1953).

The perspective comes in two versions – a hierarchical one and a negotiational one (Allison 1971; March and Olsen 1983). The *hierarchical version* takes it for granted that the leaders involved are the top leaders, defined as a homogenous group with respect to their interests and organizational thinking. The results of reform



processes are very predictable when the main actors and their interests are known. The *negotiation version* is based on heterogeneity, meaning that the leadership group involved has heterogeneous interests and views, making organizational thinking potentially more ambiguous, because it has to take into account disagreements and tensions. Heterogeneity may also extend to other actors in the public apparatus or in the private sector. Reform processes that exhibit such features are more difficult to control and less predictable, but may have higher legitimacy when participation is broad (Mosher 1967).

When using this perspective on the police reform process, two issues are important. First, is the process hierarchical, or are there elements of diversity and heterogeneity? Second, how do different actors define problems and solutions in general, and specifically in relation to how they see the role of police? Do the main actors generally agree? Are there typical coalitions, and does the thinking change over time? What qualities does actors' organizational thinking exhibit and how realistic is it?

A *cultural–institutional* perspective is characterized by natural system processes and an emphasis on informal structures, norms and values (Scott 2007; Scott and Davis 2006). It is based on a distinction between organization and institution. It also comes in two versions – a *cultural version* and a *myth/symbolic version* (Christensen, Lægreid, Roness and Røvik 2007). The *cultural version* takes as a point of departure that any organization, through an evolutionary process of institutionalization will add unique cultural informal norms and values to the formal ones (Selznick 1957). Through a process of path-dependency, important informal norms and values from the establishment of an organization will heavily influence the path followed later on, i.e. the cultural 'roots' will be overrepresented in the current organization (Krasner 1988, March 1994). Public leaders tend to see their role as furthering the 'necessities of history' rather than having strong instrumentally based power. Processes of 'historical inefficiency' (March and Olsen 1989) produce frictions in institutional design and reform. The concept of cultural compatibility (Brunsson and Olsen 1993) and the *logic of appropriateness* are important for studying reform processes (March and Olsen 1989). When a reform is introduced reform elements that are not compatible with the organization's cultural roots will have less probability of being implemented.

When we use the cultural approach to analyze the police reform process, we will first focus on the importance of path-dependency: Do the actor patterns and the organizational thinking allude to traditional cultural norms and values? Second, do the actors' main arguments display typical cultural elements? How important are the Inquiry Commission's arguments, related to leadership and culture, for the

actors in the police reform? When balancing arguments related to the different roles of the police, how important are the cultural arguments?

According to a *myth or symbolic version*, institutionalization has more to do with broader cultural and social processes on a macro level (Christensen, Lægreid, Roness and Røvik 2007). Meyer and Rowan (1977) make a distinction between *technical and institutional environment*, where adaptation to the latter implies that various definitions of what is appropriate in terms of formal structure, rules/procedures, competences/knowledge, etc. are taken for granted. One of the advantages of adapting to external myths and symbols is that leaders in a public organization can increase their legitimacy through both acting and talking. Or as Brunsson (1989) points out, there may be ‘double-talk’ or ‘hypocrisy’ going on, with a loose coupling between talk and action. This gives leaders potential flexibility, but also potentially increases tension and ambiguity.

When addressing the police reform process from a *myth perspective*, we will focus on three aspects. First, are there any particular symbols used repeatedly by certain actors or in certain parts of the process? Second, how realistic are actors’ arguments and organizational thinking, i.e. do they ‘over-sell’ the arguments, meaning that they have symbolic features. Third, do the actors use arguments that seem to be appropriate in a broader perspective, i.e. arguments that could, for example, be applied to other reform processes, suggesting a kind of symbolic imitation?

## Background and context

Generally, the Norwegian police have been an unarmed community police focusing on law and order, investigation and prosecution more than on larger emergency issues. The citizens’ trust in the police has been strong (Christensen and Lægreid 2015).

Police matters have been handled by the Ministry of Justice and Police (now the Ministry of Justice and Public Security) since 1818, but not until 1937 did the police become complete subordinate to and organized by the central government (Christensen et al. 2014). A division for police tasks was first established in the Ministry in 1945 and reorganized several times subsequently. In the post-war period, the question of how to organize the police in general, and how to organize the central leadership in particular, was continuously discussed in several public committees. Many of them proposed the establishment of a central police agency (Roness 1998). The idea was supported by employee groups within the police, but

political opposition was strong for a long time. In the dichotomy between a civilian police forced controlled by politicians, on the one hand, and a police force with a lot of professional autonomy, on the other, the former prevailed. The experience of the national Nazi police chief during WWII was for many actors an important historical lesson that subsequently accorded primacy to a politically controlled police.

The 1990s brought a new wave of devolution in Norway, primarily indicating more autonomy for agencies and more regulatory agencies and state-owned enterprises (Christensen and Lægreid 2001). In the wake of these changes, the establishment of a police agency became a logical next step since this was one of the few remaining sectors controlled directly by a ministry. The government established a new public police commission on this matter in 1998. This time the proposal for a new agency gained political acceptance and the Police Agency was established in 2001. There were several lines of argument leading up to this. One was capacity problems in the Ministry and the need to hive off detailed police tasks. Another, and less convincing one in historical terms, was that even an independent agency would be subject to democratic control (Christensen et al. 2014). A third argument was the increase in cross-border crime.

There is also a parallel central agency – the Norwegian Police Security Service – with roots going back to 1937, also subordinated to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. In addition, the Norwegian police has a prosecution authority that investigates and institutes legal proceedings in criminal cases, subordinated to the Attorney General.

The new Police Agency retained the traditional mode, including ministerial control and regulation, reflecting the historical path. The organization of the police had traditionally already been rather decentralized. From the 1960s onwards it became more regionalized when local units were made subordinate to police chiefs. The 2001 reform implied a double rationalization of the structure; the number of police districts decreased from 54 to 27, and within each district there were several mergers of local police units. The main arguments behind this were economy of scale and the need for improved competence. In sum, the reform pattern presents a rather complex picture. On the one hand, path-dependency meant a focus on structural measures and an orientation towards a 'traditional' agency type. On the other hand, the establishment of the police agency meant a certain break with the past, a solution long wanted by most actors with the exception of a few central politicians. Adding to this was a new focus on economies of scale, mostly related to post-NPM but also to NPM, a focus similar to other reforms in the same period.

The other main reason for launching a police reform was the public inquiry after the terrorist attacks in 2011 (NOU 2012: 14). Most of the Commission's report was taken up with documenting in detail what had happened. The Commission heavily criticized the police, but avoided naming and shaming specific actors as accountable. The report's analysis was more wide-ranging, emphasizing the following:

- The police were insufficiently trained and prepared in terms of risk assessment and learning. The ability to implement decisions and to make follow-up plans was too weak.
- Coordination and communication was too weak.
- Utilization of the available information- and communication technology was insufficient
- The leadership's ability and willingness to clarify who was accountable, establish goals and take measures to achieve the necessary results was lacking

According to the Commission, the lessons to be learned from the attacks primarily concerned leadership, interaction, culture and attitudes rather than a lack of resources, regulation, organization or broader values. This conclusion, cited repeatedly by different actors later on in the police reform process, has since been criticized.<sup>4</sup> Although the Commission repeatedly said that the formal organization had failed, it did not recommend any structural changes (Christensen, Lægreid and Rykkja 2015:362; Fimreite et al. 2012:15). Furthermore, when the Commission talked about problems of coordination, fragmentation, communication, administrative culture, and leadership, it did not relate them to the formal organizational structure. What was really meant by culture and leadership was rather ambiguous. This became important later on in the reform process. One reason why the Commission put less emphasis on structural factors may have been related to the fact that the Commission and its secretariat were dominated by lawyers, police employees, and historians, i.e. the relevant expertise on organization and public administration was lacking (Christensen 2013).

The Commission was also very critical of the performance management system between the Ministry of Justice and the Police. The Commission's critique can be summed up as follows (Fimreite et al. 2012:52):

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Lægreid and Rykkja (2014), Christensen (2013), Renå (2016).

- Administrative steering of the police by the Ministry was much too detailed, with more than 100 different goals set by the yearly letter of intent.
- The Ministry's political leadership was too preoccupied with details related to the police.
- The division between the political and professional leadership of the sector was ambiguous, and professional autonomy had not developed as intended.
- Goals concerning societal security lacked specific relevant measures and indicators, and were process- and output-oriented. Goals that were easy to measure were more important than those that were more complicated but also significant, and there was a loose coupling between goals and resources.

The Commission repeated a rather common critique of the New Public Management-related performance management, and seemed to subscribe to the view that politicians and administrative leaders basically should stay away from the agencies in order to grant them autonomy. However, policy areas such as societal security and crisis management, and sectors like the police, are so important politically, in particular after a major crisis, that politicians are likely to adopt a more «hands on» approach to avoid criticism rather than remaining at arm's length and providing administrative leeway.

The work of the Commission was conducted in a context of deep shock and grief. It is therefore understandable that it focused on what had happened more than on a deep analysis of the organizational preconditions. In a crisis situation, it was probably also easier to talk about leadership, culture and attitudes than digging into a complex structural analysis, which the Commission had a rather thin expertise to perform. In conclusion, the agenda and the attention of the Police Commission in 1998 and the Inquiry Commission in 2012 were rather different.

## Main actors and arguments

Both the Inquiry Commission and the Police Commission of 2012 were appointed by a majority coalition government and presented their reports to it. The coalition was led by the Labour Party and also included the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party, with a Minister of Justice and Public Security from the Labour Party. The coalition lost support in the following general election in September 2013, and was replaced by a minority coalition consisting of the Conservative and the Progress Party with a Minister of Justice and Public Security from the Progress Party, supported by the Liberals (Venstre) and the Christian People's Party. Thus, the policy-making phase following the submission of the Police Commission report was under the current right-wing minority government. This meant that the reform could potentially be more unstable, both because the new government might have other political ideas about the reform, and because the political landscape was more diverse and turbulent.

### The Police Analysis 2013 – 'One Police Prepared for Future Challenges'

The main aim of public commission established to reform the police was to do a broad study of the police that could become the basis for a long-term plan for the sector. Its remit was to focus on resources, priorities, competence, leadership and organization and to consider whether central administrative resources could be reallocated to provide more 'police capacity' in the districts. It was also authorized to propose improvements. The Commission consisted mainly of top civil servants, including the directors of the Police Agency and the Police Security Service, but also included a public administration professor. It also used the services of the major international consultancy firm McKinsey.

The Commission's report (NOU 2013: 9), called the Police Analysis, reveals a broad spectrum of problem definitions, stating that the police should both attend to cross-border crime and also deliver good police services locally. The report focused rather narrowly on the internal police organization, paying little attention to the cross-border challenges of combatting crime across administrative levels and policy areas (for example immigration, welfare administration, the military, health, education, the court system, the prison system, the correctional services, or the customs services). Overall, the report did not address the issue of cross-boundary governance and coordination (Lægreid and Rykkja 2014). Neither vertical nor horizontal inter-organizational coordination were main issues. Internal

organizational issues, such as the role of the Police Security Service, the police as a prosecution authority, or relations with the rescue services, were not addressed either. This can be considered a weakness, given that many of the police's core tasks are 'wicked' issues that cannot be solved by the police in isolation but only in collaboration across policy areas and administrative levels (Lægreid and Rykkja 2016).

The Commission emphasized the need to implement two types of reforms: First, a *structural reform* encompassing task-based changes and a new structure, with the aim of freeing resources for core tasks but also to create the preconditions for a competent and robust police with a resilient professional milieu and specialists at the regional and local level; second, a *competence reform*, meaning developing a knowledge-based and effective police force capable of continually improving its steering and leadership processes, quality and performance. Overall, the report focused more on structural issues than on competence.

The Commission stressed a few underlying reasons for the challenges and pressure the police faced. First, the preconditions and resources given to the police had not been sufficient to steer, lead and develop the sector, so more autonomy was deemed necessary. Second, according to the Commission the police had not utilized the available resources well enough. The Commission argued that to ensure an effective police force in local neighborhoods was a major challenge. At the same time, it also said it was necessary to develop robust specialist milieus and that local police and specialists must interact more. The main organizational solution to this problem, according to the Commission, was larger police districts. An additional argument for this was the large variation in size, volume and crime rates between police districts.

The Commission proposed a cut from 27 to six police districts. The span of control by the central leadership should be narrower, and leadership and administration should also be more centralized and regionalized within each district. One of the members of the Commission later admitted that there was no real professional justification for the proposed six police districts, but by suggesting six districts the commission thought there would be a good chance of ending up with a compromise of twelve to fourteen districts (Johannessen 2015a, 125). In other words, the suggested the six police districts as a bargaining chip, anticipating a political compromise on this issue (Bergens Tidende 27.12 2015).

The Commission also said that there were too many small local police stations with few employees which did not focus on core tasks and lacked the capacity to offer an acceptable response or effective crime prevention. The solution envisaged was to

appoint more personnel regionally and to have fewer local police stations. The proposal was to cut the number of local police stations from 354 to 210 and to assign responsibility for such mergers to the police agency rather than the local government, as previously. This would imply centralization to the central government and weakening of local self-government regarding the organization of local police.

The report pointed to the experiences of the other Nordic countries, pointing out that more emphasis on the core tasks, a less ambiguous division between political steering and professional activities, larger police districts, fewer and larger local police units that freed resources for emergency and crisis management matters, but also central control of ICT and common functions were common trends. Thus, the report had obvious elements of imitation.

The Commission emphasized the major differences in the quality of services between districts, regarding the handling of single cases, the number of cases solved and how many people were acquitted, and recommended that services should be more standardized. It was said that the police's ability to learn systematically from experience, analysis and development of best practice was limited. The report also stated that the central strategic steering of the police was fragmented, event-related and ad hoc, in effect an argument against too much interference from the Ministry.

The Commission highlighted four elements for the effective handling of core tasks—knowledge-driven preventive efforts; being present where and when the crime happens; providing a quick response; and restoring normality after the crime—in addition to effective investigation and punishment. Important preconditions for fulfilling these were police capacity, competence and system support, knowledge-based work, standardized instruments/methods and routines, and leaders who set and achieve goals, prioritize and scrutinize. The main recommendations in the report were a greater focus on the core police tasks, better preconditions for steering, improved leadership and development, an organizational structure that would create capacity to fulfil core tasks, facilitating increased specialization, continuous improvement and development in the sector, etc. A better organized police force was seen as an important precondition for the required competence, effective processes and higher-quality task handling.

The report said it was difficult to differentiate steering/control and leadership. Steering was seen as defining the discretionary space for enacting leadership. Steering is about determining goals, demands and frameworks, while leadership is about creating results within those frameworks. The police were said to lack the



ambition to improve leadership, and that good leadership meant good results. The relationship was not explained further, however.

The Police Analysis supported the Inquiry Commission's critique of the police performance management system, pertaining to micromanagement and a lack of prioritizing from the Ministry. The police was responsible for reporting on many and detailed performance indicators – more than 120 each year – indicators which also often were adjusted during the year. The study also pointed to a lack of outcome indicators, an apparent focus on quantitative indicators at the expense of more qualitative measures, a lack of indicators on emergency issues and response time, and a weak coupling between objectives and resources. In spite of this critical assessment the Police Analysis concluded that the existing performance management system should be continued and that a revision and simplification, especially by reducing the numbers of objectives and performance indicators, would be sufficient to solve the problems.

Regarding the management relations between the Ministry and the Police Agency, the Commission concurred with a parallel evaluation of the Police Agency conducted by the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment published in 2013 (Difi 2013). This report was very critical of the Ministry's governance of the Police Agency and its focus on specific tasks and activities rather than general, long-term strategies and priorities. The report revealed ambiguous management relations between the Ministry and the Agency, a lack of strategic governance resulting from a focus on narrow, specific and short-term issues and a general loss of confidence and trust between them (Christensen 2015). This also speaks of important divergences between a political and an administrative/profession attitude in the Ministry-Agency relationship.

If we look at the background, the main impression is that the content of the Police Analysis is more closely linked with the pre-2001 reform process than with the Inquiry Commission's report in 2012. There were a lot of path dependencies. For example, more radical solutions such as introducing a paramilitary police force to fight terrorism was not discussed (Bakken 2012). The focus was more on structure and regional and local organization. The arguments about structural rationalization were the same as before, but much stronger. There was a strong belief in merging districts and local police stations to free up resources, in non-overlapping administration, in the establishment of regional specialist groups, in more operative resources on the ground and in decreasing local response time. This resembles the arguments used to justify the major reform of the Norwegian welfare administration in 2005, and also mergers and ongoing reform initiatives in other sectors, such as the hospital sector, the municipalities, universities/colleges, the

court system, and the tax administration (Byrkjeflot, Christensen and Læg Reid 2014). The current government also has a strong belief in the principle of ‘big is beautiful’, which was also supported by reports from a ‘Productivity Commission’ in 2015 and 2016 stressing efficiency and governance capacity (NOU 2016:3).

The arguments of the Police Analysis are linked to the Inquiry Commission of 2012, but they are weaker. The Inquiry Commission emphasized culture and leadership more than structure. Still, the structural critique in the report has some elements in common with what the Police Analysis writes about pooling resources and with the increased coordination implied by mergers and stronger specialization. The Police Analysis emphasized structure much more than culture or leadership. It also stressed the importance of competence, alluding to culture and leadership, but discussed this point rather generally and briefly leaving it rather ambiguous.

Summing up, the Police Analysis favored stronger central and regional control by suggesting a merger of police districts and local police stations, and a streamlining of the police. Stronger integration, unified management, efficiency, standardization, hierarchy and more control in accordance with a traditional bureaucratic organizational form were at the forefront of the report (Johannessen 2015a), in line with a structural–instrumental reform approach. There are few signs of an alternative, more culturally based approach advocating a flexible, collegial and team-based organization with quality culture and empowered employees responsive to citizens (Johannessen 2015b). The concept ‘community police’ was not used in the Policy Analysis itself.

## Negotiating the government’s proposal 2013–2014 – ‘Day-to-day security and community police reform’

In June 2013 the Police Analysis was submitted for consultation to affected actors and stakeholders, such as ministries, central agencies, county governors, regional and local governments, and unions; the deadline for submitting comments was October 1, 2013. About 250 bodies submitted comments. Several commented that the police study was a thorough assessment of the structural challenges in the police and that the report overall was a good starting point for the long-term further development of the police. But there were also critical comments. Many responded positively to the idea of reducing the number of police districts, but thought that cutting the number to six was too radical. A petition from 150 municipalities criticized the centralization of the police and reported a significant

degree of skepticism regarding the suggested reduction in the number of local police stations and that the police agency should decide about merging local police stations. Others also criticized the report for biased arguments and for being too optimistic regarding the possible positive effects of the proposed changes. Internally, the process of following up the Police Analysis was marked by a lack of openness and transparency, and one central observer characterized the internal police culture as conservative and preservative (Aas 2015). Not surprisingly, since several top administrative executives in the Police Agency and the Police Security Service participated in the analysis, the consultative comments from the police largely supported it. The comments of the Norwegian Police Federation were rather critical, however. It criticized the analysis for not being research-based, for not providing suggestions on how local anchoring and closeness to the public should be replaced when local police stations disappeared, for not taking the social mission of the police into account when suggesting to remove civil tasks, and for being too preoccupied with measurable results at the expense of values that are more difficult to count, but which are crucial for the perception of security. This rather fundamental critique was later picked up by some of the political parties and used in negotiations with the government.

Before the government proposal was submitted to parliament, the Ministry negotiated its content with its two supporting parties in parliament, the Liberals (Venstre) and the Christian People's Party, which was a somewhat unusual feature, but reflecting the dynamics of a minority government. In October 2014, the Christian People's Party left the negotiations after their proposal to maintain a local police presence failed to be accepted. It also opposed to reduction in the number of local police to 150 units (*Dagbladet*, 4.12 2014). After that the negotiations continued with the Liberals. One of the main controversies was the number of police districts. The two government parties and the Liberals reached an agreement in February 2015, on the 'foundations for a provident and robust community police'. They agreed on twelve police districts instead of the six suggested by the Police Analysis, saying the number of local police stations estimated by the Police Analysis was too low and that each municipality should have at least one permanent contact person at the local police station. Decisions on merging the local police stations were left to the Police Agency after consulting local interests, and it was decided that municipalities should only be able to complain about procedural issues. A few tasks were transferred to other authorities, but agreement failed to be reached about transferring the issuance of passports to the municipalities. The main outcome of the negotiations was that the main suggestions from the Police Analysis were approved but some minor amendments were made to the merger suggestions and greater attention was paid to community police values.

Based on the Police Analysis, the consultations with stakeholders and negotiations with supporting parties in the parliament, the government sent the parliament its proposal for a police reform in March 2015. The subtitle of the proposal clearly signaled its emphasis: 'Day-to-day security – the community police reform' (Prop.61LS – 2014–2015). Referring to the government's political platform, the proposal stated that a community police reform would include the following elements:

- A strengthening of the local police by raising standards
- Fewer, but more robust and competent police districts
- More cooperation between the police and the municipalities
- Fewer tasks for the police

The two main reform goals were, first, to have an operative, visible, and accessible local police force with the capacity and competence to prevent, investigate, and punish criminal acts and thereby secure the safety of citizens. Secondly, to develop a more effective national and regional police force with a robust professional milieu in order to face current and future challenges. The proposal further emphasized that, although the police have enjoyed high levels of public trust over time, the terrorist acts in 2011 and the subsequent criticism of the police had made the changes necessary.

The proposal pointed out that a major internal change process within the police was under way. This was expected to result in improved management of the sector and the development of a better understanding of leadership, and to secure a changed and more 'pro-active' culture. It also acknowledged that it was challenging to confront and change an organization in a short period of time. Therefore, the measures taken were to be monitored closely. The proposal emphasized that the Police Agency was following up on the quality reform by working towards specific improvements in police services – most importantly strengthening the capacity to steer, lead and develop those services. Relating to this, internal structural changes in the Police Agency were mentioned as well as strategic steering. It was also recommended that political executives should refrain from detailed steering of the police, alluding to the critique of the Inquiry Commission, and that the Police Agency ought to have more power, for example a right to recruit police chiefs and to decide about changes in local stations.

The proposal followed the arguments in the Police Analysis concerning the importance of formally reorganizing the police rather closely, but stressed the

reorganization on the local police forces more heavily. As in the Police Analysis, it did not go into much detail about how the new regional structure could produce more local capacity, however. The major argument was the following (Prop.61LS – 2014–2015, p.67):

If local police stations merge, more police will be freed up to do active work in the field, and investigations and other tasks can be solved in larger milieus. This will yield greater effectiveness and more core specialized competence, since a larger caseload will make tasks more routine. Furthermore, the local service can be improved. Merging local police stations to create more robust units should also pay heed to the fact that digital technology also enables the police to be more available. The need for physical proximity to a local police station will be less important in the future.

The final proposal from the government was to organize the police in twelve districts instead of six. The arguments behind this decision were not very clearly stated, however, indicating that this particular number was the ‘best’ politically possible compromise available. Besides stating that each district should differentiate more between central regional units with more administrative and specialized tasks and local police stations without these functions, the proposal did not go into details about the number of local units. The local «response time» was set to 45 minutes for 90% of the population in each district, which seemed rather long but also rather unrealistic to fulfill in large rural districts.

The government proposal for the most part followed the proposals from the Police Analysis, in particular its main thoughts about the formal organizational structure. The organizational relationship between the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Police Security Service, the Police Agency and the Public Prosecution authority remained unchanged. The final proposal was less direct and tended to allude to the conclusions of the Inquiry Commission, in particular concerning leadership and culture, performance management and the security aspect. Most importantly, the final proposal played the ‘community police’ card more strongly. Key actors were affected by the dynamics of ‘attention shifting’ (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, Christensen, Lægreid and Rykkja 2016c). The concept of the ‘community police’ was not mentioned in the Police Analysis at all, but became politically important for the government, the governing parties, and most likely for voters as well. Overall then, the proposal rebalanced capacity and legitimacy, favoring the latter more than in the initial proposals. The trade-off remains somewhat ambiguous. The Ministry argued that the police must be organized to enhance local foundation and precedence, but also that it should be centrally managed and steered to enhance coherent and unified development (Prop. 61 LS (2014–2015)).

## The parliamentary debate and negotiations 2015

The Parliamentary Justice Committee followed up the proposal from the government and supported the main parts of the original proposal (Innst.306S 2014–2015). The support originated mainly from the two governing parties – the Conservative Party and the Progress Party – backed by the Liberal Party. The support of the Labour Party and the Christian Democratic Party was finally secured through a few changes to the original proposal. The government was then asked by this majority to propose the organization of a national crisis leadership. Further, the committee proposal specified what was meant by a locally anchored police and demanded various measures for active collaboration with the municipalities including municipal police councils. On leadership and culture, the committee specified fourteen different points aimed at improving the culture, leadership and attitudes in the police. Most of them were rather general and related to education and organization.

The most skeptical and deviant remarks in the committee proposal came from the Labour Party and the Centre Party. The Labour Party criticized the government for not following up on the remarks from the Inquiry Commission concerning culture, leadership and attitudes sufficiently; for lacking good arguments for the district structure; and for not clarifying how to organize a distinct leadership in a national crisis; and it questioned whether the reform really would lead to an increased local police presence. The representative from the Centre Party stated that labelling the reform a ‘community reform’ seemed strange and said the proposal would weaken the political control of the police. He proposed eighteen districts instead of twelve and argued that large public reform mergers were seldom successful. He was also very critical towards mass mergers of local police stations because this could undermine the crime prevention capacity in local communities.

The parliamentary debate that followed revealed two main narratives:<sup>5</sup> One alluded to the above, i.e. the ‘community police’, and the other to a centralizing tendency. The main representative for the Conservative Party stressed that the reform distributed police resources more evenly across the country and would bring the police closer to the population. He also stressed the local anchoring of change processes, i.e. local mergers, and that the reform focused on the Inquiry Commission’s main points regarding culture, leadership and attitudes. The Labour

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<sup>5</sup> The parliamentary debate took place June 10, 2015 and is recorded in the minutes on pages 3916–3993.

Party representative emphasized that it had contributed to improving the government's proposal in three ways: introducing more local influence regarding the development of the local police organization; highlighting culture, leadership and attitudes; and advocating a greater focus on central emergency organization.

The counter-narrative from the Centre Party focused on the increasing power of the Police Agency regarding regional and local structure, arguing that this would undermine the influence of politicians. It was skeptical that the local anchoring of the organizational changes really would make a difference. It primarily saw the reform as centralizing. It also cited the Inquiry Commission's assessment that the main structure of the police was adequate and pointed out that the Commission had never alluded to any need for structural rationalization.

The Committee's work and the following parliamentary debate brought the focus back to the Inquiry Commission's conclusions about culture/leadership and emergency management. The main political battle concerned the regional and local structural reform, however. The government's symbolic use of the new term the 'community reform' apparently was a way of 'selling' it to the skeptics. Agenda setting was also obviously an important part of the process. This resulted in political opposition from the Centre Party and also led to criticism in the media and from politicians in the municipalities. The debate became a symbolic competition and resulted in a politicized discussion about who cared the most about the influence of local authorities and citizens. In the end the political parties in the parliament, with the exception of the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party, agreed on a police reform that merged twenty-seven police districts into twelve, and significantly reduced the number of local police stations, arguably simultaneously reducing local democracy. The new 12 police districts were established with effect from January 1, 2016.

## Analysis

### Structure, culture or symbols?

The Police Analysis proposed a structural reform and a competence reform, but directed most of its efforts at structural issues. First, it argued for a less ambiguous distinction between political and professional steering, and accordingly for more strategic steering between the Ministry and the Police Agency. This seems to be a strategy for more police autonomy. It maintained that the agency should have more power to secure development within the sector, including the ability to decide on the structure of police districts. This was controversial seen from the municipalities. Second, it argued quite strongly that the proposed double structural rationalization, merging districts and local police stations, would create more police capacity and also benefit citizens. In doing this it referred to other Nordic experiences. This could be seen as a ‘smoke-screen’ for not really being able to show the actual effects of the proposed mergers. Later on, these features were modified in two ways, by focusing less on police capacity and by putting more emphasis on local proximity and influence.

Some weaknesses regarding the organizational thinking behind the Police Analysis can be raised. First, the report did not clarify either the instrumental basis for its main conclusions, or the anticipated effects of the proposed structural changes. This left important questions unanswered. It was rather easy to see that mergers could lead to more specialized capacity, but what about local police presence in rural districts with less specialized crime? Was there a risk that such changes would imply more centralization in the police districts, more emphasis on specialized competence and less focus on local, street level police – and what would be the implications? Second, it did not discuss the main implications and challenges: What would be the expected effects of giving the agency more power? How would the changes address the general need for political steering in such an important policy area, specifically in times of crisis?

In general, the process was not a strong analytical and hierarchical process but involved ambiguities, conflicting values and agendas and negotiations between the government and supporting political parties as well as parliamentary negotiations. The structural and instrumental arguments were not very well founded, even though they were anchored in quantitative data. In its final proposal, the Ministry did not clarify the major structural arguments, but relied instead on the Police Analysis. When the Ministry then proposed the establishment of twelve districts instead of six, there were no arguments attached. Also, when the parliamentary



representatives exaggerated this structural argument, no further support was provided. And when the representative from the Centre Party argued strongly against the structural rationalization, he did not provide substantial arguments as to why his proposal for eighteen districts was better.

Looking at what happened from a cultural version of an institutional perspective, there seems to be a strong path-dependency between the findings and conclusions from the Police Commission leading up to the reform in 2001 and the Police Analysis in 2013. Both reports had the same agenda and argued that structural rationalization (merging police districts) was a suitable instrumental strategy for achieving better police services in the districts. Both were motivated by an interest in developing a clearer distinction between the administration and the operative police, meaning more autonomy for the police, ensuring stronger specialist milieus providing enhanced competence and capacity and better local police services. The latter argument is relatively strong in the Police Analysis and in the process that followed. It seems obvious that the two reform processes were connected. Structural rationalization had become an 'appropriate' solution, which was supported by alluding to other Nordic experiences. When the Ministry increased the proposed number of police districts from six to twelve, this reflected the limits of what was politically acceptable, illustrating that this type of appropriateness was broader in character and not limited to the police sector.

An interesting empirical feature that could be seen both from a structural and cultural angle was the Inquiry Commission's emphasis on culture and leadership, which might be interpreted as linked to the fact that the Commission operated in another context and had another agenda influenced by national grief and shock. The Commission never actually defined what it meant by these features, indicating strong symbolic features. It might also be linked to existing subcultures within the police. Johannessen (2013) argues that there might not be a unified culture in the police, but rather different subcultures linked to an operative practice, a bureaucratic practice, a union practice, and an academic practice. It remains unclear what the Commission was actually referring to when discussing police culture. The Police Analysis alluded to culture and leadership in its emphasis on a competence reform, but did not follow up on them very much. This indicates that structural questions were easier to handle. In its proposal the Ministry referred to an ongoing change process in the Police Agency related to culture and leadership, but was short on details. It echoed the Inquiry Commission in its lack of qualification and empirical documentation of the cultural elements. Culture and leadership reemerged in the final stages of the process in the context of competence and structure, through the compromise with the Labour Party. A tentative conclusion is that first,

instrumentally culture and leadership are difficult to define and cope with compared with structural features. Second, a cultural path led from the Inquiry Commission to the police reform that became more obvious late in the process and that had a more symbolic potential, i.e. several political actors talked about it, but it remained unclear what it was all about.

This brings us to how we can interpret the process in terms of the use of myths and symbols. First, structural rationalization through mergers became a powerful symbol early on in the process and remained prominent in the process leading up to the final proposal in 2015. The new slogan ‘a more robust police’ referred to the proposal to create larger units with more competence, either more administratively or more specialist-oriented. The word ‘robust’ has been used quite often in other public reforms in Norway during the last decade, to enhance or justify the reforms. The popular doctrine of the day – ‘big is beautiful’– was taken for granted. It was also used in the major welfare administration reform from 2005 on (Christensen, Fimreite and Lægreid 2007). The latest example is the ongoing merger process of the municipalities, where this is the major catchword.

Second, both the Police Analysis and the following proposal from the Ministry referred to the experiences of other Nordic countries. Denmark, Finland and Sweden have over the past years implemented police organization reforms reducing the number of police districts and claiming that these reforms have to be understood as decentralization that will increase local policing (Holmberg 2014). In Norway this was done as a combination of instrumental imitation and trying to further a deterministic decontextualized symbol, i. e. the TINA (there is no alternative) principle: Assuming that what is done in the other Nordic countries must also be good for Norway.

Third, the process assumed an even stronger myth character when the Ministry labelled the structural proposal from the Police Analysis the ‘community reform’. The structural–instrumental arguments behind this were never elaborated on, and the related ambiguity may have made this symbol easier to use. The label was met with both surprise and ridicule by media and some opponents, but nevertheless prevailed as a selling point for the reform. The government’s unsubstantiated symbolic labeling was challenged by alternative narratives from both the Labour Party, which stressed its concern about local democratic influence over the police, and from the Agrarian Party, which saw this as an opportunity to further their anti-centralization symbols.

The centrality of the ‘community reform’ label indicates that not only are capacity and legitimacy important in reforms, but so is also symbolic language and action

(Edelman 1964), or even ‘double-talk’ and ‘hypocrisy’ (Brunsson 1989). Agenda-setting was also an important part of the process, with the terrorist attacks in July 2011 setting ground. The process following can therefore not uniquely be seen as an elaborate technical process, but rather as an overlapping setting involving conflicts over competing values and objectives between different stakeholders. This is a development also known from other settings in the aftermath of a crisis, for example in the US after 9/11 (Cuellar 2013).

Summing up, while the Inquiry Commission’s prescription amounted to a potential cultural revolution which changed attitudes and police leadership, the Police Analysis pointed to the need for structural reorganization by prescribing organizational mergers. Agenda setting played a significant role involving shifting conflicts over values and objectives regarding the structure of the police. Our initial argument was that these structural and cultural elements could be seen as rather supplementary. The analysis shows that they were in fact rather loosely coupled in the process, with the cultural features working as mere legitimizing factors.

## Capacity and legitimacy – shifting attentions and contrasting roles for the police

The 2001 police reform was definitely structure- and capacity-oriented, promoting the establishment of a Police Agency and the merging of fifty-four police districts into twenty-seven. The main argument then was that hiving off of tasks from the Ministry, establishing an agency and merging police districts improved the capacity for governing the sector. The Inquiry Commission in 2012 also emphasized capacity and coordination and focused on the emergency and crisis side of the question, but focused in its conclusions more on the cultural and leadership aspects (Christensen, Lægneid and Rykkja 2016b). The Police Analysis of 2013 also refocused on structure and capacity, but left the emergency side more to other processes, as explained by the government proposal of 2015.

The capacity arguments were repeated by the Ministry in its proposal in 2015, but weakened somewhat in the following discussion in parliament even though the emergency aspect was reintroduced by the Labour Party, for example. Instrumental thinking and arguments, seeing the police generally through the lens of capacity, or more specifically as emergency-oriented, was important throughout the process.

Legitimacy questions were not at the forefront of the police reform in 2001. Nevertheless, capacity was connected to legitimacy through the policy of freeing capacity to establish good local police services. In the aftermath of the reform,

however, critics argued against centralization, asserting that the reform would result in lack of attention to citizens' needs concerning local police services. This was an argument leaning on reports evaluating the reform. In contrast, the 2012 Inquiry Commission alluded strongly to the legitimacy side by playing the culture and leadership card. It did so in a rather ambiguous and symbol-related way, however. This also reflected some of the criticism of the internal police inquiry after the terrorist acts in 2011, which was seen as too self-gratulatory. The police leadership was seen as lacking in empathy and the situation turned into a PR disaster that ultimately undermined its legitimacy (Christensen and Læg Reid 2015).

The Police Analysis did not follow up much on legitimacy questions, even though it argued instrumentally for more attention to local needs. The Ministry saw the processes of culture and leadership primarily as ongoing internal police processes that did not belong directly to the reform process. Nevertheless, the Ministry did cite the alternative 'community police' model, a label that was not used in the Police Analysis. In reality, despite the competition over locally oriented legitimacy symbols, the reform was characterized mainly by instrumental structural arguments.

## Conclusion –agenda settings between emergency police and community police

The process of the police reform decided in 2015 in many ways reflected the capacity/legitimacy distinction. Seen in terms of a structural/instrumental approach it had a strong rational instrumental flavor regarding both processes and outcome. The process was rather top-down. The governance capacity arguments were primary, and structural reorganization was advocated as the main solution. Hierarchy, professional competence, centralization and standardization were the core elements of the bureaucratic model, supplemented by mergers. The main aim was to create a more centralized/regionalized and robust police force, with greater focus on efficiency, emergency preparedness and resilience. There were some negotiation elements in the Police Analysis but these were more prominent in the latter part of the political process, visible in the bargaining between the two minority government parties and the supporting parties in the parliament.

There are, however, also elements that fit with a cultural/institutional perspective – i.e. path dependencies ensuing from the historical-institutional legacy of the police and its reform history. Not only governance capacity matters but also governance legitimacy and the trajectory of community police. Thus path dependency also matters. The postwar reform initiatives constrain the contemporary reform process

and its outcome to a great extent. This speaks of a 'historical inefficiency' that needs to be taken into account in order to understand what is going on. Police traditions and culture matter, and the cultural arguments follow in the shadow of the hierarchy from the police study onward. Perceived problems and good solutions are informed by a logic of consequentiality, but a logic of appropriateness also has an important role to play.

Environmental factors likewise play a crucial role in understanding the reform process. Obviously, the terrorist attacks as an external shock was a major factor in understanding why the reform was brought onto the agenda, but did not influence what that reform consisted of as much. This was much more informed by the reform in 2001. There were also strong elements that fit a myth perspective. There was a loose coupling between talk and action (March 1980). On the one hand, the reform represents a strong centralization/regionalization and eventual strengthening of the emergency preparedness of the police. On the other hand, it was being sold as a 'community police' and decentralization reform. There was a strong need for branding and reputation management from the reform agents, mainly in the minority government, in order to 'sell' the reform and produce legitimacy and support for it, illustrating also the importance of agenda-setting and attention shifting.

Balancing the different agendas in an agenda shifting process the reform ended up as a centrally and regionally controlled community police but this rather loosely coupled hybrid arrangement was more leaning towards centralization than to decentralization. A main question is how big this apparent gap between talk and action can be without incurring the danger of hypocrisy and overselling the reform. Citizens and users might become frustrated if the reform does not fulfill their expectations. This was the case after the reform in 2001. It is not easy to meet the need for increased steering capacity and increased steering legitimacy within the same reform design (Dahl and Tufte 1973). A question for further research is what happens in the implementation process. The merging of police districts seems this far to have been rather smooth, but it remains to be seen what happens when the Police Agency starts the process of merging local police districts.

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## Media

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