

## Merging, disaggregating and clustering local authorities: do structural reforms affect perceptions about local governance and democracy?

Itai Beeri & Akab Zaidan

To cite this article: Itai Beeri & Akab Zaidan (2021): Merging, disaggregating and clustering local authorities: do structural reforms affect perceptions about local governance and democracy?, Territory, Politics, Governance, DOI: [10.1080/21622671.2021.1908159](https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2021.1908159)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2021.1908159>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 16 Apr 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 640



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Merging, disaggregating and clustering local authorities: do structural reforms affect perceptions about local governance and democracy?

Itai Beeri <sup>a</sup> and Akab Zaidan<sup>b</sup>

## ABSTRACT

There is increasing pressure on local authorities to restructure themselves to meet current expectations from the public. Multilevel governance has emerged as one method for such restructuring. Using the results of a survey conducted among 1733 residents of local authorities in Israel, we explore the effects of three specific multilevel governance reforms – the merging, disaggregation and clustering of local government authorities – on residents' assessments about local governance and democracy. Our findings underscore the importance of public support for the structural reform. Those who become involved in soft reforms involving bottom-up groups and voluntary coalitions that cluster together are more likely to trust their local authority, feel it responds to their needs satisfactorily and listens to them. However, the more support they express, the more their perceptions are attenuated. In contrast, residents of local authorities that amalgamated with other communities that then went through hard reforms, such as merging and disaggregation involving up-scaling and top-down reforms, had fewer positive opinions about these issues. Only residents who strongly favoured the merger had positive perceptions about local governability and participation in decision-making and were satisfied with local services and trusted the local government. We discuss these findings and draw conclusions about their implications for local structural reforms in an era of local and regional governance.

## KEYWORDS

merged local authorities; clustered local authorities; local democracy; local governance; local structural reforms; regional governance; multilevel governance

**HISTORY** Received 12 May 2020; in revised form 17 March 2021


## INTRODUCTION

As a result of social, economic and environmental changes typical of the 21st century, many Western democratic nations have implemented local government reforms, including legal, socio-economic, administrative, political and spatial reforms (Ebinger et al., 2019; Kuhlmann & Bouckaert, 2016). Garcea and Lesage (2005) defined local structural reform as the reconfiguration of local government in terms of the number, types and size of municipalities, quasi-

## CONTACT

<sup>a</sup> (Corresponding author)  itaibeeri@poli.haifa.ac.il

Division of Public Administration & Policy, School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel.

<sup>b</sup>  azaida02@campus.haifa.ac.il

Division of Public Administration & Policy, School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel.

municipalities and municipal special-purpose bodies. Local government reforms are also referred to as multilevel governance. It involves broad-based attempts to coordinate decision-making and public policy in the face of the overlap and jurisdictional fragmentation of authority in large metropolitan regions and urban areas (Enderlein et al., 2010; Storper, 2014).

Multilevel governance may be defined as the horizontal and vertical interdependence of nested networks of governments at several territorial tiers and levels such as the supranational, national, regional and local (Marks, 1993). The multilevel governance literature agrees that the dispersion of governance across multiple players is more likely to be able to solve problems, and is more efficient, specialized and professional than a single player (Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Peters & Pierre, 2004). However, one of the criticisms of multilevel governance is that it harms democracy in that it deprives citizens of their representation and makes the ruling bodies less accountable to the public (Bache et al., 2016). Moreover, while public opinion, social voice and public choice in the area of metropolitan governance might be ‘messy’, they provide a clearer view of what the public wants and is willing to accept (Storper, 2014). However, there is a severe lack of systematic empirical research on multilevel governance, its possible consequences for governance and democracy (Papadopoulos, 2005), and the possible impact of public choice on this relationship (Storper, 2014).

To fill this void, we explored the effects of multilevel governance practices, namely, three specific and competing structural reforms – the merging, disaggregation and clustering of local government authorities – on residents’ assessments about local governance and democracy. These reforms have intersecting objectives such as achieving a balance between decentralization and centralization, resolving issues involving economies of scale, boosting economic and administrative efficiency, improving the performance and effectiveness in supplying local services, and narrowing gaps between groups (Blatter, 2006). Nevertheless, the most important difference among the three structural reforms is the initiator of the reform. Amalgamations are usually mandated by the central government according to the top-down approach. Disaggregations are the result of the pressure of multiple local stakeholders. Thus, they represent an ad-hoc, bottom-up coordination that is meant to reverse the decision-making process that is usually centralized and top-down, and resulted in the merger. Finally, in contrast to mergers and disaggregations, clustering local authorities is based on the concepts of voluntarism and collaboration. It is a bottom-up strategy initiated by the local elected leadership (Ebinger et al., 2019; Zeedan, 2017).

Despite the widespread use of various structural reforms, there is no consensus among researchers and policy designers with respect to the necessity for, positive impact and price of these reforms (Bel & Warner, 2015; Houwelingen, 2017; Migali et al., 2017; Strebel, 2019), leading to a fundamental dilemma between efficiency and democracy (Reingewertz & Serritzlew, 2019). Moreover, empirical studies examining the consequences of local structural reforms focus mainly on financial aspects (e.g., Migali et al., 2017). Hence, this article is a response to the call to expand existing theoretical knowledge and examine the effects of local structural reforms on local governance and democracy (Drew et al., 2019; Ebinger et al., 2019; Martin, 2015; Reingewertz & Serritzlew, 2019).

To accomplish this goal, we investigated the impact of three structural reforms on residents’ perceptions about local governance, public participation in decision-making, satisfaction with municipal services and trust in the local authority. We also explored how support for the reforms moderated the residents’ assessments.

Shedding light on this research question is of theoretical and practical importance. From the theoretical perspective, this study can contribute to the field by examining competing municipal reforms by considering the tensions between centralization and decentralization, regionalism and separatism, localism and new localism. From a practical perspective, our findings can help politicians, policy designers, programmers, geographers, sociologists and administrators at all

governmental levels reduce the cost of implementing such reforms and hint at the changes in public opinion that can be expected from these changes.

The study is based on a professional survey of 1733 residents randomly sampled from 33 local authorities in Israel. Participants belonged to local authorities that had implemented one of the reforms and local authorities with similar structural characteristics that had not implemented any reforms, to be used as controls.

The paper is organized as follows. We begin with a discussion of the major concepts and theoretical aspects, and present our hypotheses. We then describe the research method and findings. In the final section we discuss the findings, and their research and practical implications for structural reforms in local government.

## THEORY DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES

### Politics, territoriality and local governance

According to the eminent philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, territorial conflicts have existed from the very first time a human being claimed ‘This is mine!’, and they continue to exist in one form or another in every society. Scholars have associated politics with space in various ways. For instance, Smith (1974) expanded a discussion about political power to include the spatial dimension: ‘who gets what, where and how?’ In accordance with the initial assumptions that every point in space differs from all other points in space and that inequality will forever be the result of asymmetrical power relations, it is only natural to expect that competition over land ownership is far from over (Gyuris, 2016).

In a recent study Beeri et al. (2020) conceptualized the notion of territoriality in the local and central–local domains. While territoriality refers to the political organization of the space that connects land and boundaries (Shah, 2012), central–local territoriality is defined as the spatial, political relationships among local authorities, communities, classes and ethnic groups, and between these groups and the central government (Beeri et al., 2020). In other words, we adopted a structural approach to understanding the balance of power in space and its impact on land and boundaries. By assigning land and the rights to and control of its associated resources to a local authority and thus a community, the central government has in effect performed a political act by wielding its power in favour of certain communities (Marsh et al., 2010). Such an act may provide benefits to one local leadership, but rob a neighbouring local community of these benefits. As such, structural local reforms are more likely than not to have political consequences for local governance, local democracy and thus, public opinion (Krippendorff, 2005).

Since the end of the 20th century, erosion of the nation’s power to govern and to shape public policy from the top down has led to the development of bottom-up approaches based on the power of civil society and local authorities. At a more advanced stage, approaches emerged that integrated top-down and bottom-up approaches. As a result, those advocating for local governance have sought to keep local sovereignty in the hands of local representatives to advance local democracy, even at the cost of a lower standard of living (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009).

Another perspective that developed simultaneously was the view of the region as a spatial unit whose boundaries are created by ongoing social structuring. A functional region is a natural result of local social interactions and economic conditions (Jonas, 2012; Paasi, 2003). Policy-makers tend to agree that larger territorial structures should include more players and be given more autonomy (Reingewertz & Serritzlew, 2019). However, recent trends such as multi-level governance and new regionalism are imperfect solutions (Storper, 2014). New regionalism, the most advanced form of multilevel governance today, sees the region as an ecosystem that integrates economic, planning, political, social and cultural considerations to ensure

economic development that is productive, inclusive and sustainable (Blatter, 2006; Deas & Ward, 2000).

Both multilevel governance and new regionalism introduce complexities that most likely will result in new difficulties. They reflect a clash between the traditions of the local and the general (Mill, 1861), between democracy and efficiency (Kersting & Vetter, 2003), between shared responsibility and the delegation of authority (Papadopoulos, 2005), and between ideologies such as liberal and post-liberal democracy (Peters & Pierre, 2004). In this study, we seek to expand this notion by examining how structural spatial reforms influence the reciprocal relations among governance, territoriality and politics.

## The relationship between local structural reforms, local governance and local democracy

### *Local governance and local democracy*

The basic assumption of this research is that structural reforms are a form of comprehensive regulation that has the potential to affect the administrative performance and create changes in the perspectives of the residents of local authorities that have implemented structural reforms with regard to organizational, political, economic, democratic and civil issues (Ebinger et al., 2019). Among the many possible effects, we chose to focus on four issues: residents' perceptions about local governability and public participation in decision-making, as well as their satisfaction with local services and trust in the local authority.

*Local governability* has been studied since the 1990s, mainly in the political sciences. Local governability has different, overlapping definitions and uses that touch upon governance format, political culture, management perspectives and reciprocal relations among participants in government operations (Kooiman et al., 2008; Osborne et al., 2013). We define local governability as the ability to govern and the extent of the government's political and professional capability to make and implement decisions. In other words, this term refers to the local government's ability to exercise its legitimate authority to implement policy.

*Public participation in decision-making* has been examined from several angles, among them governance and politics (Vigoda-Gadot & Cohen, 2004). Arnstein (1969) contended that public participation involves the re-division, transfer or decentralization of authority and power. Doing so enables the public to make decisions and determinations regarding public matters ranging from technical information through consultation to partnerships. Public participation has a number of complementary objectives, including promoting public integrity and fairness, improving decision-making and establishing trust.

*Satisfaction with local services* is a major indicator of residents' assessments about the municipality's products and services as they experience them. This is a fundamental performance measure of public institutions (Van Ryzin, 2004). A number of theories have examined the factors influencing satisfaction with local services. For example, the expectation theory contends that residents make rational comparisons between performance and a particular standard (Beeri et al., 2018). Theories from the field of political science maintain that satisfaction is a derivative of the response of politicians and bureaucrats to residents' demands that entails a hidden social contract of sorts based on fairness. The theory of public choice emphasizes the combination of service quality with the extent to which the public can choose this service (Vigoda, 2000).

*Trust in the local authority* plays an important and central role in many disciplines, among them psychology, sociology, education, economics and political science (Beeri et al., 2018). They are united by the common denominator of establishing trust based on people's subjective experience, perspectives and social experience comprised of their emotions, cognition and behaviour. In this study we focus on trust in the individuals, groups, office-holders and institutions associated with the local authority.

### *Merged local authorities, governance and democracy*

Structural reform in the form of merging local authorities changes the local government map. This reform, which is usually forced by the central government (although it might be voluntary), amalgamates two or more local authorities into a new political and economic organizational entity. Thus, it is a structure that is imposed on residents from the top down (Reingewertz, 2012). Over the past 50 years, local authorities have been amalgamated in the United States, Norway, Japan, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, New Zealand, Hungary, Israel, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Zambia, Sudan and Jordan (Reingewertz & Serritzlew, 2019). In a certain sense, the merger of local authorities is a New Public Management practice, under the auspices of which local governments borrow organizational principles from the business sector. Accordingly, the amalgamation of local authorities is a governmental tool designed to promote economies of scale. The goal is to streamline the administration, improve governance and provide better municipal services.

Nevertheless, opinions are mixed regarding the effectiveness of merging government authorities (e.g., Boyne, 1995; Hansen, 2015; Martin, 2015). Some researchers have cited empirical observations that support the effectiveness and economic savings involved in such mergers (Migali et al., 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2014; Reingewertz, 2012). Under some conditions such as the status of the territory, especially its size, number of municipalities and past reforms, mergers can trigger more investments and professionalization (Ebinger et al., 2019). In contrast, other scholars found no economic advantage of size, claiming that mergers do not lead to cost savings for services. Indeed, they might even impair their effectiveness because information asymmetries increase and preferences become more heterogeneous (Bel & Warner, 2015; Hanes, 2015; Oates, 1972; Soukopova et al., 2014).

Thus, from the narrow economic cash-flow perspective, opinions are divided. However, another question that is no less important is whether mergers hurt or help governability and democracy. Here again, the evidence is mixed. Opponents of amalgamation strongly believe it has negative consequences and an unpredictable future (Drew et al., 2019). On the one hand, government entities with larger budgets are likely to have higher salary levels that enable them to hire more qualified managers. Doing so might have a significant positive impact on the local authority's performance and decision-making. It may also promote public participation in the decision-making process (Ebinger & Bogumil, 2016; Reingewertz, 2012). On the other hand, the central government might favour merging as a way to increase its political power and thus weaken the power of distinct, homogeneous, united and self-governed local communities. Using such a format, the central government can micromanage them, and limit their authority and their budgets (Strebel, 2019). Thus, merging local authorities, even if planned and done openly, is liable to erode and limit their ability to shape policy, increase their dependency on the central government and cause harm to local democracy (Oates, 1972). The erosion of local democracy is rooted in the basic logic that voters may feel less connected to their representatives in larger municipalities due to the quantitative reduction in representation. From here, it is easy for residents to feel that the merger has hurt their autonomy and local governability (Lassen & Serritzlew, 2011; Zeedan, 2017). Moreover, residents may feel that they have less access to their elected officials and less opportunity to participate in making local decisions. However, comparative studies of municipalities by Houwelingen (2017) and Ebinger et al. (2019) concluded that it is quite difficult to establish that the size of the municipality affects the degree of political participation. Furthermore, they noted that the effects are complex, contradictory, and thus require further investigation.

It is important to understand that merging government authorities is not merely a technical merger of administrations, budgets and assets. Indeed, such a merger can potentially cause damage to the fabric of social life and to the self-definition and identity of each of the communities existing before the merger. Therefore, residents may have strong objections to mergers that weaken their trust in local government (Fitjar, 2019). While it takes a long time to build up trust in local government, it is quite easy to harm it, especially if no active measures are taken to nourish this trust.

Consequently, satisfaction with local services, which is a derivative of trust in local leadership (Beeri et al., 2018), is liable to deteriorate as a result of a merger. Studies have reported a negative correlation between the size of the local authority and residents' satisfaction with the quality of service it provides (Soukopova et al., 2014). Similarly, in interviews conducted with local community leaders in communities that had merged in Canada, Kushner and Siegel (2003) found that residents expressed negative feelings regarding the merger. Reingewertz (2012) clarified that the decline in the quality of the services provided, as well as in governability, trust and sense of partnership may derive from the difficulties that the merged authority has in coordinating the residents' preferences – which, after the merger, are numerous, undefined and more heterogeneous – with the operations of the local authority.

Based on the above, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 1: Compared with residents of a local authority that was not merged, those living in a merged local authority will report feeling that (H1a) there is less local governability and (H1b) less public participation. They will also be (H1c) less satisfied with the services the local authority provides and (H1d) have less trust in it.*

### *Disaggregated local authorities, governance and democracy*

The research literature does not grant the disaggregation of merged local authorities the status of a distinct reform. Nevertheless, we regarded the disaggregation of merged local authorities as a step backwards caused by ad-hoc, bottom-up political and social pressures. These pressures may result from the failure of the merger to achieve the desired and expected results. Thus, the disaggregation usually occurs when matters do not improve due to the merger or even go from bad to worse. However, it is also possible, at least hypothetically, for disaggregation to occur in a more positive climate. It may be part of a wider structural reform that takes place later. If the merger does not fit the later reform's goals, the policy-makers may decide it should be reversed.

In monitoring disaggregation, Zeedan (2017) noted that it is marked by an ad-hoc chain of bottom-up pressures, first from citizens and business owners who feel they were harmed by the merger, then from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), committees and local media, and finally from bureaucrats and elected officials. These pressures and demands for disaggregation may arise due to perceptions about the costs involved in the merger. Examples include the loss of local employment opportunities and reduced expenditures in local businesses, economic stagnation and loss of local leadership, together with the lack of avenues for participation.

Indeed, in the short term, disaggregation may be greeted with broad support and great satisfaction, particularly from social activists and the politicians pushed by the decision-makers to dissolve the merged authority. Those who support disaggregation might be regarded as having opposed the demands of the central government. However, disaggregation may underscore the weaknesses of the local authority that prompted the merger in the first place. Once confronted with these weaknesses, residents in the disaggregated communities may feel more despair, abandonment and lack of trust in the local government and in the central government's ability to force its policies on the local leadership (Beeri & Navot, 2013; Reingewertz, 2012; Zeedan, 2017).

In accordance with this scenario, it is possible that disaggregation will lead to an erosion in local autonomy and to a decline in good governance, accountability and performance. The local authority may find it increasingly difficult to govern and be less inclined to include residents in decision-making. In turn, the residents may find it hard to trust the government on any level and assess their local services as wanting. Lack of trust in the central government and the poor financial performance of disaggregated authorities go hand in hand with over-enforcement, supervision and criticism of the disaggregated authorities, thus limiting their autonomy and governability. Therefore, ensuring the success of the merger and its ramifications may prove more important to ensuring local governance and democracy than disaggregation.

Based on the above, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 2: Compared with residents of a merged local authority, those living in a disaggregated local authority will report feeling that (H2a) there is less local governability and (H2b) less public participation. They will also be (H2c) less satisfied with the services the local authority provides and (H2d) have less trust in it.*

### **Clustered local authorities, governance and democracy**

Regional clusters are comprised of municipal spatial partnerships and collaborations. Unlike the New Public Management paradigm that emphasizes competition between government authorities and service providers (Hood, 1991), clustering is in line with the New Public Governance paradigm (Hefetz et al., 2012; Osborne et al., 2013). It is a bottom-up approach usually initiated by local elected leaders. It represents the adoption of a new regional concept, marked by networked and strategic collaboration, and a shift from economic and operational concerns about efficiency to spatial, interdisciplinary, inter-organizational and inter-municipal thinking and planning (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Bel & Warner, 2015).

Mergers and clustering also differ in their social and communal aspects. Mergers are more likely to serve individual preferences and rational interests. In contrast, clustering follows a more post-functionalist rationale that goes hand in hand with governance and the need to provide public goods on varying scales to self-ruled communities (Hooghe & Marks, 2016).

Challenges are inherent in clustering. In an era of local government made up of numerous players from different sectors and organizations, the traditional, vertical, top-down organizational structure has encountered difficulties (Stoker, 1998). Thus, in line with Hooghe and Marks (2016), who disputed that public service is motivated by balancing costs and efficiency, promoting effectiveness and communities' desire to control decision-making, Strebel (2019) maintained that rich and large municipalities are more likely to reject cooperation with neighbouring local authorities.

Using clustering, local authorities transfer executive powers for providing municipal services to the cluster, at least to some extent. While the residents tend to continue seeing the local authority as responsible for the quality of the services, the local authority does not have the complete authority or ability to handle specific needs or complaints quickly. It serves as an intermediary by submitting complaints and requests to the regional body. As a result, the local authority no longer has exclusive control over its ability to govern autonomously (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Beeri & Magnússon, 2019; Bel & Warner, 2015; Kooiman, 2008). This is not a failure but rather an expectation built into the local authority. However, the residents see this change as an erosion of the local authority's governability, an erosion of local identity and autonomy, and increased dependency on factors outside the government's authority (Strebel, 2019).

The voluntary link-up between local authorities is likely to improve functional ties, in-depth interactions, commitments and complex relations between the players (Hindi, 2018). Therefore, networked regional partnerships have the advantages inherent in size. They also have the potential to provide complex, place-based, accessible municipal services more efficiently and effectively and without making far-reaching organizational changes (Blesse & Baskaran, 2016). Indeed, this type of partnership between government authorities has been found to be effective in Switzerland, France, Italy and the United States (Migali et al., 2017; Steiner, 2003).

Preserving the administrative political mechanism and the established ties between the residents and elected officials and decision-makers who are familiar to them is likely to preserve and even increase mutual trust, participation in decision-making and an inclusive economy. Sometimes, being involved in new regional issues promotes more participation because the vision is



less inclined to benefit specific subcommunities (OECD, 2005). Multilevel governance that involves clustering may promote local governance and democracy for several reasons. First, it creates the potential for re-establishing the relationship between the central and local governments, with the latter being more open to inspection and oversight. Second, given that upper echelons of the multi-governance model are not local residents, local politics may play less of a role in decision-making, leaving room for rational and professional policies (Papadopoulos, 2005). Such policies may re-establish and restore the 'loop model' (Fox & Miller, 1996) in that local preferences, needs and demands are more likely to be represented and responded to. Hence, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3: Compared with residents of local authorities that were not clustered, those living in clustered local authorities will report feeling that (H3a) there is less local governability but (H3b) more public participation. They will also be (H3c) more satisfied with the services the local authority provides and (H3d) have more trust in it.*

The above review underscores the need to compare the three reforms with respect to their impact on local democracy and governability. It indicates that the different reforms affect the potential for relative growth as well as the erosion of the dimensions of democracy and governability. Hence, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 4: Those living in disaggregated local authorities will report feeling (H4a) the lowest levels of local governability and (H4b) the lowest levels of public participation. They will also be (H4c) the least satisfied with the services the local authority provides and (H4d) have the least trust in it. In contrast, those living in clustered local authorities will report the highest levels of local governability and public participation. They will also be the most satisfied with the services the local authority provides and have the most trust in it.*

## Public support for structural reform as a moderator between structural reforms and local governance and democracy

Up to this point, the discussion has assumed that implementing structural reform is a top-down decision. Nevertheless, the extent of the public's support for these reforms is pivotal. In general, every reform is likely to generate disagreement. Reforms may have the potential to succeed as well as to fail, for chances are it will not benefit all the residents, and certainly not in the same way and to the same extent.

Hence, Warner (2006) contended that recruiting public support for a reform is important for its success because inherent in it is the potential for harming local democracy. Particularly in the era of local governance, at least some residents expect to be partners in shaping local policy. Therefore, the effectiveness of the reform depends on obtaining internal and external legitimacy from the local authorities and the residents (Council of Europe, 2010; Stoker, 1998). Martins (1995) even suggested letting the residents decide about possible changes in the local political mechanism, because of the effect that it might have on the quality of municipal services and the degree of responsiveness to public preferences. In other words, the more successful the deliberations, legitimization and groundwork are in recruiting public support for structural reform, the more likely the reform will evoke positive opinions regarding governability, public participation, satisfaction with public services and trust in the local authority.

Hence, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 5: Support for structural reform will moderate the relationship between implementing the reform and (H5a) perceptions about local governability, (H5b) public participation, (H5c) satisfaction with public services and (H5d) trust in the local authority. As support for this reform increases, these ties will become stronger and more positive.*

## METHOD

### The Israeli case

In Israel, the powerful Ministry of Finance traditionally adopts a centralist–conservative view toward local governments. Together with the Ministry of Interior, since the 2000s these ministries have adopted a strict approach toward local finances, especially toward municipalities that are less sound and marked by underperformance. However, they have granted more autonomy to a small group of local authorities demonstrating good performance (Reingewertz & Beeri, 2018). For example, the central government determines and controls local tax rates, urban laws, urban planning and the local economy, leaving less room for localism and local democracy (Beeri & Razin, 2015). In 2003, the government declared that local deficits would no longer be covered automatically. Thus, in 2004, many local authorities faced a financial crisis: 76% of local authorities operated under deficits, over 50% activated recovery plans and 21% held back the wages of thousands of employees for months (Beeri & Yuval, 2013; Reingewertz & Beeri, 2018).

One approach the central government has tried to deal with these financial crises in local authorities has been to merge poorer performing communities with those that have demonstrated better performance. Due to strong objections from local governments, only in 2003 did the central government adopt a limited plan of 33 mergers, only 12 of which were actually implemented, and none of which was voluntary. Less than four years later, four of these, all in Arab local authorities, were disaggregated due to local pressure (Drew et al., 2019). In all cases of mergers and disaggregations, the economic ramifications were the main considerations. Issues of local governance and democracy remained at the margins of the strategic and public discourse. Ultimately, the failure to consider these factors, combined with mismatches between different communities, led to the abandonment of this type of reform (Beeri, 2020; The Committee for the Promotion of Regionalism in Israel, 2019).

At the same time, alternative initiatives for regulating the local government map began to emerge. In the 2000s, coalitions began to arise between local authorities and third-sector private organizations and NGOs. Moreover, ad-hoc agreements for functional cooperation between local authorities multiplied, as did joint industrial zones that entailed the division of income among a number of bordering local authorities to improve regional economic development. Nevertheless, the most significant step in implementing the notion of regionalism, albeit slow and limited, involved encouraging local authorities to voluntarily adopt and operate under the auspices of regional clusters (Beeri, 2020). The Interior and Finance ministries adopted the model of regional clusters, which was regulated through two waves of calls for proposals in 2012 and 2017 inviting local authorities to join this process voluntarily. In 2021, eleven regional clusters are operational and include more than 50% of the local authorities in Israel, most of them situated in Israel's geographical and social periphery. Furthermore, the national team examining wide-ranging reform considers clusters to be a first step in implementing the broad notion of regionalism (The Committee for the Promotion of Regionalism in Israel, 2019). In all, one should bear in mind the preconditions of Israeli local structural reforms. At least some local authorities that had been involved in structural reforms over the last two decades were in moderate to severe crisis before the reform took place, while other authorities that were merged, disaggregated and clustered performed well before the reforms took place (Beeri, 2020).

### Municipal data

Since 2003, structural reforms have taken place in about two-thirds of the 257 local authorities in Israel. The data in the current study represent the reformed local authorities and their equivalent non-reformed local authorities, in terms of their structural characteristics: socioeconomic status, peripheral status, number of residents, ethnic group affiliation and financial soundness. Thus, the

data exclude Israeli local authorities that are less likely to be potential candidates for structural reforms and that have not undergone or are not equivalent to reformed local authorities, due to their relative soundness. We made a strong effort to represent the local authorities' population because spatial location, culture, politics and ethnicity affect public opinion (Krippendorff, 2005).

In total, 33 local authorities were randomly sampled (Table 1). All the participants' responses referred to the situation in 2019. We weighted and stratified the data on the sampled local authorities that we obtained from the Ministry of the Interior and the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS, 2019) to achieve proportional matching of the key attributes: ethnic affiliation (Jews; Arab-Muslims/Druze/Christians), residents' socioeconomic status (minimum = 1; maximum = 10; mean = 4.87; SD = 2.38); peripheral status (the local authority's proximity to geographical, economic and social resources) (minimum = 2; maximum = 8; mean = 4.90; SD = 1.54); number of residents by cluster (minimum = 1; maximum = 10; mean = 2.68; SD = 1.79); population according to national ethnic majority (Jewish = 1; Arab = 0) (mean = 0.58; SD = 0.49); and financial soundness of the local authority (sound = 1; not sound = 0; mean = 0.05; SD = 0.21). We acknowledge that matching communities may be imperfect. Nevertheless, we believe that the sample represents a reasonable match between Israeli local authorities that have gone through structural reforms and an equivalent control group of non-reformed local authorities.

### Sample and procedure

In 2019, we conducted a survey designed to test the research variables empirically. The survey was distributed through a professional company that conducts telephone questionnaires. We asked 1733 residents about their perceptions regarding local governability, public participation in decision-making, satisfaction with local services and trust in their local authority. Of the randomly selected 1733 residents, 50–55 came from each of the 33 local authorities. They were chosen to provide a proportional match in their demographic variables. The response rate was relatively large: 62%. Of the 1733 residents, 44% were women and 56% were men. A total of 41% were Jewish and 59% were non-Jewish (35% Muslims, 17% Druze, 4% Christians and 2% other religions). Age (years) ranged from 18 to 96, with an average of 51 (SD = 16.3). Education (years) ranged from 0 to 35, with an average of 13.7 (SD = 3.7). Regarding marital status, 21% were unmarried, 36% were married and 43% were married with children under the age of 18. A total of 50% of the respondents stated that they earned a monthly income below the national average (approximately US\$2500), 24% said that their income was close to the national average and 26% earned above the national average.

### Measures

In order to validate the measures, we followed several steps. First, our variables are based on perceptions, making a survey the preferred method (George & Pandey, 2017). We built the questionnaire gradually based on the steps outlined in scale development guides (DeVellis, 2016). We developed the initial content based on a review of the local governance and democracy literature and previous scales. This stage resulted in 30 items that we used for a pilot test. Based on the results of this pilot, we removed redundant and unclear items, bringing the number of items to 28 (Zaidan, 2021).

Second, special attention was paid to the possibility of common method bias, which can affect the outcomes of surveys where all data come from the same source. Following Podsakoff et al. (2012), we reduced the risk of common method bias by using clear language, labelling all response options, referring where possible to the current situation rather than past situations, using different columns for the variables, and putting the dependent variable on a separate sheet. Finally, we explained the study's goals to the participants.

Table 1. Samples of local authorities that underwent reform and equivalent local authorities.

	Local authority	Structural reform	Sector	SES/periphery index	Municipal status	District	No. of residents (thousands)	Financial soundness
1	Ofaqim	C	Jewish	3/3	CT	Southern	26.6	No
2	Qiryat Mal'akhi	NC	Jewish	3/5	CT	Southern	21.8	No
3	Rame	C	Arab	4/3	LC	Northern	7.5	No
4	Kafar Yasif	NC	Arab	4/4	LC	Northern	13.4	No
5	Karmi'el	C	Jewish	6/4	CT	Northern	45.3	No
6	Nahariya	NC	Jewish	6/4	CT	Northern	54.9	No
7	Hura	C	Arab	1/6	LC	Southern	20.0	No
8	Kuseife	NC	Arab	1/8	LC	Southern	19.7	No
9	Qiryat Shemona	C	Jewish	5/2	CT	Northern	22.9	No
10	Nazerat Illit	NC	Jewish	5/5	CT	Northern	40.0	No
11	Kefar Weradim	C	Jewish	9/3	LC	Northern	5.7	No
12	Ramat Yishay	NC	Jewish	8/5	LC	Northern	7.6	No
13	Kadima Zoran	M	Jewish	8/6	LC	Central	21.4	No
14	Tel Mond	NM	Jewish	8/6	LC	Central	12.0	Yes
15	Yehud-Neve Monosson	M	Jewish	8/8	CT	Central	29.3	Yes
16	Hod HaSharon	NM	Jewish	8/8	CT	Central	58.9	No
17	Modi'in-Makkabbim-Reut	M	Jewish	8/7	CT	Central	90.0	No
18	Rehovot	NM	Jewish	7/8	CT	Central	135.7	No
19	Binyamina-Giv'at Ada	M	Jewish	8/5	LC	Haifa	15.2	No
20	Zikhron Ya'akov	NM	Jewish	8/5	LC	Haifa	22.7	No
21	Majd Al-Kurum	M	Arab	2/4	LC	Northern	14.8	No
22	Kabul	NM	Arab	2/4	LC	Northern	13.4	No

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

	Local authority	Structural reform	Sector	SES/periphery index	Municipal status	District	No. of residents (thousands)	Financial soundness
23	Baqa Al-Gharbiyye	D	Arab	3/5	CT	Haifa	28.5	No
24	Umm Al-Fahm	ND	Arab	2/5	CT	Haifa	53.3	No
25	Isifya	D	Arab	4/4	LC	Haifa	11.9	No
26	Kafar Yasif	ND	Arab	4/5	LC	Northern	9.7	No
27	Jatt Hameshulash	D	Arab	4/5	LC	Haifa	11.4	No
28	Kafar Qara	ND	Arab	4/5	LC	Haifa	18.0	No
29	Abu Sinan	D	Arab	3/4	LC	Northern	13.5	No
30	Reineh	ND	Arab	3/5	LC	Northern	18.6	No
31	Daliyat Al-Karmel	D	Arab	4/4	LC	Haifa	17.0	No
32	Julis	D	Arab	4/4	LC	Haifa	6.2	No
33	Peqi'in	ND	Arab	4/3	LC	Haifa	5.7	No

Note: SES, Socio Economic Status; C, clustered; NC, not clustered; M, merged; NM, not merged; D, disaggregated; ND, not disaggregated; CT, city; and LC, local council.

Third, we used a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with varimax rotation that yielded a clear distinction between the measures. The factorability was good. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value (KMO = 0.968) exceeded the recommended value of 0.6, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity reached statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ), both indicating relatively compact patterns of clusters of items. The total variance explained was 69.8%. These findings support the validity and reliability of the scales.

*Perceived local governability* reflects residents’ perceptions about the local authority’s ability to design and implement local policy (Kooiman et al., 2008). We measured this variable with five items with which the respondents rated their agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree) (sample item: ‘The mayor and council members design and implement local public policy’) (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

*Public participation in decision-making* reflects residents’ perceptions about the extent to which the local authority consults and collaborates with local stakeholders (adapted from Arnstein, 1969). We measured this variable with five items with which the respondents rated their agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree) (sample item: ‘The local authority makes efforts to elicit public participation in important decisions’) (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

*Satisfaction with local service* measures respondents’ satisfaction with a broad range of local services provided by the local authority. Examples include local education, welfare, transportation, call centres, employment and industrial areas, infrastructure maintenance, sanitation and the environment, online services, and community development (adapted from Kushner & Siegel, 2003; Vigoda, 2000). Although clusters may provide different services than local authorities and there are differences between clusters, we were interested in the residents’ experiences with services in their local authority. Thus, we measured 14 municipal services provided mainly by the local authority, whether it was independent, merged or acting in collaboration with the cluster. We assessed the participants’ responses on a five-point Likert scale (1 = totally dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.92.

*Trust in local government* measures respondents’ reliance on and trust in the three most important municipal leaders and bodies (the mayor, council members and chief executive officer – CEO) (adapted from Hosmer, 1995; Smith, 2010; Vigoda, 2000). We assessed their responses on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very little trust, 5 = very strong trust). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.88.

*Support for structural reform* measures respondents’ agreement with one of the structural reforms – merger, disaggregation and clustering – in accordance with the reform initiated in the local authority and the year it began. Although the reforms began in different years, we sampled well-established reforms and assumed that all had been in place long enough to have affected the residents. We used one item to measure this variable: ‘To what extent do you support the reform of mergers/disaggregation/clustering of local authorities that was initiated in \_\_\_ (year)?’ Respondents answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = to a very large extent).

For *control variables*, we controlled for variables at the individual level (gender, religion, age, education and income) and at the municipal level (socioeconomic status, peripheral status, ethnic national majority, number of residents and financial soundness). In addition, following Essuman and Akyeampong (2011), we assumed that various attributes of the local authorities might work in tandem to impede municipal performance. Thus, we used five municipal level control variables that were weighted, averaged and considered as a single variable called ‘local authority’s soundness’. We calculated this factor based on information from the Ministry of the Interior and the ICBS (2019). The five characteristics were (1) the financial stability of the local authority, (2) the sector: national majority/national minority (Jewish/non-Jewish), (3) the size of the population, (4) the socioeconomic cluster of the population and (5) the centre versus periphery cluster of

the local authority. All items were scored from 1 to 10, where 10 reflected the community with the most financial stability, a Jewish majority population, the largest population size, the highest socioeconomic status and the greatest access to business centres. The five scores were averaged to create a total soundness score for each local authority examined.

### Statistical procedures

We used the IBM SPSS 23.0 software package to analyse the data. After checking for internal consistency by means of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the descriptive statistics, we calculated the intercorrelations among the variables using Pearson's correlations. We tested all aspects of H1–H3 using independent sample  $t$ -tests. Hierarchical linear regressions allowed us to investigate the linear relationships of these hypotheses above and beyond predictors at the individual and municipal level. We tested all aspects of H4 using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests. In order to determine whether moderation effects could predict the local democracy and governance dimensions, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model #1; H5a–d) (Hayes, 2015).

## RESULTS

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations for the research variables and the control variables at the individual and municipal levels. The variance inflation factor (VIF) range quantifying the severity of multicollinearity was low (1.07–2.87), indicating that there was no multicollinearity in these data.

First, we tested all aspects of H1–H3 using independent sample  $t$ -tests. Our findings supported H1a. Independent  $t$ -tests revealed a significant difference ( $t_{d.f.=604} = -1.65, p < 0.10$ ) with respect to governability level, which was slightly lower among the residents of merged localities (mean = 2.81; SD = 1.08) than among residents of authorities that had not been merged (mean = 2.96; SD = 1.00) (Table 3). No differences were found for the other measures. Thus, there was no support for H1b, H1c or H1d.

Hypotheses H2a, H2b and H2d were supported. Independent  $t$ -tests revealed significant differences for governability level ( $t_{d.f.=520} = -2.58, p < 0.05$ ), public participation in decision-making ( $t_{d.f.=520} = -1.80, p < 0.10$ ) and trust ( $t_{d.f.=520} = -3.29, p < 0.01$ ), all of which were lower among the residents of disaggregated authorities (mean = 2.60, SD = 1.10; mean = 2.45, SD = 1.19; mean = 2.59, SD = 1.24, respectively). No difference between the groups was found for satisfaction with services. Thus, H2c was not supported.

Hypotheses H3a–H3d were not supported. Independent  $t$ -tests did not reveal any significant difference between clustered and non-clustered local authorities.

Second, we also tested all aspects of H1–H3 using hierarchical linear regressions. This time the analyses included all the participants. Thus, we compared the perceptions of residents living in structurally reformed local authorities of one kind such as mergers with those of residents living in all other structurally reformed local authorities (e.g., disaggregations and clustering) and local authorities that had not undergone any changes. We tested the effect of the structural reforms on local governance and democracy above and beyond the effects of the predictors at the individual (i.e., age, gender, education and income) and at the municipal level (the local authority's soundness, calculated as the average score of financial strength, ethnic affiliation, number of residents, socioeconomic status and peripheral status). We entered all these factors into the first step of the regression. In the second step, we entered two dummy variables: merged authorities (yes) and clustered authorities (yes). Thus, we conducted four hierarchical multiple regression analyses to predict perceptions about governability, participation in decision-making, satisfaction with local services and trust in local government. All models revealed significant results (Table 4).

**Table 2.** Multiple correlation matrix and descriptive statistics for the research variables (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in parentheses).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<i>Individual-level variables</i>													
1. Gender (female)	0.44	0.49											
2. Age	51.0	16.3	-0.011										
3. Education	13.7	3.7	0.016	-0.119**									
4. Income	2.6	1.3	-0.221**	0.043	0.374**								
5. Religion (Jewish)	0.45	0.49	0.203***	0.176***	0.254***	0.215***							
<i>Municipal-level variables</i>													
6. Local authority's soundness	3.6	1.8	0.183**	0.195**	0.304**	0.254**	0.863***						
<i>Research variables</i>													
7. Support for structural reform	3.19	1.6	-0.066*	0.025	0.025	0.030	0.122***	0.076*					
8. Governability	2.96	1.1	0.159**	-0.023	0.024	-0.029	0.214***	0.183**	0.169**	(0.90)			
9. Participation in decision-making	2.74	1.2	0.166**	0.025	-0.028	-0.033	0.188**	0.178**	0.143**	0.753**	(0.94)		
10. Satisfaction with local services	2.92	0.9	0.138**	0.049	0.030	-0.012	0.208***	0.230**	0.170**	0.716**	0.739**	(0.92)	
11. Trust in local government	2.95	1.2	0.091**	0.017	0.014	-0.002	0.147***	0.164**	0.160**	0.739**	0.736**	0.752**	(0.88)

Note:  $N = 1733$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



**Table 3.** Summary of independent sample *t*-tests for the H1–H3 sets of hypotheses; one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the H4 set of hypotheses; and moderation analysis (PROCESS model 1) for the H5 set of hypotheses.

Testing variable	H1		H2		H3		H4		H5	
	Merged	Merged	Disaggregated	Disaggregated	Clustered	Clustered	Disaggregated	Disaggregated	Support	Support
Dependent variable	<	<	<	<	>	>	>	>	↓	↓
	Not merged (t-test)	All other (hierarchical regression)	Merged (t-test)	All other (hierarchical regression)	Not clustered (t-test)	All other (hierarchical regression)	Merged > clustered	Merged	Disaggregated	Clustered
a: Governability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
b: Participation in decision-making	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
c: Satisfaction with local services				✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
d: Trust in local government		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: ✓ = Hypothesis confirmed.

**Table 4.** Hierarchical multiple regression analysis (standardized coefficients) for predicting local governance and local democracy.

Predictors	Dependent variable = trust in local government		Dependent variable = satisfaction with local services		Dependent variable = participation in decision-making		Dependent variable = governance	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Constant	2.680***	2.609***	2.517***	2.454***	2.440***	2.369***	2.651***	2.568***
<i>Individual level</i>								
Gender (female)	0.053*	0.049*	0.095***	0.091***	0.130***	0.127***	0.103***	0.099***
Age	0.008	0.009	0.017	0.017	-0.010	-0.007	-0.022	-0.019
Education	0.000	-0.003	-0.019	-0.022	-0.039	-0.042	-0.013	-0.017
Income	-0.047	-0.038	-0.043	-0.034	-0.030	-0.021	-0.049	-0.038
<i>Municipal level</i>								
Local authority's soundness	0.129***	0.144***	0.212***	0.225***	0.184***	0.206***	0.204***	0.229***
<i>Structural reforms</i>								
Merged (yes)		-0.043*		-0.030		-0.086***		-0.091***
Clustered (yes)		0.091***		0.100***		0.076**		0.106***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.023	0.035	0.062	0.074	0.058	0.073	0.058	0.081
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.020	0.030	0.059	0.070	0.055	0.069	0.055	0.077
F	7.674***	8.372***	21.524***	18.621***	20.030***	18.511***	20.207***	20.722***
$\Delta R^2$		0.012		0.12		0.016		0.23
$\Delta F$		9.908***		10.726**		13.924**		20.792**

Note: N = 1646; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

**Table 5.** Moderation analysis (PROCESS model 1) of support for structural reform on structural reform with local governance and local democracy (H5).

	Dependent variable = Governance			Dependent variable = Participation in decision-making			Dependent variable = Satisfaction with local services			Dependent variable = Trust in local government		
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI	Model VII	Model VIII	Model IX	Model X	Model XI	Model XII
	$R^2 = 0.030^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.050^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.035^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.019^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.026^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.021^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.029^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.035^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.030^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.025^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.042^{***}$	$R^2 = 0.028^{***}$
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Constant	2.764***	2.665***	2.577***	2.591***	2.503***	2.403***	2.699***	2.660***	2.582***	2.695***	2.650***	2.551***
Support for structural reform	0.071***	0.119***	0.105***	0.056*	0.094***	0.094***	0.068***	0.098***	0.097***	0.082***	0.117***	0.112***
Merged	-0.440***			-0.439**			-0.271*			-0.335*		
Merged × Support merger	0.118**			0.116**			0.119**			0.112**		
Disaggregated		-0.189			-0.244			-0.179			-0.289	
Disaggregated × Support		-0.080*			-0.033			-0.032			-0.046	
disaggregation			0.605***			0.587**			0.487**			0.518**
Clustered			-0.089*			-0.099*			-0.083*			-0.083
Support clustering												
Simple slopes for support in the structural reform = mean ± 1SD												
1 SD	-0.322*	-0.269***	0.516***	-0.323**	0.488***	0.488***	-0.152**		0.404***		-0.152**	
Mean	-0.085	-0.429***	0.339***	-0.092	0.289***	0.289***	0.085		0.238***		0.085	
+ 1 SD	0.152	-0.589***	0.162***	0.139	0.090***	0.090***	0.322		0.072		0.322	

Note: N = 1733; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

In the first steps, women had more positive perceptions about local governability and participation in decision-making. They were also more satisfied with local services and trusted the local authority to a greater extent. In addition, respondents who lived in relatively sound local authorities (large, Jewish authorities of high socioeconomic status located close to the centre of the country and with strong financial stability) also had more positive perceptions about local governability, participation in decision-making, satisfaction with local services and trust in the local authority.

More importantly, in the second step, all four models that included the structural reforms were significantly above or below the results at the individual and local authority levels. In local authorities that were clustered, participants reported higher levels of governability, participation in decision-making, satisfaction with local services and trust in the local authority, compared with all other participants. In contrast, in local authorities that were merged, participants reported lower levels of governability, participation in decision-making and trust in the local authority, compared with all other participants. The regression models thus supported H1–H3 to some extent. The only exception was H1c, which was not supported.

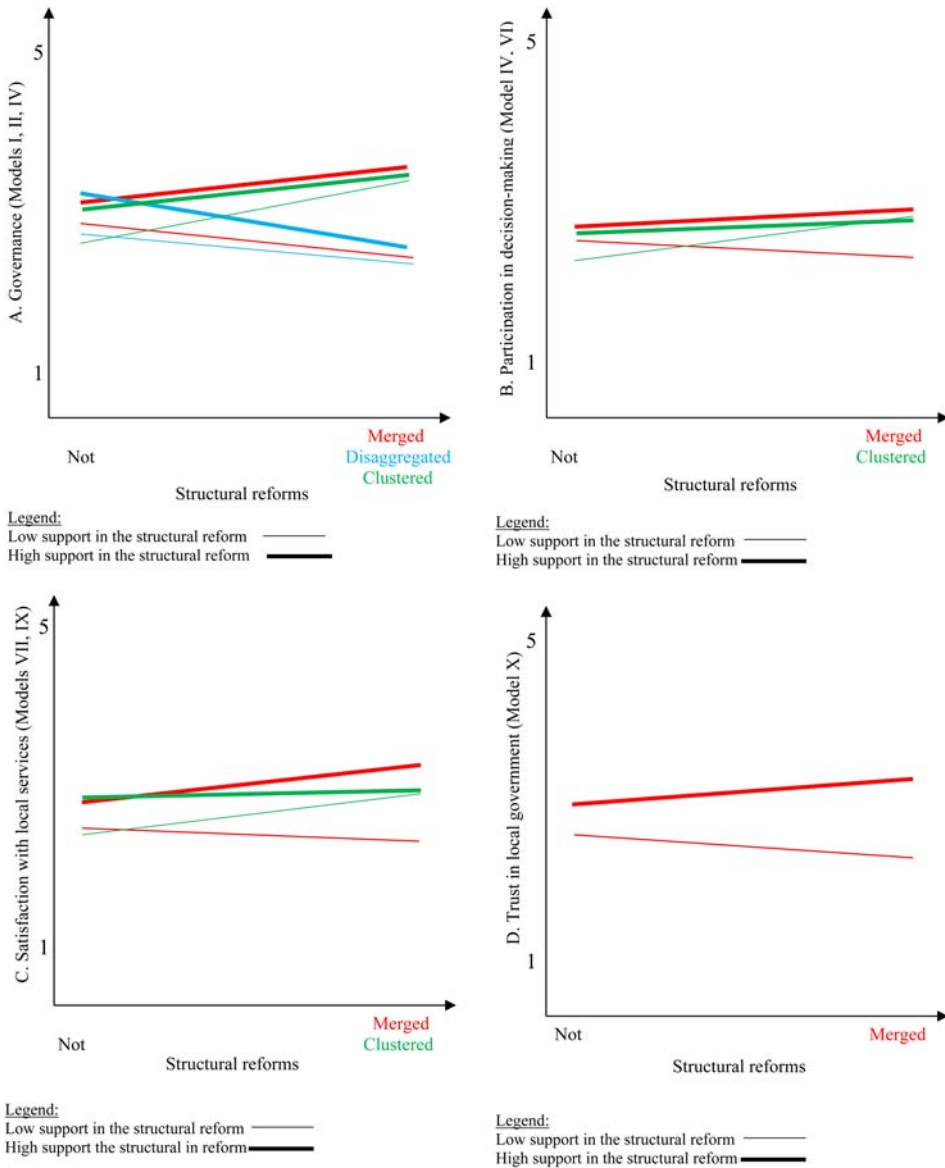
Third, the findings supported all aspects of H4. One-way ANOVAs that included respondents living in local authorities that had gone through a structural reform revealed a significant difference between the three reforms with respect to the four variables: governability level ( $F_{d.f.=971} = 30.04, p < 0.001$ ); public participation in decision-making ( $F_{d.f.=971} = 15.91, p < 0.001$ ); satisfaction with services ( $F_{d.f.=971} = 14.39, p < 0.001$ ); and trust in the local authority ( $F_{d.f.=971} = 18.77, p < 0.001$ ). Tukey's test for post-hoc analysis found the highest levels of all four variables ( $p < 0.001$ – $0.05$ ) in the clustered authorities compared with the merged authorities, which exhibited higher levels than the disaggregated authorities: governability (mean = 3.24, SD = 0.96 > mean = 2.81, SD = 1.08 > mean = 2.60, SD = 1.10, respectively); public participation in decision-making (mean = 2.96, SD = 1.13 > mean = 2.59, SD = 1.18 > mean = 2.45, SD = 1.19, respectively); satisfaction with local services (mean = 3.12, SD = 0.93 > mean = 2.91, SD = 1.03 > mean = 2.69, SD = 0.98, respectively); and trust in the local authority (mean = 3.17, SD = 1.12 > mean = 2.86, SD = 1.20 > mean = 2.59, SD = 1.24, respectively).

We also conducted an additional set of four one-way ANOVAs that included all respondents who lived in local authorities that had not gone through any structural reform. These residents had more positive assessments of the local authority's governability and participation in decision-making than those of residents who lived in merged and disaggregated local authorities. In addition, residents who lived in local authorities that had not undergone any type of reform were more satisfied with the local authority's services and had more trust in it than residents who lived in disaggregated local authorities.<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, our final hypotheses, H5a–H5d, posited that support for structural reforms would have a moderating effect on local governance and democracy. As expected, support for structural reforms emerged as a significant moderator in eight models. Based on Hayes (2015) PROCESS (model #1) macro for SPSS, we used the sample mean, one standard deviation above the mean, and one standard deviation below the mean to represent moderate, high and low support for structural reforms, respectively.

As indicated in Table 5, starting with *governance* (Figure 1a), this analysis revealed that mergers were associated with strong perceptions about local governability only among those who strongly supported the merger ( $\beta = 0.118; p < 0.01$ ) (model I). Disaggregation was associated with lower levels of perceived governance as residents' support for disaggregation increased ( $\beta = -0.080; p < 0.05$ ) (model II). Clustering was associated with strong perceptions about local governance at all levels of support for the clustering reform. However, this association weakened as the level of support increased ( $\beta = -0.089; p < 0.05$ ) (model III).

An analysis of our results revealed two significant models regarding perceptions about *participation in decision-making* (Figure 1b). Mergers were associated with strong perceptions about participation in decision-making only among those who strongly supported the merger



**Figure 1.** Moderation effect of structural reform on local governance and local democracy by support for structural reform (H5). (colour online only)

( $\beta = 0.116$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (model IV). Clustering was associated with high levels of participation in decision-making at all levels of support for the clustering reform. However, this association weakened as the level of support increased ( $\beta = -0.099$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) (model VI).

An analysis of our results also revealed two significant models regarding *satisfaction with local services* (Figure 1c). Mergers were associated with more satisfaction with local services only among those who exhibited medium to high levels of support for the merger ( $\beta = 0.119$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (model VII). Clustering was associated with high levels of satisfaction with local services at all levels of support for the clustering reform. However, this association weakened as the level of support increased ( $\beta = -0.083$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) (model IX).

Finally, the analysis predicting *trust in local government* (Figure 1d) revealed one significant model. Mergers were associated with more trust in local government only among those who exhibited medium to high levels of support for the merger ( $\beta = 0.112$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (model X).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As the recent challenges and pressure put on local authorities to reshape themselves to respond to jurisdictional fragmentation increased, local governments have gone through multilevel governance reforms and considered structural reforms of various kinds. Hence, as scholars such as Drew et al. (2019), Ebinger et al. (2019), Storper (2014) and Reingewertz and Serritzlew (2019) have suggested, it is more important than ever to consider and adopt structural reforms in local government in a balanced and comprehensive manner. Such reforms have critical implications for the rights and perspectives of communities and individuals regarding local governance and democracy, not just economic considerations. Our study answers the call to shed light on the advantages as well as the costs to governance and democracy inherent in the structural reforms of merging, disaggregating and clustering local authorities, while taking into account the possible impact of public choice on such reforms (e.g., Papadopoulos, 2005; Storper, 2014).

Our empirical findings consist of two main sets of comparisons, between residents of local authorities that have gone and not gone through a structural reform and between residents of local authorities that have gone through different forms of structural reforms.

The first comparison included control groups, which enabled us to test whether the reform affected the residents' assessments about local governance and democracy. In general, significant differences were found only in disaggregated authorities – where residents reported lower levels of governability, participation and trust – and in merged localities – where residents reported lower levels of governability. In other words, none of the local structural reforms – mergers, disaggregations or clustering – resulted in more positive perceptions of local governance and democracy compared with equivalent residents that had not undergone such changes. Of the three structural reforms, clustering was the only one that did not have a negative effect on residents' perceptions regarding local governance and democracy. This finding provides an initial answer to Papadopoulos (2005) and Storper (2014) about the relationship between multilevel governance reforms and their consequences for governance, democracy and public choice. Our findings indicate that multilevel governance in the form of structural reforms has difficulty improving residents' perceptions about local governance and democracy and in some cases can actually exacerbate them. These findings accord with scholars who criticize multilevel governance on the grounds that it deprives citizens of their democratic rights (Bache et al., 2016; Bel & Warner, 2015; Drew et al., 2019; Fitjar, 2019; Kooiman, 2008; Kushner & Siegel, 2003; Lassen & Serritzlew, 2011; Reingewertz, 2012; Strebel, 2019; Zeedan, 2017).

The second set of comparisons revealed that residents who lived in local authorities that had gone through structural reforms were more likely to report variations in their perceptions about governability, participation in decision-making, satisfaction with local services and trust in the local authority compared with all other residents. This finding is interesting because the local authorities that were part of the structural reforms included poor, moderate and well performing municipalities. Of the reforms, merging local authorities was usually, but not always, associated with drops in residents' perceptions about local governance, participation in decision-making, satisfaction with local services and trust in local government. However, those residents who strongly favoured the merger voiced positive assessments of all these measures.

Disaggregation was associated with lower levels of governance. Moreover, the more support residents showed for the disaggregation, the more critical they were of local governance. In contrast with previous studies that criticized multilevel governance, claiming that it harms democracy and makes local authorities less accountable (Bache et al., 2016), the clustering of local

authorities was associated with higher levels of perceived governance, participation in decision-making and satisfaction with local services. Nevertheless, the more support residents showed for clustering, the more their perceptions were attenuated.

Taken as a whole, these findings have several theoretical implications. First, contrary to previous studies (e.g., Boyne, 1995; Hansen, 2015), the current study to some extent unravelled the bureaucratic–democratic paradox (Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2014). Multilevel governance reforms have their downsides in terms of public opinion. Nevertheless, if multilevel governance reforms are necessary, the data show that the benefits of such reforms are not dependent upon the reform purely in terms of ‘financial flow’ or ‘advantages of size’. Rather, these benefits depend on what can be called ‘community flow’ or ‘consolidation advantages’, that is, on the dynamics of public support for the reform. The clearest case was that among those who supported the merger, the dependent variables all emerged as relatively high. Moreover, those who were in favour of disaggregation and apparently felt that the merger was harmful, as reflected in their perceptions that the local authority had little governability. In the case of clustering as well, support for the reform also had a significant effect. However, as we predicted, the reform’s success was liable to be interpreted as eroding governability due to the transfer of power to a super-authority regional organization. Thus, it was precisely those who had high expectations and supported clustering who were to some extent disappointed, as reflected in somewhat lower levels of perceived governability, participation in decision-making and satisfaction with services.

Second, this paper provides empirical evidence and theoretical support for the complex transition from local government to local governance, new regionalism and multilevel governance as an ecosystem. In line with the descriptions of many other researchers (e.g., Deas & Ward, 2000; Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Osborne et al., 2013; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009) regarding bottom-up growth, local autonomy and place-based policy, we found a relatively clear preference for the governable and democratic products of structural reform based on principles of voluntary coalitions, and cooperation over competition. Hence, the relatively high measures for governance and democracy found among residents of clustered authorities cast doubt on the effectiveness of the merger as a structural reform. Even worse, it seems that merging authorities without recruiting public support will lead to bitterness and disappointment. This finding accords with Storper (2014) who claimed that social voice in the area of governance might provide a clear view of what the public wants and is willing to accept.

We must add the caveat that some merged local authorities went through crises before the mergers took place. Furthermore, in general, the mergers were centralized, politicized and did not include appropriate professional guidance from organizational, financial and community experts. In other words, at least from the public opinion perspective, the merger reform reflects the ‘disadvantages of size’ while the clustering reform shows the ‘advantages of inclusion’.

Third, this study is the first to use empirical methods to investigate the results of reversing reforms. While disaggregation is possible from a procedural perspective, the cost of such a step is devastating with respect to local governance and democracy. In effect, this policy is a triple sequence of failures and crises. In accordance with Zeedan (2017), we demonstrated that residents who lived in disaggregated authorities paid the heaviest civil, community and municipal price. Furthermore, even though the disaggregation originated from a bottom-up initiative, the crisis in governability harmed not only the local authorities but also their relationship with the central government. Based on this result, we suggest that when the local authority is in crisis and a merger is imposed quickly and without public support, the best solution might be to try to improve the merger slowly and with professional input rather than disaggregating it completely.

In conclusion, the value of place, territory and boundary will continue to differ from one point in the urban space to another. Hence, we expect to see contradictory trends. Place, territory and boundary will continue to be the source of struggles for power and control. At the same time, they will continue to serve as an incentive for connection and partnership. Central–local territoriality

(Beeri et al., 2020) – that is, the political struggle between central and local, local and local, and local and the residents – will continue to shape structural reforms in local government and the reciprocal relations in space, whether forced from the top down and due to external circumstances or whether through bottom-up processes and due to intrinsic changes. Ultimately, however, it is the public's opinion regarding these reforms that will determine whether they will be assessed as promoting or hurting local governance and democracy.

Finally, no study is free of limitations. First, beyond structural characteristics, our control group is not exactly the same as the group in which reforms were applied. Apparently, the local authorities in the control group were in a better position and did not need structural reform. Second, although support for structural reform is an independent factor, and far from having multicollinearity with the variables of governance and democracy, there is still some fear that it reflects a self-fulfilling prophecy of local authorities.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## NOTE

1. The full table can be obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

## ORCID

Itai Beeri  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8731-9772>

## REFERENCES

- Agranoff, R., & McGuire, M. (2003). *Collaborative public management. New strategies for local governments*. Georgetown University Press.
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- Bache, I., Bartle, I., & Flinders, M. (2016). Multi-level governance. In Christopher, Ansell, & Jacob, Torfing (Eds.). *Handbook on theories of governance* (Chap. 40, pp. 486–498). Edward Elgar.
- Beeri, I. (2020). Lack of reform in Israel local government and its impact on modern developments in public management. *Public Management Review*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1823138>
- Beeri, I., Aharon-Gutman, M., & Luzer, J. (2020). Central–local territoriality – But in moderation: Are boundary commissions a mechanism for preserving and minimizing spatial inequality? *Megamot*, 55(2), 67–96.
- Beeri, I., & Magnússon, M. A. S. (2019). Governance relations in small nations: Competition vs. cooperation and the triple role of big cities. *Lex Localis – Journal of Local Self-Government*, 17(2), 265–282. <https://doi.org/10.4335/17.2.267-284>
- Beeri, I., & Navot, D. (2013). Local political corruption: Potential structural malfunctions at the central–local, local–local and intra-local levels. *Public Management Review*, 15(5), 712–739. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2012.707682>
- Beeri, I., & Razin, E. (Eds.). (2015). *Local democracy in Israel: Decentralization, localism, participation and local politics*. Floersheimer Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- Beeri, I., Uster, A., & Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2018). Does performance management relate to good governance? A study of its relationship with citizens' satisfaction with and trust in Israeli local government. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2018.1436074>



- Beeri, I., & Yuval, F. (2013). New localism and neutralizing local government: Has anyone bothered asking the public for its opinion? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(2), 623–653. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mut031>.
- Bel, G., & Warner, M. E. (2015). Inter-municipal cooperation and costs: Expectations and evidence. *Public Administration*, 93(1), 52–67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12104>
- Blatter, J. K. (2006). Geographic scale and functional scope in metropolitan governance reform: Theory and evidence from Germany. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 28(2), 121–150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0735-2166.2006.00264.x>
- Blesse, S., & Baskaran, T. (2016). Do municipal mergers reduce costs? Evidence from a German federal state. *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 59, 54–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2016.04.003>
- Boyne, G. (1995). Population size and economies of scale in local government. *Policy & Politics*, 23(3), 213–222. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557395782453446>
- Council of Europe (CoE). (2010). *United Nations development programme (UNDP), local government initiative (LGI) of the open society*.
- Deas, I., & Ward, K. G. (2000). From the ‘new localism’ to the ‘new regionalism’? The implications of regional development agencies for city–regional relations. *Political Geography*, 19(3), 273–292. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(99\)00085-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(99)00085-2)
- DeVellis, R. F. (2016). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (Vol. 26). Sage.
- Drew, J., Razin, E., & Andrews, R. (2019). Rhetoric in municipal amalgamations: A comparative analysis. *Local Government Studies*, 45(5), 748–767. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1530657>
- Ebinger, F., & Bogumil, J. (2016). Von den Blitzreformen zur neuen Behutsamkeit Verwaltungspolitik und Verwaltungsreformen in den Bundesländern. In A. Hildebrandt & F. Wolf (Eds.), *Politik der Bundesländer* (pp. 139–160). VS.
- Ebinger, F., Kuhlmann, S., & Bogumil, J. (2019). Territorial reforms in Europe: Effects on administrative performance and democratic participation. *Local Government Studies*, 45(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1530660>
- Enderlein, H., Walti, S., & Zurn, M. (2010). *Handbook on multi-level governance*. Edward Elgar.
- Essuman, A., & Akyeampong, K. (2011). Decentralisation policy and practice in Ghana: The promise and reality of community participation in education in rural communities. *Journal of Education Policy*, 26(4), 513–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2011.554999>
- Fitjar, R. D. (2019). Unrequited metropolitan mergers: Suburban rejection of cities in the Norwegian municipal reform. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2019.1602076>
- Fox, C. J., & Miller, H. T. (1996). *Postmodern public administration: Toward discourse*. Sage.
- Garcea, J., & Lesage, E. C., Jr. (Eds.). (2005). *Municipal reform in Canada: Reconfiguration, re-empowerment and rebalancing*. Oxford University Press.
- George, B., & Pandey, S. K. (2017). We know the Yin – But where is the Yang? Toward a balanced approach on common source bias in public administration scholarship. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 37(2), 245–270. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X17698189>
- Gyuris, F. (2016). *Political discourse of spatial disparities*. Springer International.
- Hanes, N. (2015). Amalgamation impacts on local public expenditures in Sweden. *Local Government Studies*, 41(1), 63–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2013.869496>
- Hansen, S. (2015). The democratic costs of size: How increasing size affects citizen satisfaction with local government. *Political Studies*, 63(2), 373–389. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12096>
- Hayes, A. F. (2015). The process macro for SPSS and SAS.
- Hefetz, A., Warner, M. E., & Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2012). Privatization and inter-municipal contracting: The US local government experience 1992–2007. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 30(4), 675–692. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c11166>
- Hindi, T. N. (2018). *Synergies in science-based regional innovation systems (RIS)* [Doctoral dissertation, The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology]. Technion Library. [https://technion.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/972TEC\\_INST/q1jq5o/alma9926521889703971](https://technion.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/972TEC_INST/q1jq5o/alma9926521889703971)

- Hood, C. (1991). A public management for all seasons? *Public Administration*, 69(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1991.tb00779.x>
- Hooghe, E. A. E. B., & Marks, G. W. (2004). Contrasting visions of multi-level governance. *Multi-level Governance*, 15–30.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2016). *Community, scale, and regional governance: A post functionalist theory of governance* (Vol. 2). Oxford University Press.
- Hosmer, L. T. (1995). Trust: The connecting link between organizational theory and philosophical ethics. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(2), 379–403. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9507312923>
- Houwelingen, P. V. (2017). Political participation and municipal population size: A meta-study. *Local Government Studies*, 43(3), 408–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2017.1300147>
- Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS). (2019). <https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/subjects/Pages/Local-Authorities-Physical-and-Financial-Data-Definitions-and-Explanations.aspx>
- Jonas, A. E. (2012). Region and place: Regionalism in question. *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(2), 263–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510394118>
- Kersting, N., & Vetter, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Reforming local government in Europe: Closing the gap between democracy and efficiency*. Leske Budrich.
- Kooiman, J. (2008). Exploring the concept of governability. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 10(2), 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980802028107>
- Kooiman, J., Bavinck, M., Chuenpagdee, R., Mahon, R., & Pullin, R. (2008). Interactive governance and governability: An introduction. *The Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies*, 7(1), 1–11. <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.293273>
- Krippendorff, K. (2005). The social construction of public opinion. In E. Wienand, J. Westerbarkey, & A. Scholl (Eds.), *Kommunikation über kommunikation* (pp. 129–149). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Kuhlmann, S., & Bouckaert, G. (2016). *Local public sector reforms in times of crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kushner, J., & Siegel, D. (2003). Citizens' attitudes toward municipal amalgamation in three Ontario municipalities. *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*, 26(1), 49–60.
- Lassen, D. D., & Serritzlew, S. (2011). Jurisdiction size and local democracy: Evidence on internal political efficiency from large-scale municipal reform. *American Political Science Review*, 105(2), 238–258. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305541100013X>
- Marks, G. (1993). Structural policy and multilevel governance in the EC. *The Maastricht Debates and Beyond*, 392.
- Marsh, B., Parnell, A. M., & Joyner, A. M. (2010). Institutionalization of racial inequality in local political geographies. *Urban Geography*, 31(5), 691–709. <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.31.5.691>
- Martin, R. (2015). Rebalancing the spatial economy: The challenge for regional theory. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 3(3), 235–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2015.1064825>
- Martins, M. R. (1995). Size of municipalities, efficiency, and citizen participation: A cross-European perspective. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 13(4), 441–458. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c130441>
- Migali, G., Rizzo, L., & Barcelona, I. E. B. (2017). Does inter-municipal cooperation promote efficiency gains? Evidence from Italian municipal unions.
- Mill, J. S. (1861). *Considerations on representative government*. Harper & Brothers, 1862. <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook>
- Oates, W. E. (1972). *Fiscal federalism*. Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2005). *Building competitive regions – Strategies and governance*. OECD Publishing.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2014). *OECD regional outlook: Regions and cities: Where policies and people meet*. OECD Publishing.
- Osborne, S. P., Radnor, Z., & Nasi, G. (2013). A new theory for public service management? Toward a (public) service-dominant approach. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 43(2), 135–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074012466935>
- Paasi, A. (2003). Region and place: Regional identity in question. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27(4), 475–485. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132503ph439pr>

- Papadopoulos, Y. (2005). Taking stock of multi-level governance networks. *European Political Science*, 4(3), 316–327. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210032>
- Peters, B. G., & Pierre, J. (2004). Multi-level governance and democracy: A Faustian bargain? *Multi-level Governance*, 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199259259.003.0005>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2012). Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63(1), 539–569. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100452>
- Reingewertz, Y. (2012). Do municipal amalgamations work? Evidence from municipalities in Israel. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 72(2–3), 240–251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2012.06.001>
- Reingewertz, Y., & Beerli, I. (2018). How effective is central enforcement? Evidence from convened committees in failing local authorities. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 36(2), 357–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654417713494>
- Reingewertz, Y., & Serritzlew, S. (2019). Special issue on municipal amalgamations: Guest editors' introduction. *Local Government Studies*, 45(5), 603–610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2019.1615465>
- Shah, N. (2012). The territorial trap of the territorial trap: Global transformation and the problem of the state's two territories. *International Political Sociology*, 6(1), 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2011.00144.x>
- Smith, D. M. (1974). Who gets what where, and how: A welfare focus for human geography. *Geography (Sheffield)*, 59(4), 289–297. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40568285>
- Smith, N. (2010). *Uneven development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. 3rd ed. The University of Georgia Press.
- Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2009). Making governance networks effective and democratic through metagovernance. *Public Administration*, 87(2), 234–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01753.x>
- Soukopova, J., Nemeč, J., Matějová, L., & Struk, M. (2014). Municipality size and local public services: Do economies of scale exist? *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 7(2), 151–171. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nispa-2014-0007>
- Steiner, R. (2003). The causes spread and effects of intermunicipal cooperation and municipal merges in Switzerland. *Public Management Review*, 5(4), 551–571. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1471903032000178581>
- Stoker, G. (1998). Governance as theory: Five propositions. *International Social Science Journal*, 50(155), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2451.00106>
- Storper, M. (2014). Governing the large metropolis. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 2(2), 115–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2014.919874>
- Strebel, M. A. (2019). Why voluntary municipal merger projects fail: Evidence from popular votes in Switzerland. *Local Government Studies*, 45(5), 654–675. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2019.1584557>
- Van Ryzin, G. G. (2004). Expectations, performance, and citizen satisfaction with urban services. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 23(3), 433–448. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20020>
- The Committee for the Promotion of Regionalism in Israel. (2019). *The reform of regional governance in Israel*. Israel Ministry of Interior.
- Vigoda, E. (2000). Are you being served? The responsiveness of public administration to citizens' demands: An empirical examination in Israel. *Public Administration*, 78(1), 165–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00198>
- Vigoda-Gadot, E., & Cohen, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Citizenship and management in public administration: Integrating behavioral theories and managerial thinking*. Edward Elgar.
- Vigoda-Gadot, E., & Mizrahi, S. (2014). *Managing democracies in turbulent times. Trust, performance, and governance in modern states*. Springer.
- Warner, M. E. (2006). Inter-municipal cooperation in the US: A regional governance solution? *Urban Public Economics Review*, 6, 221–240. <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=50400609>
- Zaidan, A. (2021). *Municipal reforms and their impact on local governance and democracy* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Haifa]. The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Library at the University of Haifa. [https://haifa-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1ch98gv/972HAI\\_MAIN\\_ALMA11235448190002791](https://haifa-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1ch98gv/972HAI_MAIN_ALMA11235448190002791)
- Zeedan, R. (2017). Bigger but not always better: Size and democracy in Israeli amalgamated local governments. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 39(5), 711–728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2016.1262701>