



Full Length Article

Renewable energy expansion or the preservation of national energy sovereignty? Norwegian renewable energy policy meets resource nationalism

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A B S T R A C T

Proponents of renewable energy often argue that renewables bolster national energy sovereignty. Most of the scholarship however focuses on security of supply, imports and enhanced domestic production, not on exports. How does *exporting* renewable energy resources affect sovereignty? Here, we turn our attention to Norway, a country that is already self-sufficient in renewables, and where renewable energy expansion is primarily directed at exports. Drawing on resource nationalist scholarship we empirically scrutinize key Norwegian renewable energy debates and show how the Norwegian renewable energy debates do not include notions of renewables bolstering sovereignty. On the contrary, they vary between portraying the relationship between renewables and sovereignty as a non-relationship, where renewables are immaterial to sovereignty, or an adverse relationship, where renewable expansion is perceived to weaken, rather than strengthen, sovereignty. The fear of being locked into an asymmetric dependency relationship with an EU that gradually wrests away Norwegian sovereignty over natural resources triggers resource nationalist imaginaries and is a powerful brake on renewable energy expansion. Resource nationalism is also fueled by claims of green grabbing and attacks on local self-determination. Our findings signal that renewable expansion may trigger political and popular backlashes, and that resource nationalist claims about abstained sovereignty may constitute considerable obstacles to renewable energy transitions.

1. Introduction

Renewable energy deployment receives massive attention as a solution to states' energy insufficiencies, and proponents of renewables – scholars, politicians, environmentalists – often argue that renewable energy bolsters energy sovereignty (e.g., Anghel et al., 2020; GEA, 2012; Thaler and Hofmann, 2022). We refer to this as the default argument of a positive relationship between renewable energy and energy sovereignty. Because renewable energy is spatially extensive and relatively evenly distributed, unlike fossil energy renewables provide opportunities for energy insecure countries to become energy self-sufficient (Blondeel et al., 2021; Paravantis and Kontoulis, 2020). Consequently, proponents argue, energy insecure countries should pursue renewable energy policies aimed at increasing national self-sufficiency and decreasing dependence on imported energy. This will enhance their energy sovereignty, i.e., their ability and authority to control, regulate and manage their own energy (GEA, 2012; NEU, 2019). The argument has immediate empirical relevance; responding to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, most European Union (EU) countries have announced significant increases in the deployment of renewables to strengthen national energy

sovereignty (Czyżak et al., 2022).

Illustrating the default argument, the *International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis* (IIASA) has a simple recommendation: To strengthen your sovereignty, install more renewables (GEA, 2012, p. 350). The recommendation is however premised upon energy needs not already being met, and energy insecurity being a generic condition. Indeed, behind the default argument sits a focus on *increasing domestic renewable energy production* or *securing reliable access to renewable energy* to achieve energy sovereignty. Less attentiveness is paid to the scenario where energy needs are adequately met, and where increased renewable energy production will lead to increased energy exports. Indeed, there is very little to be found on the association between sovereignty and renewable energy exports. One thorough treatment of energy sovereignty, by IIASA, devotes 60 pages to energy and security, but less than half a page to energy exports, without a single line about renewable energy exports (GEA, 2012). Meanwhile, the importance of understanding how also renewable energy exports impact energy sovereignty increases as states strengthen their renewable generation and cross-border interconnector capacities.

We set out to respond to the following question: How does *exporting*

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renewable energy affect energy sovereignty? While our focus is on *perceptions* of sovereignty, we acknowledge that perceptions are also rooted in *actual* sovereignty issues. Responding to the above question, we look to the case of Norwegian renewable energy exports, which we show fails to support the default argument. Instead of claims of strengthened energy sovereignty, the Norwegian public discourse often runs counter to the default argument, and domestic resistance against renewable exports is increasing (Moe et al., 2021). Through an analysis of three core debates underlying Norway's renewable energy exports (the relationship with the EU, subsea cables, and wind power) we demonstrate that this resistance has to do with perceptions of abstained – not gained – sovereignty. All three debates are represented by actors perceiving the relationship between renewable energy and energy sovereignty in different ways. Each debate encompasses analytically separable but intertwined issue-complexes that individually and combined illustrate why renewable energy exports is not automatically conducive to perceptions of strengthened energy sovereignty. Contrarily, the three debates contain two claims that challenge the default argument about renewables and sovereignty.

First, we discern claims indicating a perceived non-relationship between renewables and energy sovereignty, where increases in renewable installations are immaterial to and do not have any perceived impact on sovereignty. In the second and increasingly important claim, renewable exports *jeopardize* Norwegian energy sovereignty. This claim represents an *adverse relationship* between renewable energy exports and sovereignty; renewable exports is perceived to weaken rather than strengthen sovereignty. The claim is linked to the fact that in Norway, renewable exports increase interdependence with the EU, and trigger accusations of “green grabbing”.

To enhance the understanding of the association between renewable energy exports and energy sovereignty, we draw on insights from scholarship on resource nationalism (e.g., Childs, 2016; Koch & Perreault, 2019; Kohl & Farthing, 2012). The literature on resource nationalism is a useful theoretical hook because it sheds light on the intricacies of sovereignty in natural resource contexts, through recognizing how national and sub-national discourses affect political and economic thinking about energy security, resource management and distribution. In Norway, renewable energy exports have triggered a resource nationalist discourse with claims about harmed sovereignty.¹

Norway may appear unique. It is more self-sufficient in renewable energy and more energy secure than almost any country (e.g., DEA, 2020; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2018). More importantly, with its network of interconnectors and subsea cables, Norway is ahead of most European countries with respect to the cross-border transmission capacity necessary for renewable power exchange. Here, Norway offers a timely glimpse into a decarbonized future where traditional and state-centric conceptions of sovereignty will face major challenges as European countries strengthen their grids and increase their cross-border interconnector capacity (European Commission, 2019; Moe et al., 2022). While superficially atypical, the Norwegian case suggests future pressures other states may face as their green transitions unfold. Our findings specifically suggest that accommodating sovereignty concerns may be pivotal to the success of energy transitions.

Our findings build on a wide range of primary sources. We rely upon publicly available governmental and parliamentary documents and political party programs. We also draw on semi-structured interviews with 19 national politicians and major power-sector, industry, and environmental stakeholders, conducted in 2018 and 2020. We have also used the online media database Atekst to identify discussions in Norwegian media.

We present our theoretical approach in section 2. Section 3 describes Norway's renewable energy situation and the key actors of the

renewable energy debates. Section 4 explores these three contentious debates, and section 5 discusses the theoretical and empirical implications of our findings. Section 6 concludes that the resource nationalist discourse in the Norwegian renewable energy debate contains no claims of gained sovereignty, but rather vary between sovereignty being unimportant or abstained.

2. Theoretical approach

Scholarship on energy security has typically subsumed energy sovereignty under the heading energy security: If there is energy security, there will be energy sovereignty (Cherp & Jewell, 2011; GEA, 2012). Thus, it is *energy security* and not *energy sovereignty* that is explained. Real-world developments within and beyond energy transition debates however suggest that energy sovereignty is increasingly important for explaining the direction of renewable energy transitions. Examples of energy sovereignty debates abound: In Latin America, where reclamation of natural resources is part of regaining national energy sovereignty; in the Trump administration's emphasis on energy dominance; in arguments for BREXIT; and in EU documents on strategic sovereignty, recently intensified by the war in Ukraine (e.g., Balafas & Fakiolas, 2020; Kohl & Farthing, 2012; The Conversation, 2016; Westphal, 2021). The war in Ukraine has made the imperative of preserving a modicum of energy sovereignty painfully clear to most European countries. EU countries have cut themselves off from Russian petroleum with very differing degrees of eagerness, but through the present sanctions regime, all states except Hungary have opted for energy sovereignty over the reliability of supply that Russian gas provided. In Europe, in line with the default argument, enhancing energy sovereignty involves a push for increased renewable energy generation and interconnector capacity (e.g., Anghel et al., 2020; Czyżak et al., 2022).

The growing literature on resource nationalism provides a suitable springboard for examining the links between renewables and sovereignty. Resource nationalism is a political discourse about “how a state and its population should manage and distribute profits derived from natural resources” (Koch & Perreault, 2019, p. 611), including questions about how benefits and harms associated with energy are distributed, and the involvement of foreign actors. The common argument of resource nationalism is that the people of a country, rather than corporations or foreign entities, should be the beneficiaries of national resources.

Predominant in resource nationalist scholarship is a post-neoliberal strand reasserting the national state as the main economic actor. The strand is empirically traceable to populist leaders in developing countries, where energy sovereignty is part of a trend towards energy and resource nationalism (Agnew, 2018; Childs, 2016; Emel et al., 2011; Fitz-Henry, 2015; Koch & Perreault, 2019; Kohl & Farthing, 2012). In the Global South, the idea that resource abundant countries have limited sovereignty over resources is hardly controversial. Here, the reclamation of natural resources from transnational companies and global capitalism is part of returning national pride and sovereignty to nations. In Kohl and Farthing's (2012) article on resource nationalism in Bolivia, and in Emel et al. (2011) on sovereignty extraction in Tanzanian gold mining, the recuperation of sovereignty over natural resources takes center stage. Imaginaries of national self-determination and images of resources as constituting the nation-state are commonplace (e.g., Childs, 2016; Emel et al., 2011; Huber, 2019).

Similar images and imaginaries are prevalent in the rise in economic nationalism in the West (Bridge et al., 2018; Huber, 2015). BREXIT came with arguments about Britain regaining its energy sovereignty (e.g., The Conversation, 2016), and Britain's national interest has often been framed in terms of defending energy sovereignty and limiting the scope of EU energy policy (McGowan, 2011). Similar arguments appeared in the Trump administration's emphasis on energy dominance, with President Trump stating that “we don't want to let other countries take away our sovereignty and tell us what to do and how to do it”

¹ By discourse, we mean the text and talk of politicians, political institutions, and stakeholders (e.g., van Dijk, 1997).

(Trumpwhitehousearchives, 2017).

Elements of resource nationalism have emerged in countries that embraced energy liberalization and now experience popular backlashes against the realization that energy systems are no longer nationally contained. Our case, Norway, is one example. Also, Switzerland has long prioritized energy sovereignty over an electricity agreement with the EU (Thaler and Hofmann, 2022). In EU countries and the EU itself, the aim of strategic sovereignty in energy affairs – with Russia the main threat – has become part of common EU policy (Anghel et al., 2020; Bochkarev & Austin, 2007; Leonard & Shapiro, 2019; Proedrou, 2021; Westphal, 2021). Russia's invasion of Ukraine is accelerating already ongoing energy sovereignty initiatives within the EU and separately within most of the member countries.

Critical approaches to resource nationalism highlight the importance of descending below the international and state levels of analysis, to domestic agents' (groups and individuals) perceptions and imaginaries about sovereignty (Childs, 2016; Koch & Perreault, 2019). Childs (2016:540) laments that resource nationalism too often is reduced "to a language of energy security and economic wellbeing" within the "timeworn framework of geopolitics and international relations", reinforcing rather than critiquing the "fixity of the national imaginary". Childs argues that resource nationalism instead needs to critically unpack competing claims to resources made *within* a nation's borders to include dimensions of identity and justice.

Dunlap (2018) and Siamanta and Dunlap (2019) constitute two for us relevant critical approaches to resource nationalism. They depict wind power expansion as "green grabbing", and as little different from regular extraction of fossil fuels and minerals by transnational companies. Dunlap (2018) juxtaposes energy sovereignty with energy *autonomy*: Energy sovereignty is industrial-scale and associated with land-grabs, conflicts, and corporate exploitation. In contrast, energy autonomy can be achieved through community wind parks tied to, built, and operated by the community. These are compatible with local self-determination and the avoidance of conflict. Siamanta and Dunlap (2019) portray wind power expansion as the appropriation, transfer of ownership and control over land and resources, typically to transnational companies. These are "green grabs" resulting from the unequal distribution of power and agency, wherein the state as the main facilitator prioritizes capitalist industrialization and global capital over local (often indigenous) interests and the protection of communal land. Hence, green rhetoric is merely a cloak for the neoliberal expansion of capitalism.

The critical approaches speak to a scholarly tension between state-centric and relational, scalar, multi-actor conceptions of sovereignty. Geographers have long attacked definitions of sovereignty as inviolable and indivisible, exclusively territorial and vested in the geographical state (e.g., Agnew, 2018; Childs, 2016; Emel et al., 2011; Koch & Perreault, 2019). The critical approaches constitute a valuable corrective to what Koch and Perreault (2019:614) call the realist approach to resource nationalism. The relevance here is that the link between renewable energy extraction and sovereignty is perceived differently by agency with different stakes and at different levels of analysis, ultimately resulting in domestic battles over what renewable energy exports mean for sovereignty.

The concept of sovereignty sits at the core of resource nationalism. 'Sovereignty' in its conventional use is defined as a state's absolute authority over a defined territory, as recognized by other states (Weber, 1995, p. 1). Sovereignty over natural resources implies a state or community having exclusive control and self-determination over resources within a particular territory (Emel et al., 2011). These are Westphalian, state-centric definitions. The resurgence of nationalism has indeed often been state-centric, territorial, and national, fueled by imaginaries of national and territorial self-determination. To Agnew (2018:3), Brexit, Trump, and the relative success of Marine Le Pen "can all be put down to efforts at reclaiming sovereignty for the state and its territorial population." However, territorially defined sovereignty may also be claimed

by communities or groups with social and spatial claims, like indigenous groups (Perreault and Green, 2013; Watts, 2004). While the Westphalian state sits at the core of traditional conceptions of sovereignty, "sovereignty may have multiple spatial expressions" (Koch & Perreault, 2019, p. 618) and be multi-actor, scalar and relational (e.g., Agnew, 2018; Bridge et al., 2018; Emel et al., 2011). Thus, purely Westphalian conceptions of sovereignty are inadequate. Wind power is a striking illustration; here, citizens and activist groups commonly draw on resource nationalist language to challenge foreign involvement, both locally and nationally (Koch & Perreault, 2019, p. 612; Siamanta and Dunlap, 2019). Depending on who perceives, different and competing perceptions and understandings of sovereignty can emerge.

We embrace a very broad understanding of sovereignty that includes both realist and critical features. On the one hand, although we do not set out to do so, we believe that the level of sovereignty to some extent *can* be gauged, for instance through indicators of energy independence and self-sufficiency. On the other, sovereignty does not exist independently of agency, and actors' perceptions of sovereignty are crucial for policy outcomes. We view sovereignty as complex and multi-layered, represented and perceived by different agents, groups, and institutions at different levels of analysis. As we show, the scholarly tension between realist and critical approaches runs through the Norwegian case, where state-centric and essentialist conceptions of sovereignty co-exist with relational, scalar, and multi-actor conceptions. In parts of the debate, state-centric discussions about the relationship with the EU play center stage. The sovereignty discourses however also take place at sub-national levels, and we observe tension between different perceptions of sovereignty.

We discuss both *actual* and *perceived* sovereignty. First, sovereignty can mean substantive authority, here over energy policy, implying that an actor (e.g., a country) has the right and ability to make its "own choices regarding the forms, scales, and sources of energy as well as the patterning and organization of energy usage" (Schelly et al., 2020, p. 109). Actual substantive authority over energy policy logically has two preconditions: sufficient resource endowments; and self-determination over energy resources and their usage. Sovereignty requires the right to govern, and physical resource endowments will not benefit sovereignty if the resources are governed by someone else. As we return to, Norway has sufficient resource endowments. Instead, the question is whether recent sovereignty abstentions to the EU within renewable energy means that the determination over renewable energy policy is increasingly taken away from Norway. This *actual* sovereignty abstention carries echoes into *perceived* sovereignty abstentions.

Second, sovereignty can refer to perceived sovereignty. The extent to which sovereignty is safeguarded or threatened is a prime example of a phenomenon embedded in perceptions. *Perceived* losses or *perceived* threats of losses of sovereignty are as important for states' energy policy as *de facto* or *de jure* losses. Schmitt (2018) for instance makes the point that when the narrative surrounding the proposed Europe-MENA renewable energy collaboration and electric grid, Desertec, developed from a north-south energy partnership to a remake of European colonial exploitation schemes, it contributed to killing the project. Sovereignty is always interpreted by social actors or change agents, who "frame visions, create shared identities, mobilise for collective action, and build political coalitions to induce and organise a field" (Mey & Diesendorf, 2018, p. 109). Thus, our above preconditions for actual sovereignty represent structural opportunities for policy change that may have effect through the committed agency of change agents (e.g., Mäkitie et al., 2018; Mey & Diesendorf, 2018).

On energy sovereignty more specifically, a recent EU document (NEU, 2019) defines energy sovereignty as the ability of a political community to have the authority to control, regulate and manage its own energy. Thaler and Hofmann (2022, p. 2) emphasize that energy sovereignty has both internal and external dimensions: The internal refers to the empowerment of communities to decide about energy systems. The external refers to protection from supply disruptions by

outside actors and protectionist policies against regulatory competition. They define energy sovereignty as “a country’s ability to decide independently about the structure and sources of its energy supply ... and about its energy policy ...” We concur, with one important caveat; as most of the literature, they focus on energy supply rather than imports and exports. An encompassing definition of energy sovereignty needs to speak of the structure and sources of a country’s *available energy*, which includes what it can access through imports and what it can itself produce for domestic consumption and exports.

Above we prefaced a default argument about a positive association between renewables and energy sovereignty. One key mechanism through which Norway challenges this default argument runs through the interconnectors required for exports. As Fischhendler et al. (2016, pp. 533–4) state, “cross-border electricity interconnection may be discouraged for fear that it will create and institutionalize relationships based on asymmetric dependence, which can then be used by one partner against another” and “the energy security perception of countries determines whether they believe that regional grid interconnection will make them more or less energy secure”. Thaler and Hofmann (2022, p. 3) put it even more strongly: “Pursuing energy sovereignty implies that a country avoids integration into cross-border electricity systems since this requires shared rules for operation, trade, enforcement, and litigation.” The crux is whether renewable exports create dependency relationships along the lines emphasized in the resource nationalism scholarship (Huber, 2019; Koch & Perreault, 2019). Indeed, renewable exports may tie exporters into asymmetric relationships with importers, turning energy independence into dependence, and weakening sovereignty. The asymmetry may be a simple matter of balance of power or it can be legally cemented. And it can both be actual or perceived. The case of Norway demonstrates these dynamics.

Norway points to two alternatives to the default argument: First, there may be a non-relationship between renewables and energy sovereignty. If a renewable expansion is perceived to have no impact on sovereignty, renewable energy policy will instead be driven by country-specific factors, e.g., interest battles, indigenous groups’ territorial claims, climate concerns, a tradition for prioritizing exports, or ideas about social profits. Second, there may be an *adverse relationship* between renewables and sovereignty, where renewable energy exports weaken sovereignty. In the Norwegian case, this is illustrated *inter alia* through the relationship with the EU, which triggers national-level sovereignty debates. The debates emerging from this relationship are in turn reinforced and cemented by sovereignty claims and resistance at the sub-state level.

3. Energy status, actors and preferences

Norway is the world’s fifth largest petroleum exporter (IEA, 2017) and arguably hosts the greatest renewable energy resources in Europe. Norway has the world’s seventh largest hydropower production (roughly 140 TWh), supplying 90% of domestic electricity consumption. Wind power contributes 15 TWh, or around 10% (NVE, 2022). This makes Norway one of the world’s most energy independent countries. In the Danish Energy Agency’s (DEA, 2020) *self-sufficiency* index, Norway reigns supreme.

Norwegian wind power installations have surged, triggered by a rush to finish projects before the green certificate system, introduced in 2012, expired in 2021. Through this system, introduced in part because of the EU Renewable Energy Directive, Norway and Sweden committed to financing a total of 28.4 TWh of renewable energy by 2021. Between 2016 and mid-2022, wind power capacity more than quintupled, from 0.9 GW to 4.8 GW (NVE, 2022).

For 17 of the 25 years between 1995 and 2020, Norway has had a power surplus. The surplus can only be utilized for power exchange and exports through interconnectors and subsea cables to other countries. The export potential rests on 9 GW of interconnectors and cables to Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, and two recently completed

cables: NordLink to Germany and North Sea Link to the UK. Net Norwegian exports are around 15–20 TWh, or approximately 10% of domestic electricity generation (Fraunhofer ISE, 2022). Potential future exports are however limited by electrification. Norway will need net 50–80 TWh of new electricity generation by 2050 (Statnett, 2021). Thus, while new subsea cables increase the renewable export potential, domestically Norway is rapidly consuming more electricity.

Power trading has a long history in Norway; Norway built its first interconnectors to Sweden in 1960 and its first subsea cable to Denmark in 1976. Today, power trade is regulated through the power exchange market Nord Pool, founded in 1996 by Norway and Sweden as a Nordic power exchange market. Denmark and Finland joined by 2000. The idea was reliable power exchange between neighboring countries with complementary power situations. Nord Pool has since grown to encompass 20 European countries, including Germany and the UK.

Nord Pool illustrates how a state with a renewable surplus may certainly benefit from renewable energy exports. Selling hydropower to Denmark in return for wind power when Danish wind produces surplus electricity is good business and improves the reliability of supply for Norway. Nord Pool also lacks supranational features and has never been associated with asymmetry or dependency. Thus, power exchange through Nord Pool has never been contentious. The sovereignty argument, and the fear of being locked into an asymmetric energy relationship, is confined to Norway’s relationship with the EU.

Traditionally, Norwegian energy and climate policy has been market-based, guided by social profitability and cost-effectiveness (Miljødirektoratet, 2017; Moe, 2009, 2015; Regjeringen.no, 2020). This corresponds to what we hereby label a *mainstream discourse*. This discourse does not see renewables as connected to energy security, independence, or sovereignty. Instead, the central goal is to maximize social profits from cost-effectively utilizing natural resources. Politically, the discourse has been advocated by the Norwegian “establishment parties”, the Labor Party and the Conservative Party, which since 2005 have formed the backbone of alternating government coalitions.

Rivalling the mainstream discourse is a *sovereignty discourse* where renewable energy expansion is seen as jeopardizing sovereignty, paralleling core themes within the resource nationalism literature (e.g., Koch & Perreault, 2019). Over the past few years, sovereignty has acquired renewed importance in the Norwegian public conversation on renewables. The sovereignty discourse is not novel, but has long stayed dormant, only to rise whenever territorial issues have been at stake, as under the Norwegian EU referendums in 1972 and 1994. In the parliament, this discourse has most consistently been represented by the Centre Party, and more recently by the left-wing party Red and the right-wing Progress Party.

Vested interests have also been important to Norwegian energy policy, especially those of the petroleum sector, the energy-intensive industry, and the power sector (e.g., Moe, 2014, 2015; Ryggvik, 2010; Sæther, 2019). For *renewable* energy policy, the latter two have been dominant. The energy-intensive industry and the power sector have distinctly different takes on energy sovereignty. For the energy-intensive industry the worry is that rising electricity prices, accelerated by exports, will erode industrial competitiveness. Thus, the industry has supported wind power expansion (which lowers electricity prices), but strongly opposes subsea cables, warning that power exports will increase domestic electricity prices. The industry has expressed extreme wariness of Europeanization of Norwegian energy policy over the fear that sovereignty over natural resources will be ceased, and most industry voices contribute strongly to the sovereignty discourse. In contrast, the arguments of the power sector align with the mainstream discourse. The power sector profits from electricity exports and sees EU integration and supranational regulations as crucial for predictability and long-term market access. Thus, the sector has lobbied for cables, which improve power exchange and increase the export potential. Generally, the power sector has also supported wind power expansion, albeit premised on the electricity price being high enough to make wind power projects

profitable (Moe et al., 2021).

Beyond these distinct interests, numerous smaller actors can be subsumed under the heading “environmentalists” (Moe et al., 2021). This group comprises environmental organizations, ad-hoc organizations, indigenous groups, and individuals. Among these, preferences and views on sovereignty are varied. Some take a strong nature protection, and subsequently anti-wind power, stance. Oftentimes, local self-determination, or something resembling Dunlap’s (2018) energy autonomy, is the goal. This is particularly so for the indigenous Sami, who have social and spatial claims to sovereignty that rival those of the state. Some environmentalists however prefer accelerating a European energy transition by turning Norway into a green battery for Europe, which entails support for the construction of cables for power exports and closer EU integration.

4. Contentious issues

Renewable energy expansion for Norway hinges on three dimensions; deeper Europeanization of Norwegian energy policy, the construction of more subsea cables, and greater deployment of wind power. Each of these dimensions correspond to contentious debates in the Norwegian public, with the fear of reduced sovereignty permeating the debates. The following sections empirically explore the essence of the debates, and address how they individually and in interaction sculpt a hesitant renewable export policy where the sovereignty discourse is not only present but conquering ground.

4.1. Europeanization and claims of abstained sovereignty

For Norway, renewable expansion implies increased exports and power exchange through interconnectors to other countries, mainly within the EU. Exporting more to EU countries however means closer integration with the EU’s electricity market. Due to the Agreement on the European Economic Area (hereafter the EEA Agreement), Norway’s main institutional arrangement with the EU, such integration requires common rules and a continuous Europeanization (i.e., the process of Norway adopting EU policy and law) of the Norwegian electricity market. This is because EU legislation for the EU’s electricity market is deemed “EEA relevant”. The EU has a large body of electricity sector legislation, including four energy packages with directives and regulations. Most renewable energy-related legislation incorporated into the EEA Agreement has already been transposed into Norwegian law without public debate. This is ironic; the Norwegian position was that energy would and should be exempt from the EEA Agreement. Keeping vital and strategic natural resources such as energy outside the EU’s influence was not only considered crucial, but also partly why Norway turned down EU membership in 1994.

Since 1994, EU energy legislation has nevertheless had definite impacts in Norway. The green certificate system was for instance partly triggered by the EU Renewable Energy Directive. The EU’s first and second energy packages encompassed only minor adjustments for Norway, were relatively uncontroversial and swiftly incorporated into Norwegian law (NOU, 2012, pp. 2, 548). However, the third energy package, adopted by the EU in 2009 and incorporated into the EEA Agreement in 2017, tremendously changed the situation and caused heated debate about Norwegian energy sovereignty.

The third energy package established the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER). ACER sits at the core of the Norwegian energy sovereignty debate. Article 1(2) of Regulation (EC) No. 713/2009 holds ACER’s purpose to be assisting the national regulatory authorities for electricity “in exercising, at Community level, the regulatory tasks performed in the Member States and, where necessary, to coordinate their action”. The ACER Board of Regulators can take binding decisions on terms and conditions for access to cross-border infrastructure and adopt decisions that are directly binding for EEA countries. Because EEA members do not have a seat at the EU negotiating tables,

representatives from EEA countries can participate in ACER board meetings, but without voting rights. Furthermore, ACER is a supranational agency, not an elected political body. EU agencies consist of representatives without direct accountability chains to EU member states’ populations (Buess, 2015; Føllesdal, 2011). ‘Agencification’ is a democratic challenge for EU countries and even more so for EEA countries, that lack representation in the agencies (Egeberg & Trondal, 2016).

The third energy package, with ACER central, was in Norway perceived as potentially having grave implications for sovereignty by many actors, including industry, labor organizations, political parties (particularly their grassroots organizations), media outlets and the population. The ACER controversy received massive media attention throughout the winter of 2017/2018 and heated debates ensued in the run-up to the parliament’s vote over the implementation of the third energy package into Norwegian law.² It is extremely rare that debates over EU directives become so widely debated and durable as this debate. The debate contained two analytically distinct, though interrelated, uses of sovereignty; one focusing on constitutional issues, another on resource management and ownership.

Regarding constitutional issues, many critics argued that ACER infringed upon sovereignty and that consent required treatment under §115 of the Norwegian constitution. §115 establishes that transfer of sovereignty requires a ¾ majority in parliament, and the presence of 2/3 of the parliament. The appeal to §115 came from several actors, including legal scholars, the NGO *No to the EU*, and several political parties, including the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party. Many also expressed³ that time was ripe to use the largely unexploited yet unambiguously present right to veto an EEA-relevant rule.⁴ A key aspect in the debate was ACER being an agency, involving additional democratic deficit on top of what the transposition of EU law in Norway already involves (Egeberg & Trondal, 2016). Thus, protests were unavoidable when the Legal Department of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice concluded that the transfer of sovereignty through ACER membership was not intrusive and that its ratification required simple majority only.

On resource management and ownership, accusations arose that ACER membership equaled abstaining control over Norwegian hydropower, and that Norway could risk ceding sovereignty over its energy resources. Terms such as “losing control” and “ceding sovereignty” over hydropower – often labeled Norway’s “heirloom silver” – frequented media headlines. More than half of the Labor Party’s mayors signed an appeal to the (then conservative) government, arguing that “we cannot accept that Norway abstains sovereignty over its power resources to [...] ACER. Norway must maintain sovereignty and national, democratic control over its power resources” (cited in Klassekampen, 2018). The Centre Party and the Red Party warned that ACER in the future might force Norway to build more subsea cables and export more renewable electricity (TV2, 2018).

A key issue pending the ACER vote was the concern that ACER’s power may increase. In 2016, the EU’s fourth energy package had already strengthened ACER by enabling it to make decisions by simple majority and extending its scope of authority. The potential for increased authority, and general insecurity about the ramifications of the fourth energy package, led to calls – especially from trade unions – for postponing the treatment of ACER until more was known about the direction of ACER and the EU’s renewable energy policy.

Notwithstanding debates and resistance, the parliament in 2018

² The combination ACER* and sovereignty* received 1875 hits in Norwegian media outlets between November 2017 and April 2018 (Atekst database search).

³ Amongst others the Norwegian United Federation of Trade Unions (Fellesforbundet).

⁴ The right to veto an EU decision is typically avoided, as the EU can suspend the relevant part of the EEA Agreement.

voted on ACER membership by simple majority. The vote for ACER was secured by a political compromise where the Labor Party demanded guarantees from the government of national sovereignty over any decision relating to energy security, including cable construction and hydropower. Labor also demanded guarantees that the overarching authority on laws and regulations would remain with the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy (MoPE).

Following the vote, debate has ravaged on the practices of abstaining sovereignty to the EU. The NGO *No to the EU* in 2018 sued the government for violating §115, in a still ongoing lawsuit that has received broad popular support. Initially dismissed by the District Court and the Court of Appeal, the case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which in plenary treatment allowed the case to again be tried before the District Court. Only particularly important matters are treated in plenary in the Supreme Court, and plenary treatment is rare, counting no cases in 2019, and only one in 2018 (Harper, 2020). In 2021, the Oslo District Court ruled in favor of the state, but *No to the EU* appealed, determined to challenge the state's practice of abstaining sovereignty. The appeal hearings are still pending.

The ACER debate clearly illuminated how Europeanization of Norwegian renewables and the potential impact on exports was perceived as negatively linked to energy sovereignty, fundamentally different from the power exchange of Nord Pool. The sovereignty discourse is however also accompanied by a mainstream discourse, explaining the political consent to ACER: The Conservative Party and the leadership of the Labor Party embrace ACER and the EEA Agreement as economically beneficial for Norway and the energy sector and downplay allegations of compromised sovereignty. For these parties, market access and social profitability is the rationale underlying Europeanization, and energy exports is portrayed in social profitability rather than sovereignty terms. ACER has nevertheless triggered substantial debate based on a vocal sovereignty discourse. A 2017 poll showed that only 18% of respondents supported the positive ACER vote (Nei til EU, 2017). In a 2021 poll, half of the respondents blamed ACER for the record-high electricity prices, with only 1 out of 10 believing ACER had nothing to do with the high prices (Nei til EU, 2021). The EU's fourth energy package has yet to be implemented in Norway, and everything indicates that also that process will be loaded with assertions of abstained sovereignty.

4.2. Subsea cables

Increased renewable exports and exchange hinges on the construction of subsea cables. Sovereignty claims therefore also shroud discussions about cables. At the heart of these claims sits the concern that Norway, by building more cables, may lose national control over its natural resources and ultimately its energy policy. The concern rests upon a view that the EU's need for Norwegian electricity constitutes a bottomless pit, and that the EU will always have incentives to insist on more cables and greater influence over Norwegian energy policy.

The reliance of the Norwegian energy-intensive industry on cheap renewable electricity for competitiveness is key to understanding the skepticism towards cables. A fear is that cables will facilitate increased electricity exports that will result in higher electricity prices, bankruptcies and flagging-out (Moe et al., 2021). Unsurprisingly, the sovereignty argument has been articulated most vocally by the trade unions fearing that the energy-intensive industry is sacrificed when national control over energy resources is relinquished (FriFagbevegelse, 2018a).

The process preceding the decision to indefinitely postpone the proposed cable NorthConnect to Scotland found both trade unions and giants of industry argue that Norway must protect its energy sovereignty and avoid the flagging-out of industry. Cable opponents argued that energy sovereignty and avoidance of industrial flagging-out is best accomplished by *not* becoming a green battery for the EU, and by halting the construction of export cables believed to threaten the reliability of supply and consequently Norwegian sovereignty (ABC, 2020; E24, 2018). In an appeal organized by the trade unions in front of the

parliament, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) made the sovereignty argument explicit: LO hailed the wisdom of the Norwegian politicians that in 1905 secured national control over Norwegian hydropower, contrasting them with the present, where Norway is the victim of "the power companies' increased profit requirements, [...] ACER, and the European energy market rules on free flow of energy" (Radikal Portal, 2020).

The uproar about cables originated amongst representatives of trade unions on the political far left but has since been more broadly adopted, also by political parties. That constructing cables jeopardizes Norwegian energy sovereignty and weakens industry, is argued primarily by the Centre Party and the far-left party Red. For both, cables and sovereignty are inextricably linked. The Centre Party views cables as critical infrastructure over which Norway needs to preserve national control rather than cede sovereignty (Dagbladet, 2019b; Stortinget, 2019). Both parties also believe that Norway's main climate contribution lies not in exporting clean energy, but in utilizing hydropower to manufacture industrial products like aluminum, silicon, and other metals and minerals far cleaner than other countries (Dagbladet, 2020). Red has warned that closer integration into the EU Energy Union will yield more cables, which will vacuum Norway for electricity and erode the competitiveness of the energy-intensive industry (Dagbladet, 2019a; Filter Nyheter, 2019).

Prior to Norwegian ACER membership, the sovereignty discourse was fronted by a clear minority of political parties and parliament members. However, these successfully placed sovereignty and cables on the agenda also of other parties, illustrated by the Labor Party mayors' appeal urging Labor to block ACER membership over fears of free flow of energy, expensive electricity, and loss of industrial employment (FriFagbevegelse, 2018b; Gullberg, 2019; Klassekampen, 2018).

The claim that the EU can force Norway to construct cables was accentuated with the cable NorthConnect. NorthConnect is on the EU's Projects of Common Interest (PCI) list, and thus among a select number of infrastructure projects singled out for EU financial support. The EU has not accommodated MoPE requests to remove NorthConnect from the list. Moreover, the extent to which the list binds Norway is contested. In 2019 the Centre Party argued that the fourth energy package includes a clause that obliges countries to the PCI list and proposed in parliament that NorthConnect must be removed from the list to avoid "in the future being pressured by the EU into constructing the cable" (Stortinget, 2019). Thus, to the Centre Party, the fourth energy package entails an undisputed loss of sovereignty (Dagsnytt18, 2019).

The sovereignty discourse has clearly nourished on the controversies around ACER and NorthConnect. Yet, the Conservative Party, major sections of the Labor Party, and the power sector represent a mainstream discourse, where sovereignty is immaterial. For these actors, the central motif conditioning the construction of cables is social profitability (e.g., Aasland, 2018; Laugen, 2020; interviews). Indeed, the social profit motif is entrenched in Norwegian officialdom and institutionalized in the bureaucracy. Thus, when The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) assesses the effects of a cable, social profit is a main criterion, and part of the official mandate of state-owned transmission net operator Statnett. Several of our power sector interviewees emphasized that power surpluses need to be exported; otherwise, electricity prices will fall to zero, driving the power sector towards bankruptcy (Laugen, 2020; Skjelbred, 2018; Øygarden, 2018; interviews). This is exactly what in 2022 is happening in northern Norway. In southern Norway, in contrast, record-high continental gas prices are imported via cables to the European power markets.

The arguments of the mainstream discourse reflect the viewpoint that cables are primarily a useful infrastructure through which Norway can exchange power for the benefit of the country and the power sector. In the mainstream discourse, ACER institutionalizes European electricity markets and provides predictability and stability (Henriksen, 2018; Laugen, 2020; Løfsnæs, 2018; Øygarden, 2018; interviews). As stated by Statnett director Skjelbred (2018, interview): "It is in the

Norwegian national interest to have these markets, and in the national interest to have access to international trade in power. And we need someone to control this system". Former Minister of Petroleum and Energy, Tord Lien (Progress Party) (2018, interview) was even clearer: "we are more integrated in Europe than most, and there are few countries that benefit more from it than us." Hence, the mainstream discourse represents a political counterweight to sovereignty claims and resource nationalism. It contains claims of neither gained nor abstained sovereignty; rather, it showcases a non-relationship between renewable exports and sovereignty. Nevertheless, sovereignty claims have indisputably gained traction. This was accentuated in 2021 and 2022, as skyrocketing power prices were routinely blamed on ACER and the new cables North Sea Link and NordLink (e.g., VG, 2022).

4.3. Wind power installations

Despite politicians voicing increasing skepticism against wind power, official wind power policy largely echoes the mainstream discourse, with its focus on cost-effectively utilizing natural resources for social profits (Moe et al., 2021). Until recently all parties were in favor of wind power expansion. While the Labor Party and the Conservative Party recognize that wind power is contentious (e.g., VG, 2019), they routinely claim that Norway preserves full sovereignty over its wind resources, irrespective of ACER. They argue that Norway's electricity needs will increase, that wind power has become cost-effective, that exporting electricity generates social profits, and that power exchange is in the mutual interest of Norway and the EU. Indeed, when the conservative government in 2020 produced a white paper suggesting reforms to the wind power licensing system, the language never strayed far from the mainstream discourse: Wind power contributes to value creation and industrial development, should be exploited to maximize society's utility, and should be based on cost effectiveness and social profitability (MoPE, 2020, pp. 10, 55).

A thriving sovereignty discourse however runs parallel to the mainstream discourse. To some extent it is fronted by political parties, but more so by grassroots actors, ad-hoc organizations, and indigenous groups. Among the parties, the Centre Party most strongly stresses the importance of natural resources remaining on Norwegian hands and that energy sovereignty must not be ceded (Centre Party, 2021; Dagbladet, 2019b). While not against wind power *per se*, the Centre Party has continuously voiced fears that Norwegian wind power will be used to supply the continent at the expense of Norwegian households, industry, and ecosystems. The party has also expressed fears that European entrepreneurs will acquire ownership over Norwegian wind power, with installations mandated by the EU, to which Norway will be succumbing. This logic portrays a relationship between wind power and energy sovereignty that is adverse, where national, local, and popular control over natural resources is weakened: Because of the asymmetric relationship between Norway and the EU, less integration – thus less exports of wind power – is the only guarantor of full energy sovereignty. The Centre Party position is thus unambiguously resource nationalist, in arguing that the Norwegian people, not foreign entities, should be the beneficiary of national resources.

Arguably stronger expressions of the sovereignty argument can be discerned from grassroots actors and ad-hoc organizations. In 2019 Motvind Norge ("Headwind Norway") was formed – an ad-hoc anti-wind power organization with 19000 paying members (November 2021). On their web page, the wind power debate is framed as one of smart companies and businesspeople conning Norway, making a fortune by selling the Norwegian people's natural resources to foreign countries (Motvind Norge, 2021). Their work contains strong notions of local self-determination and national sovereignty; that is, claims about sovereignty at both popular, sub-national and national levels of analysis.

Extreme rhetoric has been used in the fight against specific wind parks. The leader of the group *Nei til vindkraftverk på Frøya* ("no to wind power in Frøya"), in 2019 compared wind power in Frøya, where the

entrepreneur is German, with wartime occupation, stating that "Frøya is on German hands – again" (NRK, 2019). Another member labeled it a betrayal against the country and our self-determination (NRK, 2019). The recurring argument is that local self-determination and Norwegian sovereignty have been sold to the highest bidder. In the corresponding Facebook group references to treason and Nazi occupation were frequent and persistent. A poster of German World War II soldiers guarding wind turbines with the headline "new occupation" went viral (Adresseavisen, 2019a, 2019b). Comparing German wind power investors to Nazi occupiers has become commonplace, as have allegations of treason (Totland, 2021). Former head of the Norwegian wind power interest organization Norwea, Øyvind Isachsen, is reportedly tired of being called a Nazi (Harvest, 2020; NRK, 2020a, 2020b).

While Facebook groups attract extreme voices, even prominent members of the action groups reference German occupation and the selling out of natural resources belonging to the people. The line of reasoning has obvious elements of energy sovereignty and resource nationalism (e.g., Childs, 2016; Kohl & Farthing, 2012). It draws on powerful imaginaries of self-determination, both nationally and locally and alleges that Norwegian wind power is exclusively benefiting foreign interests. Andreas Thon Aasheim of Norwea (2020, interview) confirmed that the claim that Norway is giving away the country is prevalent wherever foreign investors are involved.

Some environmental organizations welcome electricity exports as part of a European energy transition (Moe et al., 2021; Wilhelmsen, 2018; interview). In contrast, *Norges miljøvernforbund* (Green Warriors Norway) advocates undiminished Norwegian control over natural resources and argues that Norway is sacrificing its nature to export electricity to foreign wind power entrepreneurs exploiting Norway. To *Norges Miljøvernforbund* (2020) sovereignty abstentions will lead to EU countries putting pressure on Norway to install more renewables. According to the organization's wind power spokesperson, Norway has ceded sovereignty *inter alia* through ACER, and obediently acquiesces in its role as Europe's battery. He underlines the sovereignty argument by referencing both the year 1814 (the birthyear of the Norwegian constitution) and 1905 (Norwegian independence from Sweden) (Adresseavisen, 2019a; Nilsen, 2019). Sovereignty losses are also exemplified by statements that Norway has become "a colony of the EU", where the "colonial masters can freely take whatever Norwegian natural resources they can carry", and that Norwegian power is made available for an "insatiable Europe" (Norges Miljøvernforbund, 2020).

Representatives from both Norwea and the power company TrønderEnergi (Aasheim, 2020, interview; Laugen, 2020; interview) emphasize that most resistance is local and that some of the strongest rhetoric comes from activists on the political extremes and organizations weaponizing local grievances and anti-EU sentiments for their own political purposes. Some of this resistance is less about energy sovereignty than about concerns for property values, quality of life, and biodiversity. The *national* sovereignty argument however has a strong local counterpart, namely *local self-determination*, where the argument is that local interests are overrun by national and/or international interests (Laugen, 2020, interview). The idea of the state as the sole focus of sovereignty is further hollowed out by a 2021 ruling bound to have serious ramifications for Norwegian wind power: The Norwegian Supreme Court ruled that the wind power license in Fosen was invalid because it interferes with the rights of Sami reindeer herders to enjoy their culture (Supreme Court of Norway, 2021). The Sami is an indigenous group with distinct social and spatial claims to sovereignty. This exemplifies how sub-national sovereignty concerns, as emphasized by resource nationalism, also impact the Norwegian renewable energy debate.

5. Discussion

The theoretical assumption that investing in renewable energy bolsters energy sovereignty rests upon simple mechanisms: Renewable energy access increases independence and self-sufficiency, and hence

energy sovereignty. However, our findings showcase how renewable expansion and exports in an energy self-sufficient country can entail more complicated dynamics between renewables and perceptions about sovereignty. In the Norwegian case, the default argument's positive relationship between renewable energy exports and sovereignty gives way to two other relationships.

The first is a non-relationship, corresponding to what we have referred to as the mainstream discourse, where increased Europeanization, more cables, and more wind power are not perceived to impact sovereignty. The second is an *adverse* relationship, where renewable exports lead to allegations and perceptions of reduced sovereignty. The Norwegian sovereignty discourse delves around this adverse relationship, drawing on powerful imaginaries of self-determination. The common denominator is a general fear that Norway is ceding control over natural resources and resource governance to the EU and European business interests, rendering national and local energy sovereignty illusory and compromised. An ever-greater asymmetry in favor of the EU, combined with initiatives such as Norway as a "green battery", and a continuously expressed EU interest in Norwegian resources, feed this image. The result is perceptions of *adverse* sovereignty, where renewable energy exports weaken rather than strengthen sovereignty by making Norway asymmetrically dependent in an exploitative relationship.

Although the sovereignty discourse is not shared across the entire political establishment, it is gaining strength and has visible policy results. First, the opposition against Europeanization of the power sector, of which the legal process against the allegedly unconstitutional consent to ACER membership by simple majority is a manifestation, is largely sovereignty-based. The criticism against habitual Europeanization from successive Norwegian governments does not occur at the political margin but is a broader movement, encompassing the energy-intensive industry, many environmental organizations, ad-hoc groups, and local and indigenous interests.

Second, the construction of further subsea cables is contested, and cable advocates are a political minority; this is partly attributable to a stronger sovereignty discourse. The license to the cable NorthConnect is on indefinite hold, and the argument from the adversaries, including numerous industrial actors, is that further interconnector capacity will harm – not strengthen – Norwegian energy sovereignty and industry.

Third, wind power is increasingly viewed with skepticism.⁵ Norway has a strong nature conservation strand, and the perception that major pristine wilderness areas are demolished to make way for wind power is widespread (Moe et al., 2021). In the public discourse, the destruction of nature is often explicitly linked to electricity exports and to Norway succumbing to pressures from European wind power capitalism. Norwegian politicians have long felt popular pressure to introduce wind power restrictions. Consequently, in 2020 the government presented a white paper with new restrictions to the licensing system and put a temporary halt to new wind power licenses (this was revoked in 2022). There will however be no brake on foreign ownership (MoPE, 2020, p. 79), which is one of the sovereignty grievances voiced by grassroots actors and organizations. Finally, following the Supreme Court ruling in favor of the Sami (Supreme Court of Norway, 2021), the spatial sovereignty claims of indigenous groups is now a permanent constraint on wind power expansion.

In 2021, the arguably dominant party of the sovereignty discourse, the Centre Party, formed a coalition government with the Labor Party. While the Labor Party has the Prime Minister, the Centre Party has significantly increased its political footprint. One visible policy impact is a delay and diminishing of Norwegian efforts within offshore wind power; a development attributable to fundamental disagreements within the government about whether to connect offshore wind parks to the Norwegian mainland or to the European continent (or both) (Moe

et al., 2022). The unprecedentedly high European electricity prices since fall 2021 are also boosting the sovereignty discourse. In a 2022 poll asking people what is to blame for the electricity prices, the top three answers were subsea cables (70%), ACER/European power exchange (66%), and the power companies (65%) (VG, 2022). The polling results support the sovereignty discourse and correspond to the three contentious debates on Europeanization, subsea cables, and wind power.

There clearly are mutually reinforcing debates on sovereignty that challenge the default positive association between renewable energy and sovereignty. The debates also challenge the longstanding, economically driven mainstream doctrine of exporting power whenever socially profitable. This mainstream discourse persists; it is traditionally strong within the historically dominant parties on the left and the right, the Labor Party and the Conservative Party, and is too deeply entrenched to disappear. However, it is increasingly sharing the spotlight with a sovereignty discourse. Indeed, Norwegian renewable energy policy sits firmly at the intersection between these two discourses.

Interestingly, ten years ago our findings might have supported the default positive relationship between sovereignty and renewables. A unanimous parliament then agreed that two new subsea cables (NordLink and North Sea Link) would improve reliability of supply, wind power was too expensive to be attractive and peripheral in the Norwegian landscape, and the EU Energy Union was an abstract concept for the future. No strong sovereignty discourse existed. Thus, the Norwegian case has a temporal dimension.

Today, Norway clearly exemplifies that a positive relationship between renewable energy exports and energy sovereignty cannot be taken for granted. The default relationship is challenged from *two* angles; from the sovereignty discourse *and* the mainstream discourse. More wind power, more cables, and Europeanization are by a multitude of actors at different levels of analysis simply not perceived as conducive to a strengthening of sovereignty. Rather, renewable energy export is increasingly perceived as jeopardizing sovereignty at both national, local, and popular levels.

6. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how sovereignty claims and resource nationalist discourse permeate three debates on Norwegian renewable energy. The first centers on the institutional framework necessary for further integration with the EU's electricity market. Especially, the implementation of the EU's third energy package into Norwegian law has fostered a discussion on the abstention of sovereignty to the EU within energy policy, and the unknown consequences of this abstention. The second debate concerns the protection of sovereignty over Norwegian energy resources and industry from EU energy consumption and commercial interests. The fear that more cables to the EU will entail reduced control over natural resources and industrial flagging-out was a prime reason that the cable NorthConnect was shelved. The third debate centers around how Norwegian pristine nature, local resources and local democracy is sold to the EU, and the fear that Norwegian wind power is used to serve EU rather than Norwegian needs.

The three debates are thriving and suggest a mild surge of resource nationalism in Norway. While the debates clash with a social profitability onus that has long informed energy policy, sovereignty and resource nationalist discourse increasingly dominate the public spotlight. Norwegian renewable energy policy sits at the intersection between the mainstream and sovereignty discourses, neither of which claim that renewable exports strengthen Norwegian energy sovereignty. Instead, our findings suggest that Norwegian renewable energy expansion is likely to emerge as a molded and hesitant compromise blending Europeanization, sovereignty concerns, social profitability, conservation interests, and local – including indigenous – opposition.

The Norwegian case demonstrates the usefulness of resource nationalism as a theoretical lens. Kohl and Farthing (2012) describe how reclaiming natural resources has been crucial to regaining energy

⁵ In 2021, a poll for the first time showed a majority against more land-based wind power (50% against, 37% for) (Klassekampen, 2022).

sovereignty. In Agnew's (2018) depiction of the realist, state-centric conception of resource nationalism, sovereignty is recuperated for the state and its territorial population. Here, arguments of self-determination and what Childs (2016) labels the fixity of the national imaginary are important. Koch and Perreault (2019) describe the realist approach as fetishizing resources within a given and never-changing national territory. Parts of the Norwegian sovereignty discourse mirror these realist, state-centric accounts, for instance in emphasizing renewable resources as part of the national "heirloom silver" that should be nationally controlled and not traded.

However, Norwegian resource nationalism also has a strong critical component, which suggests that multi-scalar and relational models of sovereignty are crucial to fully account for the dynamics in the Norwegian case. We easily recognize Norwegian claims of almost colonial-style "green grabbing" akin to that described by Dunlap (2018) and Siamanta and Dunlap (2019). This manifests in the shape of local and indigenous resistance and claims of sovereignty against the Norwegian state rather than foreign entities, for instance by the indigenous Sami. It also manifests in claims about Norway falling prey to cunning global wind power capitalists, being subject to German colonization, and at the extreme end, re-occupied by Nazis that annex whatever resources available. It is also visible in claims from industrial interests arguing that preserving industrial competitiveness through cheap renewable electricity is part of protecting Norwegian energy sovereignty.

What can Norway contribute, beyond the literature on renewable energy exports, to the more general question of what *exporting natural resources* does to perceived energy sovereignty? Centering around themes such as independence being threatened by binding asymmetric relationships, green grabbing, and assaults on local self-determination (e.g., Dunlap, 2018; Fischhendler et al., 2016), the Norwegian case yields suggestions as to when resource exports are perceived as harmful to energy sovereignty. First, being in an asymmetric relationship with a bigger actor means that export leads to dependence, not independence. Second, the erosion of national ownership to resources intimately associated with the nation is likely to stir up fears of sovereignty abstinences and claims of "heirloom silver" being traded away. Third, if trading away the heirloom silver comes with sacrifices such as damage to nature, habitats, and traditional lands, perceptions of sovereignty abstinence are further accentuated. Fourth, charges of abstinence will appear if exporting natural resources becomes a zero-sum game, i.e., export means reduced domestic availability of the resource.

Norway may seem anomalous. It is one of the world's most self-sufficient and energy independent countries. As a non-EU member closely integrated with the EU, Norway is also in an unusually asymmetric relationship with its surroundings. We however believe that the Norwegian case could be suggestive of a not-too-distant European future. Norway is ahead of most of Europe in terms of interconnectors, cables, and cross-border power trade. As the rest of the continent catches up (e.g., European Commission, 2019), Europe will become physically and legally more integrated. Norway hence offers us a glimpse into a physically networked grid world (e.g., Moe et al., 2022), where sovereignty is relational, pooled and unpacked rather than territorially defined. Our findings suggest that the consequence may be political and popular backlashes, and that energy sovereignty issues may pose considerable obstacles to future renewable energy expansion.

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There are no conflicts of interest to report.

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Interviews

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