Small but sturdy: Lessons on robust crisis governance from the Faroe Islands

Rógvi Olavson
PhD candidate, University of the Faroe Islands
Tórshavn
Faroe Islands
RogviO@setur.fo

ABSTRACT: The study of robust governance is vital for the development of the necessary capacity to deal with difficult challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The Faroes are a subnational island jurisdiction that managed the pandemic relatively well. However, the reasons for this governance success have not been adequately studied. This case study asks, 'how was Faroese COVID-19 governance robust?' and 'how can robust characteristics of Faroese pandemic governance be explained?' The case study shows how robustness was demonstrated through finding a balance between stability and change, which was suitable to the particularities of a small society, such as the Faroe Islands. The analysis also shows a connection between robustness on the one hand and speed and flexibility on the other. Although the Faroese government and most of its organizations were unprepared for the pandemic, the ability to take rapid action compensated for the lack of preparedness. At several critical junctures, speed and expediency demonstrated their value over deliberation and planning which, under normal circumstances, hold considerable importance in public administration. In turbulent situations, timing is critical and solving the 'speed versus deliberation' dilemma emerges as an important aspect of robust governance. Evidently, in the Faroese case several robustness strategies and their associated speed were reinforced by the smallness of the society.

Keywords: COVID-19, Faroe Islands, governance, turbulence, robustness, social capacity, smallness, temporality.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented test of governance for the current generation of leaders. This crisis put enormous pressure on whole societies, especially on those actors responsible for mitigating its effects. For the same reason, the pandemic also presents a unique opportunity to evaluate how political and administrative systems perform under pressure and how to improve governance in a variety of situations. Along with new and challenging issues, the pandemic has underpinned the need to continually develop ways to address 'turbulence' (Ansell et al., 2017, p. 2). While the concept of turbulence is intended to increase understanding of governance in times of interactive change (Ansell & Tondal, 2018, p. 43), its conceptual counterpart, 'robustness', aims to understand new ways of addressing the challenges of turbulence (Scognamiglio et al., 2023, p. 53). A central feature of robustness involves a reflective governance approach, striking a balance between stability and change (Ansell et al., 2022, p. 8).

This paper covers the COVID-19 pandemic from early March 2020 until late February 2022. Within this protracted period, the pandemic's challenges were manifest in various guises, varying from one society to the next as the level of emergency waxed and waned. After the initial emergency, the sense of peril persisted for long periods, which made authorities, even in

the least affected areas, constantly wary. Consequently, 'turbulence' aptly depicts the pandemic's impact on governance systems. The ever-changing circumstances and the consequent unpredictability of governance also constitute a temporal dimension central to the analysis of COVID-19, its disruptions, and (robust) responses.

The paper examines the case of COVID-19 governance in the Faroe Islands (Faroes), a small North Atlantic archipelago with 54,522 inhabitants. The Faroes are formally part of the Danish Kingdom, yet they enjoy significant political autonomy, including over pandemic management. Faroese pandemic management was characterized by pragmatism, driven by a soft law approach originating in the ambiguous formal relations between Denmark and the Faroes. Epidemic (pandemic) management was formally on Danish hands, but as it would turn out, Denmark's involvement in Faroese pandemic management would be limited. Additionally, while most other neighbouring countries abandoned a full-scale testing strategy, the Faroes adopted a comprehensive testing and isolation approach, which was made possible by reconfiguring industrial preparedness resources and applying these resources to a very small population.

Previous studies have extensively analysed the Faroese COVID-19 experience from a medical and epidemiological point of view (Eliasen et al., 2022; Helmsdal et al., 2022; Petersen et al., 2020, 2023; Petersen, Hansen, et al., 2021; Petersen, Kristiansen, et al., 2022; Petersen, Kristiansen, Hanusson, et al., 2021; Petersen, Kristiansen, Reinert, et al., 2021; Petersen, Strøm, et al., 2022; Strøm et al., 2021), and – to a lesser degree – from socio-political (í Skorini & Albinus, 2022) and sociological (Hayfield, 2023) viewpoints. While some of these studies allude to pandemic governance, they do not focus primarily on this aspect. Therefore, this paper explores turbulence and robustness in Faroese COVID-19 governance and asks, 'How was Faroese COVID-19 governance robust?' and 'how can robust characteristics of Faroese pandemic governance be explained?'

With their small population, the Faroes can be defined as an archipelagic microstate. Therefore, this case is about a small, sub-national island jurisdiction confronting a turbulent pandemic. At the onset of the pandemic, one would not have expected the Faroes to possess significantly advantageous conditions for handling a global pandemic compared to other developed states and territories. Most of the disadvantages common for small jurisdictions also apply to the Faroes, and its health sector has fewer resources and less specialization than its Nordic counterparts. Still, the Faroes did deal with the pandemic better than most developed countries and territories in terms of fatalities, societal openness, and citizen satisfaction (Olavson, 2023a).

The purpose here is to contribute to scholarship on robust governance and to the literature on small states by analysing available material, written responses, and interviews with key figures involved in the Faroese COVID-19 governance. It has been facilitated by the author's previous official involvement (as a civil servant) in conducting the government evaluation of the Faroese COVID-19 response (Olavson, 2023a). The analysis includes considerations of a temporal dimension, which offers insight into the role and considerations of time in turbulent situations and in the attempts to manage them. The analysis also delves into the ways in which smallness contributed to robustness and to what degree robust governance is a made possible by small state characteristics. The data was analysed qualitatively through the conceptual lens of Ansell et al. (2021) and Scognamiglio et al. (2023), where turbulence is seen as the challenge and robustness as the way to deal with the challenge.

The studied case is considered relevant because the Faroes fared well during the pandemic compared to most other industrialized countries in terms of low fatality rates, maintained societal openness, and registered high levels of citizen satisfaction (Olavson, 2023a). This paper is also driven by curiosity about successful COVID-19 governance in the Faroes and whether there are broad lessons to be learned from this case. The next section explains the theoretical framework for the analysis. Section three describes the research methodology, data sources and analysis. Section four offers an analysis of robustness in Faroese COVID-19 governance. The fifth and final section outlines the main takeaways and implications of this study.

Theoretical framework

Turbulence

Turbulence is defined as 'situations where events, demands, and support interact and change in highly variable, inconsistent, unexpected or unpredictable ways' (Ansell et al., 2017, 2022; Ansell & Trondal, 2018). This concept has been developed to analyse and understand governance 'in times of dynamic interactive change' (Ansell & Trondal, 2018, p. 43). While 'turbulence' overlaps with the commonly used 'crisis', I agree with Ansell & Trondal (2018), that the two concepts have different scopes and purposes. In most of the crisis governance literature, a 'crisis' is characterized by threat, urgency, and uncertainty (Boin et al., 2005, pp. 3–4). These features may also appear in turbulence, but their significance diminishes, becoming part of a 'new normal' characterized by turbulence. Boin et al. write that the COVID-19 pandemic was a 'mega-crisis' which in turn caused 'a series of global, and interconnected, health, economic, social, institutional and political crises' (2021, p. 1). I submit that the pandemic represents not only a crisis but also a protracted period of turbulence, which *includes* manifold crises and necessitates a robust response. I specifically categorize COVID-19 as a case of environmental or exogenous turbulence, which affects governance systems with *shifting parameters*, and where previously stable structures, procedures, budgets, technologies, or political environments become less stable and reliable. Additionally, this turbulence introduces increased *temporal complexity*, which involves shifting or manifold tempos, disrupted routines, demands for rapid responses, and clashing time horizons and competing schedules (Ansell & Trondal, 2018, p. 45).

Robust governance

Governance may be broadly defined as the manner of governing a state, organization, or other entities. For this article, it refers to 'modes of control that allow the production of fragmented and multidimensional order *within* the state, *by* the state, *without* the state, and *beyond* the state' (Levi-Faur, 2012, p. 3). The concept of *robust* governance presupposes that there can be such a thing as 'good governance,' capable of addressing the manifold crises that accompany an increasingly turbulent world. According to Ansell et al., robust governance is meant to confront 'the heightened turbulence of present societies and to enhance the capacity of public organizations to permanently engage in the production of robust solutions' (2022, p. 8). This is achieved by creating agile and developmental organizations capable of improvising, experimenting, and learning rapidly; and systematically involving relevant actors beyond the existing policy and governance networks (Ansell et al., 2022, p. 8). Resilience derives from the Latin *resiliere* or *resilio*, meaning to 'bounce' or 'rebound' (Capano & Woo, 2017, p. 401), indicating an ability to 'bounce back' to a stable state. Conversely, robustness seeks to bridge

the gap between stability and change and, therefore, refers to the 'ability to uphold basic systemic functions (stability) through continuous transformations (change) that are supported by particular institutional infrastructure (stability)' (Ansell et al., 2022, p. 9). Unlike a resilient system, a robust system does not bounce back but aims to bounce forward 'to maintain some of its key functions in new and perhaps more attractive ways' (Ansell & Trondal, 2018, p. 9).

To effectively observe robust governance, it is essential to understand several underlying concepts that address elements of robustness in the context of the Faroes' COVID-19 governance. While robustness may often be associated with common attributes such as speed, adaptability, and flexibility, I submit that the following robust strategies offer a richer analysis and provide greater explanatory power in terms of showing what happens when governance is quick, adaptable, and flexible. The following six strategies of robustness draw inspiration mainly from Ansell et al.'s (2022) conceptual development and have also been used and further developed in Scognamiglio et al.'s (2023) systematic literature review of robust governance during COVID-19:

(1) **Scalability**: Enabling resource movement across organizations, levels, and sectors for adaptable solutions.
(2) **Prototyping**: Promoting agile solutions via testing, experimentation, and feedback.
(3) **Modularity**: Allowing for agile modifications while maintaining functional stability, co-creation, and tailored responses.
(4) **Bounded Autonomy**: Building commitment by involving stakeholders in a shared strategy to create public value during turbulence.
(5) **Bricolage**: Practising a form of 'evolutionary tinkering' and creatively reconfigures resources and ideas to meet new demands in turbulent conditions.
(6) **Societal Mobilization**: Promoting identification, understanding, and quick utilization of societal resources, such as trust, compliance, and other forms of social capacity, in response to turbulence.

Some of these robustness strategies overlap. For example, 'prototyping' refers to experimentation; but eventually, experimentation and feedback may be understood as evolutionary tinkering or a form of 'bricolage.' Similarly, a high degree of 'modularity' in a system, which refers to different sectors and organizations having similar or identical building blocks, contributes to the likelihood of several other indicators. Despite these overlaps, the concepts have different meanings, which contributes to a potential rich analysis.

Ansell et al. (2022, p. 11) mention 'societal mobilization' as a missing attribute of stable bureaucratic systems; here it is introduced as a robustness strategy. Although this paper is about governance, an outcome, such as successful COVID-19 governance, cannot be reduced only to decision-making. This means that (robust) governance is not isolated from, say, the sociocultural or environmental circumstances in which it operates; circumstances which often determine its conditions of possibility. Crucially, this perspective reveals the existence of resources that governance can mobilize for better outcomes. For example, state capacity factors – financial resources, influence, and expertise – are enduring issues in political analysis (Matthews, 2012, p. 281). However, I propose casting a wider net and considering, for instance, 'social capacity' as an important resource for governance during turbulent times. I propose a view of social capacity as the abilities, attributes, qualities, or features within a population and in the individuals which make up society, which may be beneficial in a turbulent situation. I will elaborate on this type of resource in the section on smallness below.

Since turbulence carries new challenges posed by 'temporal complexity' (Ansell & Trondal, 2018, p. 45), we must also consider the temporal dimension of robust governance. Temporality refers to the consideration of time and how it shapes and influences human experiences, events, processes, and political action (Goetz, 2014, pp. 577–578). Temporality is crucial to an examination of turbulence and robustness because governance must be flexible and adaptable over different timeframes when facing complex challenges. Turbulence implies that difficult situations, which require sensible governance, arise unpredictably. Therefore, certain initiatives may work well in certain situations at certain times, while similar initiatives are ineffective or undesirable in other situations. There can be no set recipe for robust governance, as timing and circumstance are central to the idea. Temporal complexity is therefore an empirical manifestation of turbulence in an organization, often arising from 'multiple or shifting tempos, such as when organizations must shift from routine program action to rapid response' (Ansell & Trondal, 2018, p. 45). This is applicable to the COVID-19 pandemic when the shift from routine action to rapid response seemed ubiquitous.

Another aspect of temporality is the duration of decision-making. Should it be quick? Or is there room for reflection and deliberation, allowing for more sensible albeit slower decision-making? Thus, I propose that the concept of temporality is an important ingredient in the Ansell et al. (2022) framework of robustness, highlighting the speed-versus-deliberation (or speed-versus-anticipation) issue. This dilemma or trade-off between speed and deliberation is central, especially in turbulent circumstances when the predisposition for heightened speed and reduced deliberation (and sometimes prudence) in decision-making is likely to be more pronounced than in less turbulent situations. This temporal perspective has profound implications for the way in which one views the robustness strategies presented in the previous section. During turbulence, the speed at which scalability, bricolage, or societal mobilization are applied is fundamental to their effectiveness.

Smallness

The question of polity size is highly relevant in terms of understanding turbulence and robust governance. While the study of small states has often concerned itself with democracy (Anckar, 1999, 2004; Dahl & Tufte, 1973; Newton, 1982; Ott, 2018; Veenendaal, 2015) and security and foreign policy (Bailes et al., 2016; Bailes & Gylfason, 2008; Thorhallsson, 2019; Thorhallsson et al., 2019) the question of small states' political and administrative systems' ability to deal with turbulent challenges seems to have fewer academic discussions. Smaller jurisdictions are in some ways more delicate than larger jurisdictions. They tend to be at a disadvantage in terms of international bargaining power and economic capacity, exemplified by the inability of many small states to acquire protective equipment during the initial pandemic emergency (World Health Organization, 2020). Being isolated, having relatively homogenous industries, being heavily dependent on imports, and possessing lower levels of specialization is potentially problematic (Anckar, 1999; Baldacchino & Wivel, 2020; Sarapuu et al., 2021; Thorhallsson, 2019). The same can be said of the diseconomies of scale evident in any small jurisdiction. Sarapuu et al. argue that small states 'typically crave stability' and that it is particularly problematic for small states to 'find a good balance between political preferences of the domestic audience, the need to maintain national autonomy, and the need to keep up the international institutional setting which had previously helped create stability and predictability (2021, p. 21). This is a fitting description of the vulnerabilities associated with being a small state during a global turbulent event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, there are several examples where smaller jurisdictions demonstrate the ability to deal with crises better than larger entities. Jugl (2019) compares Luxembourg's and Germany's response to the refugee crisis in 2015. She finds that Luxembourg had a greater ability for swift reaction than the much larger polity of Germany. Structural characteristics in a small state led to better abilities to perceive an upcoming crisis and opportunities to prepare for it. Additionally, communication channels were simpler, and coordination possibilities were stronger compared to the large state, which suffered from 'attention biases which inhibited the detection of, preparation for and reaction to the crisis' (Jugl, 2019, p. 19). Similarly, while many states, including wealthy North American and European countries, failed at pandemic management (Boin et al., 2021, pp. 11–12; Clark et al., 2021, p. 15; Maxmen, 2021; O'Leary, 2020; Rocha, 2020), many small states fared relatively well, although pandemic measures came at a huge economic cost (Högenauer et al., 2021, p. 6). Several factors look favourable for a small island nation during a pandemic. For instance, being isolated and having a small population should be an advantage in a situation where it is desirable to have as little contact between people as possible. For island jurisdictions, having few points of entry should also be advantageous, as travel in and out of the country can be more easily monitored and controlled.

Another pertinent factor is that of social cohesion and trust, which may be characteristic of small jurisdictions. Baldacchino (2005) uses the concept of 'social capital,' to analyse economic success in small island jurisdictions. While governance and democracy often take the credit for such success, Baldacchino suggests that they may merely be 'epi-phenomena, the visible effects of other, deeper forces at work that are mainly social rather than political' (2005, p. 32). In their analysis of (pre-pandemic) societal security in Iceland, Bailes and Gylfason found that 'improvization does actually work pretty well in such a small, close-knit, skilled and inventive society' (2008, p. 33). In most small states and microstates many actors know, or know of, each other. Baldacchino & Veenendaal refer to this as a heightened social 'intimacy', which means that society is marked by 'pervasive connections and overlapping role-relationships. While such intimacy may be associated with negative effects, such as clientelism, nepotism, longstanding antagonism, and feuds, it may also lead to social cohesiveness, community, and fellowship (2018, pp. 342–343). In a professional setting, people are therefore used to working with zero or one 'degrees of separation', making organizational collaborations easier.

A systematic literature review on robust governance during the COVID-19 emergency suggests that voluntary citizen compliance was one of the strategies governments employed to address the health emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic (Scognamiglio et al., 2023). Compliance is correlated with a high level of trust, which promotes an understanding and agreement about the severity of the crisis and what is needed to mitigate its harmful effects. However, compliance with specific guidelines is not the only benefit high trust provides. Sociologists have long argued that the benefits of trust are wide-ranging and reduce complexity and transaction costs throughout society (Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 2017). Consequently, a small, high-trust society is likely to have relatively low societal complexity, which is a clear advantage from a governance perspective. As Dahl and Tufte suggested, a system of relatively low complexity will have less variation in behaviour, more people adhering to the same code, norms are easily communicated, violations are visible, sanctions are easily applied by palpable and surreptitious means, and avoiding sanctions is difficult (1973, p. 91).

These abovementioned social forces may act independently of political action, but in terms of robust governance, the mere presence of *potential* societal resources is less important than the governance system's ability to identify, understand, and mobilize these resources and to do so quickly when needed. On balance, then, smallness offers advantages and

disadvantages, although many other factors and particularities are crucial for a small jurisdiction's robustness.

Research methodology

This case study is based on interviews with key figures in the Faroese COVID-19 governance as well as available material on the Faroese COVID-19 response. Some of the most valuable material in this regard is part of the official COVID-19 evaluation by the Faroese government, which was carried out by the author (Olavson, 2023a, 2023b), and which was available at the government's website at the time of writing. Other sources include official documents obtained by request for information access, scholarly literature, and media reports. The analysis primarily relies on the evaluation data and interviews, as they specifically pertain to COVID-19 governance. The evaluation data was gathered using qualitative surveys, which were sent to Faroese in the top management of government ministries, organizations, committees, municipalities, trade unions, employer's associations, schools, and private businesses. The survey yielded 33 written responses and 3 oral responses from these organizations in the summer of 2022. Organizations decided themselves how to respond, i.e. how many of their staff to include in their assessment, how much material to include, which areas to focus on, and so on.

I first analysed and used this data in the official COVID-19 evaluation, working as a civil servant for the Faroese government. The evaluation was published in Faroese and presented in January 2023 (Olavson, 2023a, 2023b). I divided the qualitative survey into three parts.

The first part concerned the initial COVID-19 outbreak that hit the Faroes in the first half of 2020. This section of the survey included organizational preparedness prior to the crisis, the measures taken during the outbreak, day-to-day management during the period, and the emerging complexities and challenges that arose. I asked respondents about collaborative efforts with various stakeholders at home and abroad, the balance between implementing guidelines and enforcing legal measures, and the feedback loop from internal and external stakeholders, such as employees and intermediaries, customers, and citizens. Finally, I asked them about the socioeconomic implications and consequences that the pandemic and its management strategies had on their own organization and its stakeholders.

The second part examined the period from summer 2020 to February 2022. I continued to inquire about the organization's trajectory as the country experienced cycles of slowdowns and accelerations (lockdowns and reopenings). I asked about adaptations and how organizations prepared for potential recurring waves. This included addressing new challenges and complexities that arose during this period. Questions mirrored those in part one, addressing collaborative strategies, guidelines, and feedback loops to provide insights into the evolving dynamics of crisis management.

In the third part, the focus shifted to lessons learned from managing COVID-19 and how they can inform organizations' approaches to potential future events. I asked about significant insights gained, key takeaways, and lessons that could be applied to enhance future crisis management. The resulting raw data, comprising 206 pages of text, can provide insight into how organizations navigated temporal shifts during the pandemic and how they adopted robust governance strategies to address dynamic conditions effectively. To supplement this data and to ensure an accurate representation of COVID-19 governance in the Faroes, I conducted

interviews with the Chief Medical Officer, the Chief of Police, the Head of the Veterinary Laboratory, the Head of the Department of Occupational Medicine, and Public Health, and two civil servants in Klaksvík Municipality. All of these interviewees had participated in the government evaluation. The interviews were meant to elaborate on the main points of those responses, giving a richer body of material and reducing the chances of misunderstandings.

None of the data has previously been used in a scholarly context. Therefore, I obtained permission from relevant organisations to use the data for academic purposes.

Analysis

Based on the methods and data described above, this section examines the presence of robustness in Faroese COVID-19 governance. The first sub-section addresses the Faroese context and documents an important premise for the analysis: that the Faroese COVID-19 governance was relatively successful. The next sub-section explains how and why Faroese testing capacity was unique, and how it formed the foundation for robust governance during the pandemic. The following sub-section explains how social capacity played a vital role for pandemic governance. The sub-section that follows describes the extensive use of soft-law and how this influenced robustness. The fifth and final sub-section explains how the adaptive and communicative behaviour of organizations contributed to robustness during the pandemic.

COVID-19 in the Faroes

In the Faroes, COVID-19 was considered a deadly threat from March 2020 to February 2022. Remarkably, deaths were avoided almost a full year into the pandemic. By the end of February 2022, there were 28 registered COVID-19-related deaths, equating to 518 deaths per million inhabitants. In comparison, during the same two-year period, COVID-19-related deaths were between five and six times more likely in the United Kingdom and the United States (see). Notably, 26 of the 28 COVID-19-related deaths in the Faroes occurred during the final four months of this period. With the onset of the Omicron variant in December 2021, more people who died of other causes had the Omicron virus at the time of death, making it difficult to distinguish between deaths *with* COVID-19 and deaths *because of* COVID-19. Consequently, the Faroese government ceased registering COVID-19-related deaths in March 2022.

As Figure 1 shows, the Faroes registered its first COVID-19 related fatality in early 2021 and had a very low fatality per capita compared to other industrialized countries over the two-year period. While a low number of deaths is a significant indicator of successful COVID-19 management, another important indicator is the extent to which society remains open despite the threat. In the Faroes, the everyday lives of most citizens were less affected by the pandemic compared to most industrialized countries during most of the two-year period from March 2020 to February 2022. This contrast is evident in the COVID-19 stringency index developed at the University of Oxford (Hale et al., 2021). During the first year, the Faroes maintained a stringency score of around or below 40 for a prolonged period, whereas the compared countries had scores around 60 or higher (see Figure 2). Overall, the stringency of the Faroese response (the height of the curve) was the lowest.

**Figure 1: Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million inhabitants.**
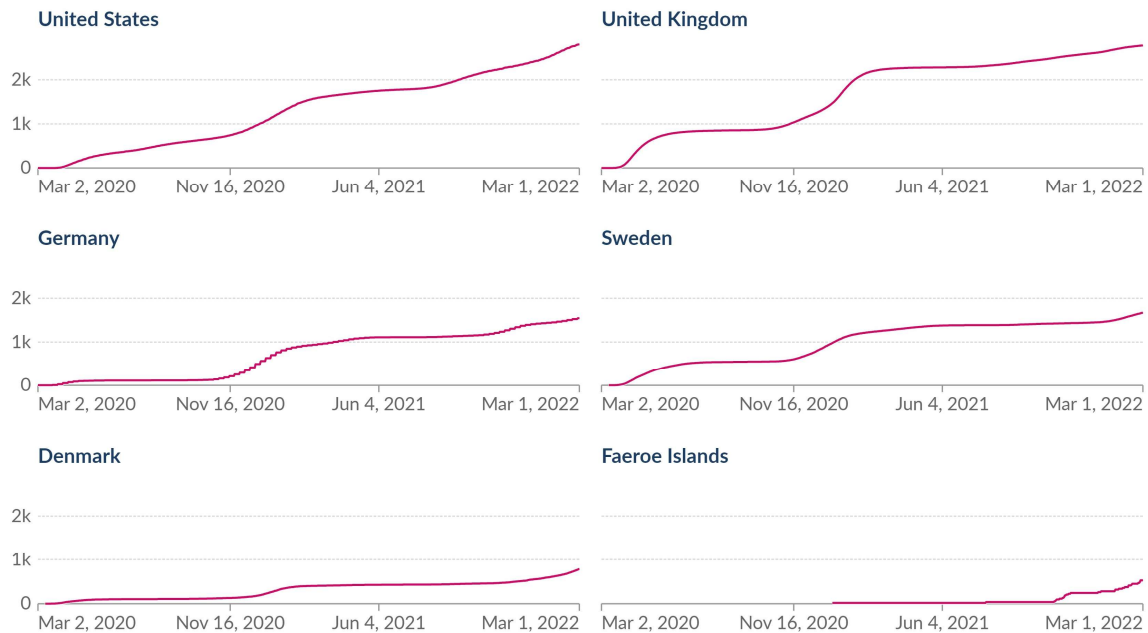
Note: Due to varying protocols and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death, the number of confirmed deaths may not accurately represent the true number of deaths caused by COVID-19.
*Source:* WHO COVID-19 Dashboard, via www.ourworldindata.org

Figure 2 shows that overall stringency was significantly lower in the Faroes compared to other countries, which is an indication that the society was more open. If COVID-19 governance can be judged by the effective balancing of protecting people and maintaining activity, the Faroes were comparatively successful. Furthermore, consideration of citizen satisfaction with the handling of COVID-19 can strengthen this argument. Figures Figure 3 and Figure 4 below, though not directly comparable since the survey questions are not identical, provide insights into public satisfaction. The level of satisfaction (the percentage of those answering 'appropriate') among Faroese citizens (see Figure 3) was most comparable to that of Denmark. However, the dip to the low 41 per cent approval in October 2021 – likely owing to a high infection rate at the time – demonstrates that satisfaction among Faroese citizens was not unassailable. The remaining four countries – Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States – had significantly lower satisfaction rates on average among their citizens through most of the pandemic (see Figure 4).

**Figure 2: COVID-19 Stringency Index.**
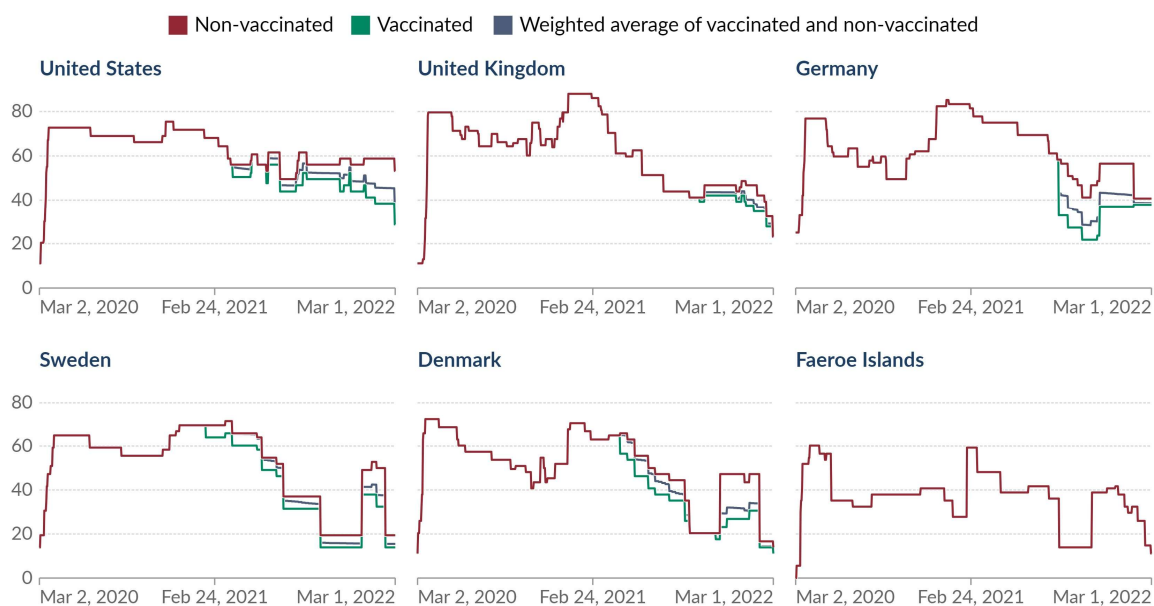
Notes: This index is a composite measure based on nine response indicators, including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest).
Source: Hale et al. (2021) via www.ourworldindata.org.

Figure 3: Distribution in % showing Faroese attitudes towards COVID-19 measures.
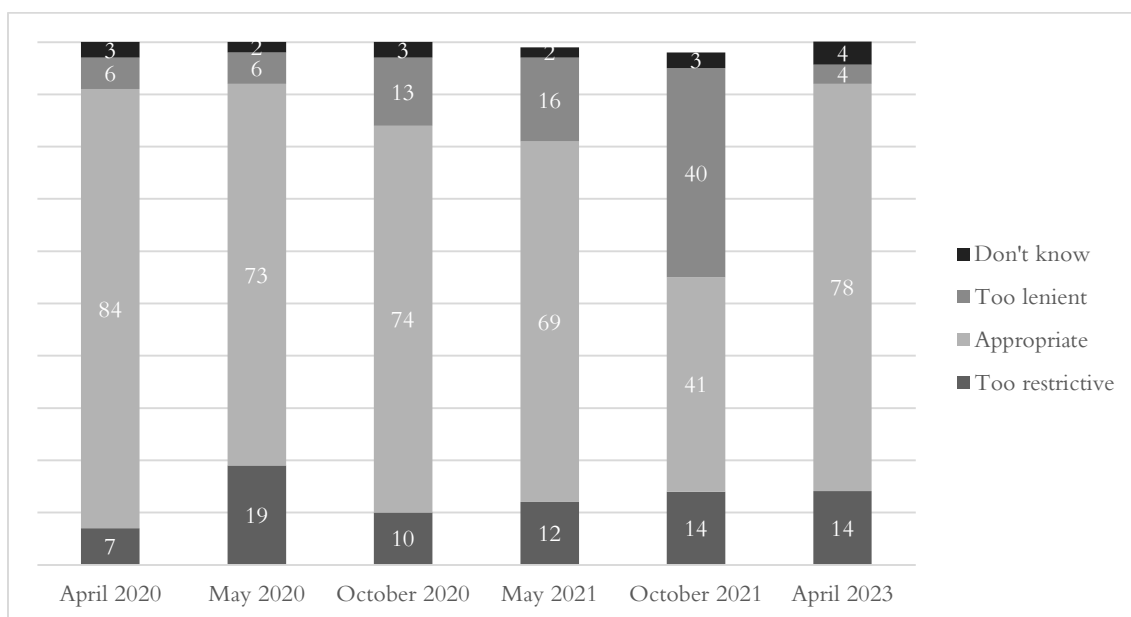
Sources: For April 2020 to October 2021: í Skorini & Albinus (2022, p. 374). For April 2023: previously unpublished survey results.

Figure 4: % of people in each country who think the government is handling COVID-19 'very' or 'somewhat' well.
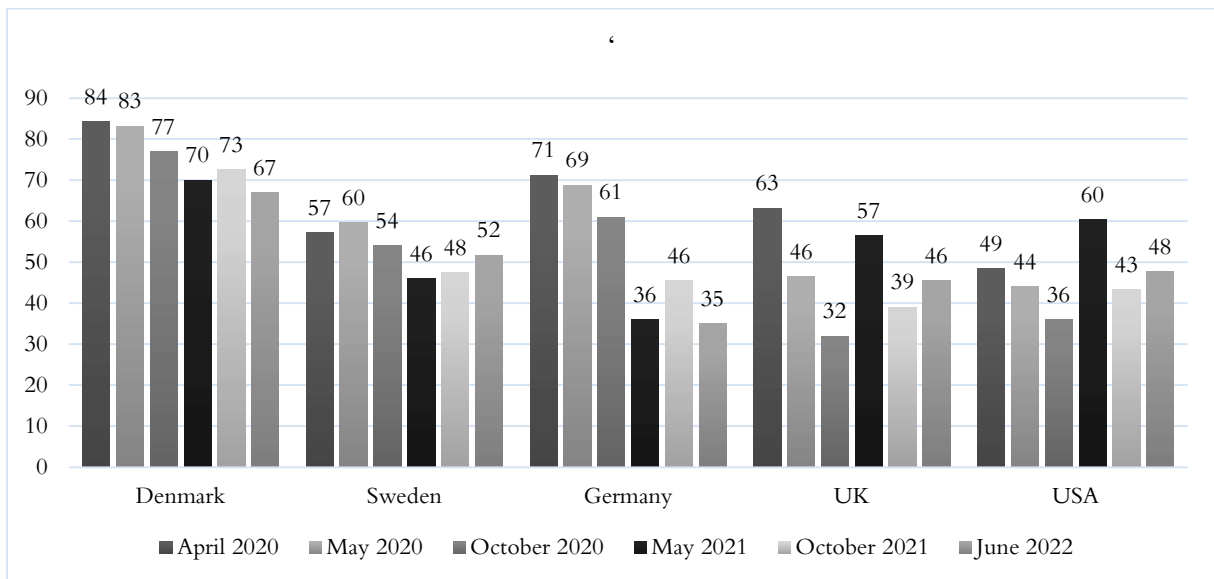
Note: For comparison to Figure 3, the same months have been selected, except for the last one, for which comparable data was not available. June 2022 represents the post-pandemic 'reflective' survey since it is the latest month with data points available for all five countries in Figure 4. Each bar represents an average of data points collected within the given month.
Source: Yougov (2020).

     Despite the somewhat favourable description and comparisons above, this paper does not make the case that Faroese COVID-19 governance and experience was an entirely rosy affair. As in all other societies, there were issues of fairness in relation to government measures and political divisions concerning vaccinations and mask wearing, which challenged governance. There were significant problems, such as staff fatigue and stress in the health and education sectors. The focus on Covid-19 meant that the health sector was unable to give as much focus to the treatment of other diseases. Long-COVID had significant health consequences for some previously infected. Mental health and social lives were severely affected as the elderly and school children were isolated from their regular lives. For long periods, the tourism, hospitality, and creative industries disappeared completely. Even when these industries were allowed to return, they did so under severely unfavourable conditions given the erratic behaviour of the virus and unpredictable infection rates. Although wage compensation was meant to be all-inclusive in the public sector and extensive in the private sector, several families were left with significant financial problems and in certain cases 'children suffered, because the income of both parents suddenly evaporated' (Olavson, 2023a, p. 22).

     On the other hand, the paper does argue that there are elements of robustness observable in the management of the pandemic, relevant both to the study of small states' governance and to the broader study of robustness. Having established the relatively decent outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Faroes, these outcomes now beg explanation. Notably, the study should consider the degree to which the Faroese COVID-19 success was due to robust governance.

Testing capacity: Salmon to the rescue

One of the fundamental conditions for the relatively successful Faroese COVID-19 governance was that the Faroes tested far more than any other country in the world during the first months of the pandemic. By December 31, 2020, the Faroes had tested an equivalent of its entire population 3.7 times. Second and third in the world were Luxembourg and the United Arab Emirates, where tests amounted to 2.6 times and 2.2 times their populations respectively by the end of 2020 (Hasell et al., 2020). The question arises: how did this small North Atlantic jurisdiction have the highest testing capacity per capita in the world during this critical pre-vaccine period? The explanation lies in the salmon farming industry.

When the news of the 'coronavirus' epidemic broke, the laboratory director at the Faroese Veterinary Authority reacted immediately and sought ways to develop a testing apparatus in the Faroes. The testing laboratory was already equipped for mass virus testing due to its prior work combating isavirus, a salmon disease that had decimated salmon in Faroese fjords decades earlier. The similarity between testing salmon and humans allowed for a swift adaptation to make this capacity available for COVID-19 testing. Thus, one of the most crucial circumstances enabling effective infection control can be traced to the Faroese export industry, which garnered attention in the international media early in the pandemic (Boffey, 2020). In addition to the initial adaptation, the laboratory needed more equipment, testing kits, and staff. The laboratory rapidly scaled up, making it possible to test 3,000 to 4,000 people per day: up to 8 per cent of the population. Figure 5 demonstrates exactly how far ahead the Faroes were in terms of testing during the first ten months of the pandemic. It also suggests the relative advantage that small absolute population size offers for national testing.

Figure 5: COVID-19 tests per 1000 population by 31 December 2020.
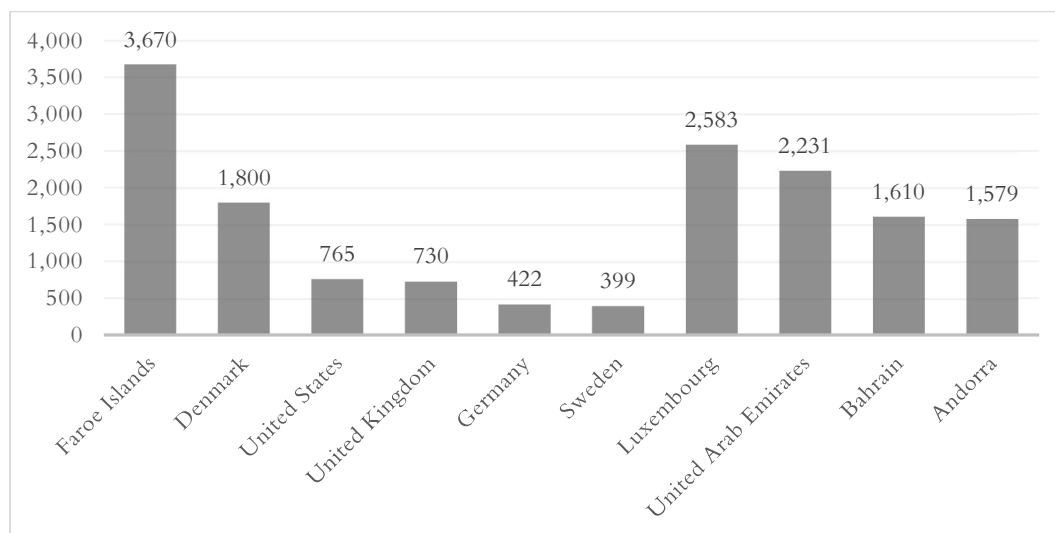
Notes: This figure compares the Faroes with previously compared countries (see previous figures) and the other four top testers globally by 31 December 2020 (pre-vaccine period). Data for Andorra and Germany are from 27 and 28 December, respectively.
Sources: www.korona.fo, www.hagstova.fo and Hasell et al. (2020).

This unprecedented testing capacity, coupled with rapid analysis and contact tracing (most individuals received their test results within a few hours), made it viable for the government to pursue a testing, tracing, and isolating strategy when many other countries, including Denmark, abandoned such strategies during the first few months of the pandemic.

Aside from industrial capacity, the Faroes' COVID-19 response was bolstered by collaboration among several institutions. This included the healthcare system, the veterinary authority, and the Chief Medical Officer. The healthcare system collected the samples, the veterinary authority analysed them, and the Chief Medical Officer conducted contact tracing and analysed infection chains based on the results. In late June 2020, the government licensed and hired private laboratory Thetis to test for COVID-19, which further bolstered the capacity. This expansion allowed authorities to test all travellers through Vágar Airport (code: FAE) as international travel resumed after the initial wave of the pandemic. The government hired another private company, international ferry operator Smyril Line, to manage the logistical challenge of processing people through queues at Tórshavn harbour and implementing a drive-through testing scheme for domestic testing. The National Hospital also played a pivotal role in testing operations and in implementing the continuous logistical development of the testing process. Testing was continuously streamlined as better procedures and improved testing facilities were identified. These organizations acted as bricoleurs, incessantly tinkering, fine-tuning, and improving procedures. Collaborations between these different organizations, which may not have existed prior to the pandemic, make this an excellent example of bounded autonomy: the nurturing of a 'joint ownership' of a challenge and addressing it jointly (Ansell et al., 2022, p. 15). It is also a good example of the fellowship and strengthened community, which often characterize small states during turbulent events.

Another positive impact of the testing strategy was that so-called dark figures (unknown positives) were repeatedly found to be extremely low (Petersen et al., 2020; Petersen, Kristiansen, Reinert, et al., 2021; Petersen, Strøm, et al., 2022). This finding confirmed the success of the test strategy and enabled the health authorities to maintain a vigilant eye on infection clusters throughout most of the crisis. Several contributors to the official government evaluation indicated that promoting extensive testing, especially during periods of high infection rates, was a prudent decision. Smyril Line, the ferry company responsible for testing logistics, criticized the breadth of the testing: too many healthy people were tested, and the scheme was unnecessarily expensive (Olavson, 2023a, p. 18). However, the counterargument made during the author's interviews with the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief of Police was that it would have been much more expensive for Faroese society *not* to pursue a comprehensive testing strategy throughout the pandemic.

Industrial capacity, administrative preparedness, and a collaborative spirit sprinkled with some entrepreneurship (prototyping and bricolage) within the public sector allowed the Faroes to have and deploy one of the highest global COVID-19 testing capacities in the world at a crucial time. This comprehensive approach delayed cases and deaths early in the pandemic as well as enabled society to be relatively open while most other countries were severely restricted.

This scenario illustrates the importance of agility, adaptability, and collaboration – hallmarks of robustness – in managing a health crisis. The ability to co-create and connect actors who usually do not cooperate is a good example of what Ansell et al. (2022, p. 15) call 'bounded autonomy'. The ability to quickly repurpose existing facilities and equipment for COVID-19 testing matches what they refer to as 'bricolage'. This situation could arguably also be viewed as a case of 'modularity', since the building blocks used for salmon testing were adapted for human testing. Finally, 'scalability' is evident in the employment of hundreds of testers, analysts, and contact tracers, as well as in the continuous streamlining and effectivization of testing throughout the pandemic. These attributes collectively enabled the

whole system to respond swiftly to the unfolding crisis. In a turbulent situation such as a pandemic, harnessing collective expertise and resources enhances robustness and the capacity to manage the crisis.

Mobilizing social capacity

While robust governance refers to activity oriented towards decision-making, I also argue that other noteworthy external factors are crucial to governance outcomes. Such factors may take various forms and influence resources or conditions under which decision-making occurs. Therefore, a vital part of robust governance involves knowing about and managing such social features and mobilising available societal resources and favourable circumstances to enhance governance effectiveness.

The Faroes are a high trust society, which was reflected in a high satisfaction and voluntary compliance with the guidelines issued by the authorities (as seen in Figure 3). The picture below illustrates the testing queue early in the pandemic, indicating a high compliance with the government's testing strategy (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Cars lining up for COVID-19 testing in Tórshavn in March 2020.

Notes: The queue covers most of the circular road around the capital. While testing capacity is important, the people also need to show up (Olavson, 2023a, p. 16).
Source: www.faroephoto.fo

Nevertheless, compliance and trust may not fully explain the social dynamics in play in a small society in a turbulent situation. During a deadly pandemic, social surveillance and control within the private sphere also contribute to governance, facilitating the implementation of interventions such as social distancing, gathering bans, quarantines, and testing. Social control, which may be described as the dark side of social cohesion, was widespread during the Faroese pandemic, as the Chief Medical Officer and Chief of Police confirmed in interviews. The police received regular reports from citizens about other 'misbehaving' citizens. A qualitative study of Faroese COVID-19 diaries found that 'those who do not follow the rules and stuff, everyone will soon know' and that 'even if you are not put in prison, because there is as yet no law, we do have a strong social control' (Hayfield, 2023, p. 10).

Small societies typically have a higher degree of what Johannesen (2012) calls 'recognizability' and what Baldacchino and Veenendaal call 'social intimacy' (2018, p. 342); where many community members know each other and may know each other well. This familiarity forms the basis of ad-hoc monitoring of those who may potentially violate the new rules implemented to combat the spread of infections. The concept of the 'rural panopticon' (Philo et al., 2017) can be useful to grasp these dynamics. Jeremy Bentham's architectural prison model, the 'panopticon', and later Michel Foucault's (1995) concept of 'panopticism', denote total surveillance, leading people to self-discipline and to eventually internalize certain desirable behaviours. The important distinction to be made here is that the government did not directly surveil citizens during the pandemic; it merely provided clear public messaging and guidelines regarding appropriate behaviour. Surveillance occurred spontaneously among the citizenry, and there is no indication that the government directly encouraged this behaviour. Therefore, it is unlikely that this constitutes 'societal mobilization', although a more cynical approach would have been to identify and observe these social forces and manage and mobilize them as needed. Conversely, it can be argued that public communication can be tailored to enhance these effects without undermining them.

The importance of social capacity – including social cohesion, trust, compliance, and social control for COVID-19 governance – was confirmed in October 2021, when compliance began to wane, leading to an infection surge (see Figure 3), and this resource was suddenly lacking. The dip in compliance was likely due to pandemic fatigue as reports came out about the public now being 'fed up with COVID' (Dalsgaard, 2021). The Chief Medical Officer tried to encourage the population to continue to be careful, highlighting the governance difficulties compared to earlier in the pandemic when compliance was higher.

Soft law: Expedient decision-making

The Faroes avoided legislation for direct epidemic management throughout the pandemic, adopting instead a soft law approach, which profoundly impacted the way it was handled. This decision was practical and stems from the relationship between the Faroes and Denmark. Although epidemic management was formally a Danish competency, the Faroese government managed the pandemic without direct Danish involvement or supervision. From the beginning, there were doubts about the boundary between Faroese and Danish jurisdiction in relation to epidemics. Formally, such matters were subject to Danish law, meaning any legislation in the Faroes would have to pass through the Danish parliament to take effect. For the Faroese government, legislating through a geographically distant and foreign parliament would have been undesirable. Consequently, to avoid hard legislation, which would have to be Danish, the government adopted a comprehensive soft law approach, using only guidelines instead of laws to manage the pandemic (Olavson, 2023b, p. 30). Although most countries around the world supplemented hard law with guidelines, the Faroese approach was quite unique with its absence of hard law.

The soft-law approach began as experimentation, akin to 'prototyping', and eventually evolved into 'bricolage'. As soon as its effectiveness became apparent, the government quickly justified the soft-law approach to encourage 'trust and responsibility' among the people. While this rationale could be dismissed as ideological spin, it is not entirely wrong because it is likely that the political system suspected that such an approach would work in the Faroes for the reasons explained in the previous section. The high degree of compliance likely compensated

for the lack of hard laws to combat the crisis, something that was uncertain beforehand. It seems evident that this type of turbulence management works best in a high-trust society.

How effective was this approach? Several respondents to the evaluation in 2022 believed that the government's use of guidelines instead of laws and mandates was advantageous. While it was often challenging to interpret government-issued guidelines, the inherent agility and flexibility of such an approach – for instance, in the ability to tailor guidelines based on local or contextual realities, and leveraging the expertise of those on the ground – was significant in expediting decision-making throughout society. One of the main conclusions in the evaluation highlighted the effectiveness of this strategy:

> It is often best to let those who engage in a particular activity daily adapt the guidelines to the concrete reality in a way they find sensible (Olavson, 2023a, p. 19).

This observation highlights the value of adaptability and context-specific solutions in governance during times of crisis. Conversely, the soft-law approach's flexibility could also be a disadvantage since responsibility was moved from the political authority to citizens and organizations. This was especially problematic when the guidelines were ambiguous. This problem can be observed in the National Hospital's response to the evaluation survey:

> The national government made the decision <u>that</u> the health sector should slow down [reduce activity]. But it was the hospital management who had to decide *how* this was to be carried out. The same thing happened when we opened again (Olavson, 2023b, p. 11; emphasis in original).

Even if decisions were not always optimal, it was an advantage not having to ask permission, as decisions could be corrected later. Collaboration among organizations – whether public, private, or NGO – was essential for interpreting and implementing guidelines and changing the protocol when needed. Most respondents seemed to have followed the guidelines as if they were the law. This compliance means that, although the Faroes formally looked like a completely decentralized system during this period, a mixture of solidarity and social pressures contributed to a high level of compliance with government guidelines. Thus, it could be argued that the Faroes had a *formally decentralized* and *informally centralized* management of the pandemic. On paper, COVID-19 governance was very loose; but, in practice, compliance was as if there had been hard legislation.

Several respondents highlighted the role of the COVID-19 Advisory as a useful intermediary between citizens and authorities, contributing to the effectiveness of the soft-law approach. The Advisory took thousands of calls throughout the period, working on a case-by-case basis to solve issues and help people and organizations interpret government guidelines and adapt them to their circumstances (Olavson, 2023a, p. 19). In the words of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Advisory worked as an invaluable link or as 'a valve between frustrated citizens and the political system' (Olavson, 2023b, p. 36). This is a good example of public sector entrepreneurship or 'prototyping' and later 'bricolage', as it continually adapted its advice to societal demand and to the growing body of Faroese scientific literature on COVID-19. Pál Weihe, head of the Advisory, explained in an interview that the Advisory's messaging and diplomatic methods were meticulous and rooted in a deep understanding of Faroese culture, focusing on the intricacies and needs of the people and organizations who needed its advice. On some occasions, this approach meant that very specific solutions and compromises were cultivated during the communication between the Advisory and callers. Several examples are given in the interview on attempts to accommodate callers' wishes to 'reduce distance,' to eventually compel them to follow the advice given. The Advisory would seek to determine

their background, profession, and other clues, making it possible to 'place them culturally' to find out how to communicate with them effectively and to utilize 'Faroese transparency' (social intimacy). A woman was upset, because her father had passed away and her sister wanted to travel from Denmark to attend the funeral. An informal agreement was made between the Advisory and the caller that the sister would attend the funeral but would sit by herself and not attend the wake or other social events. This is one of hundreds of examples ranging from weddings, birthdays, sports acitivities and everyday organization in workplaces. According to the interview the informal, pastoral, and compromise-seeking approach resulted in a very high satisfaction among callers with the given recommendations.

Learning from turbulence is, as mentioned in the theoretical chapter, an important ingredient in robust governance, as the most robust governance systems find a suitable balance between stability and change. In terms of learning from the pandemic, the Faroese government realised early on – despite a relatively successful handling of COVID-19 – that it would be prudent to have local control over epidemic (pandemic) management in the future. The Faroese government proposed a takeover of epidemic (pandemic) management, which the Faroese parliament voted for unanimously in 2023. On 1 January 2024, the pandemic area was transferred to the Faroese government. In practice this means that obstacles to formal pandemic legislation in the Faroes are removed. It is therefore unlikely that the Faroes would employ soft law to the same extent in the future.

Organizational adaptability and communication during the pandemic

Despite the crisis affecting various activities in various ways, almost all respondents in the evaluation agreed that non-essential activities could be temporarily curtailed, allowing focus on core operations. Consequently, some experienced the need for significant streamlining and reductions in specific activities, resulting in prolonged processing times, longer waiting periods, and delays in providing certain goods and services. Within the health sector, activity changed considerably due to the pandemic, requiring significant efforts for direct COVID-19 management. Employees had to adapt rapidly during the COVID-19 crisis. For nearly all public institutions, regular services – including health, education, elderly care, and childcare – had deteriorated to some extent during certain periods.

Closely tied to enhancing adaptability between management and staff, formal and informal communication and meeting activities significantly increased at most workplaces, especially in the public sector. This escalation in communication became necessary due to unknown and unstable circumstances. The need for more frequent and comprehensive dialogue enhanced collaborative efforts among government organizations, municipalities, and private operators, leading to more effective operations during COVID-19 compared to normal circumstances. On multiple occasions, collaborations emerged among organizations, departments, units, and individuals that had never collaborated before, and on even more occasions, existing collaborations were intensified because of the pandemic. Almost all respondents in the official evaluation emphasized their commitment to collaborations with other parties during the crisis, indicating that 'bounded autonomy' was pervasive throughout the governance system. Another example of 'bricolage' was the active engagement with local research data (Olavson, 2023b, p. 4), which allowed for nuanced and context-sensitive decision-making and adaptation in response to challenges. The agility within the Faroese system is aptly expressed in the response to the evaluation survey from the Ministry of the Environment and Industry:

The Faroes had a very flexible (agile) system, meaning that it adapted quickly to the circumstances, and the formal bureaucratic boundaries were less limiting compared to larger systems abroad. The question is whether a new and more detailed plan, based on a hypothetical example, would have been equally helpful, considering the constant need to assess the situation and make decisions based on rapidly changing circumstances. This was the advantage of the Faroese system. With an informal management approach that we have in the Faroes, it was nevertheless important that significant decisions were rooted [in available knowledge], and those responsible had to constantly communicate with each other (Olavson, 2023b, pp. 36–37).

As the above quote highlights, the Faroes had an agile and flexible system that facilitated expedient decision-making and, by extension, robust governance. This prompts the question of whether a comprehensive planning process would have been as effective since the pandemic was fraught with uncertainties anyway. Several respondents mentioned that the COVID-19 crisis brought about significant skill development, valuable experiences, and improved practices that remain relevant today or in specific contexts. Examples include technical skill development, such as remote teaching methods and teleworking arrangements. These examples, in addition to the formal takeover of epidemic (pandemic) jurisdiction from Denmark, which was mentioned in the previous section, suggest that there has been some degree of learning or 'bouncing forward' from the experience, which distinguishes 'robustness' from the oft-used 'resilience'.

Conclusion: Implications for robust governance

This paper has sought to provide insights into the dynamics of robust governance, including the roles of smallness and temporality during turbulent times. Turbulence can take many forms, including political turmoil, war, climate crisis, cyber threats, terrorism, and infectious diseases. Systems of governance must regularly confront these challenges, among other types of turbulence. The question of robustness is foundational in sociology and political science because it concerns the very existence of societies. A society does not qualify as a good society, if it is unable to survive turbulence. Exploring this capability then requires identifying sought-after characteristics that contribute to the success and durability of societies and civilizations.

Developing robust answers to turbulent challenges is crucial. This raises the question how political systems can advance robustness and what robustness truly embodies. In this paper, I asked, 'how was Faroese COVID-19 governance robust?' and 'how can robust characteristics of Faroese pandemic governance be explained?' While robustness can take many forms, the present analysis demonstrates the importance of speed, tinkering, flexibility, and different types of learning as critical robust traits in turbulent situations, many of which may be reinforced in a small society due to over-lapping role relations, strong community and high trust levels. This case also demonstrates the importance of finding the appropriate balance between stability and change, i.e. when to bounce back and when to bounce forward, which is a crucial element of robustness. The most pertinent example of bouncing forward is the Faroese formal takeover of epidemic (pandemic) management from Denmark, valid from 1 January 2024.

The Faroes displayed different elements of robustness throughout the pandemic. All six robustness strategies used in the analysis are observable in the Faroese case. A common theme among these strategies is their associated speed. For example, scalability is more valuable when it can be done quickly. Bounded autonomy, which involves collaboration and joint ownership

among several actors, is more effective and, therefore, more robust in turbulent situations if established swiftly. A steep learning curve involves quick learning; therefore, experimenting, tinkering, and feedback – key aspects of prototyping and bricolage – are also more effective when performed quickly.

Temporality, then, emerges as a crucial aspect in the context of robust governance during turbulence. In the case of the Faroes, the ability to take rapid action or adapt swiftly made up for unpreparedness or anticipation and even suboptimal decisions. Both the lack of preparedness and the swift compensation for this lack can be associated with smallness, and we may ask whether it is cost-effective for a very small society to have wide-ranging preparedness when there is a great ability to adapt to new situations and implement learning swiftly. The trade-off between preparedness and speed may look different in a larger society with a very different social fabric. At several junctures during the pandemic, such as the initial lockdown (slowdown), and subsequent surges in infection, speed and flexibility repeatedly proved their value over more traditional approaches of deliberation and planning, typically highly important in public administration and governance, especially in larger societies. This analysis reinforces the argument that in governance, timing is important, and the small absolute size of the jurisdiction helps. For a larger jurisdiction, possible implications of these findings depend on the degree to which it is possible to replicate smallness characteristics, thus reinforcing the six robustness strategies and the speed at which they can be implemented.

The conclusions of this study have implications for the speed-versus-deliberation dilemma, especially in turbulent situations where the importance of speed seems to be more significant compared to calmer situations. Further research in robust governance should examine how speed is achieved as part of a robust response in a tight social setting and how the 'speed versus deliberation' balancing act is managed in turbulent times. Arguably, a small jurisdiction such as the Faroes presents an ideal setting to study this dilemma because speed may be more easily achieved in very small political units. Yet, the Faroese case is highly particular, with cultural, sociological, political, and geographical features not applicable in other societies. Similar research in different societies would aid ongoing academic discussion on robust governance and its associated temporal and size dimensions. Also, studies using other methods, statistical analyses, and longitudinal studies, observing how robust governance strategies evolve over time, including beyond the pandemic and in different turbulent situations, would offer deeper insights and would complement the findings of this paper.

Disclaimers

References

Anckar, D. (1999). Homogeneity and smallness: Dahl and Tufte revisited. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *22*(1), 29–44.

Anckar, D. (2004). Direct democracy in microstates and small island states. *World Development*, *32*(2), 379–390.

Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic as a game changer for public administration and leadership? The need for robust governance responses to turbulent problems. *Public Management Review*, *23*(7), 949–960.

Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2022). Public administration and politics meet turbulence: The search for robust governance responses. *Public Administration, 101*(1). https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/padm.12874

Ansell, C., & Trondal, J. (2018). Governing turbulence: An organizational-institutional agenda. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, *1*(1), 43–57.

Ansell, C., Trondal, J., & Øgård, M. (2017). Turbulent governance. In C. Ansell, J. Trondal, & M. Øgård (Eds.), *Governance in turbulent times* (pp. 1–23). Oxford University Press.

Bailes, A. J. K., & Gylfason, Þ. F. (2008). 'Societal security' and Iceland. *Stjórnmál Og Stjórnsýsla*, *1*(4), 21–46.

Bailes, A. J. K., Thayer, B. A., & Thorhallsson, B. (2016). Alliance theory and alliance 'shelter': The complexities of small state alliance behaviour. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, *1*(1), 9–26.

Baldacchino, G. (2005). The contribution of 'social capital' to economic growth: Lessons from island jurisdictions. *The Round Table*, *94*(378), 31–46.

Baldacchino, G., & Veenendaal, W. (2018). Society and community. In G. Baldacchino (Ed.), *The Routledge international handbook of island studies* (pp. 339–352). Routledge.

Baldacchino, G., & Wivel, A. (2020). Small states: concepts and theories. In G. Baldacchino & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Handbook on the politics of small states* (pp. 2–19). Edward Elgar.

Boffey, D. (2020, April 8). Veterinary scientist hailed for Faroe Islands' lack of Covid-19 deaths. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/08/vetinary-scientist-hailed-faroe-islands-lack-covid-19-deaths

Boin, A., McConnell, A., & 't Hart, P. (2021). *Governing the pandemic*. Springer International.

Boin, A., t' Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005). *The politics of crisis management*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Capano, G., & Woo, J. J. (2017). Resilience and robustness in policy design: a critical appraisal. *Policy Sciences*, *50*(3), 399–426.

Clark, H., Sirleaf, E. J., Cárdenas, M., Chebbi, A., Dybul, M., Kazatchkine, M., Liu, J., Matsoso, P., Miliband, D., Obaid, T., Sudan, P., Zedillo, E., & Nanshan, Z. (2021). *COVID-19: Make it the last pandemic*. https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/COVID-19-Make-it-the-Last-Pandemic_final.pdf

Dahl, R. A., & Tufte, E. (1973). *Size and democracy*. Stanford University Press.

Dalsgaard, M. (2021). People are 'fed up' with Covid. *Kvf.Fo*. https://kvf.fo/greinar/2021/10/21/people-are-fed-covid

Eliasen, E. H., Weihe, P., & Petersen, M. S. (2022). The Faroese septuagenarians cohort: A comparison of well-being before and during the COVID-19 pandemic among older home-dwelling Faroese. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, *50*(1), 136–143.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish*. New York: Vintage Books.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goetz, K. H. (2014). Time and power in the European Commission. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *80*(3), 577–596.

Hale, T., Angrist, N., Goldszmidt, R., Kira, B., Petherick, A., Phillips, T., Webster, S., Cameron-Blake, E., Hallas, L., Majumdar, S., & Tatlow, H. (2021). A global panel

database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 government response tracker). *Nature Human Behaviour, 5*(4), 529–538.

Hasell, J., Mathieu, E., Beltekian, D., Macdonald, B., Giattino, C., Ortiz-Ospina, E., Roser, M., & Ritchie, H. (2020). A cross-country database of COVID-19 testing. *Scientific Data*, *7*(1), 345.

Hayfield, E. A. (2023). Resilience processes during lockdown: a diary study from the Faroe Islands. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 1–17.

Helmsdal, G., Hanusson, K. D., Kristiansen, M. F., Foldbo, B. M., Danielsen, M. E., Steig, B., Gaini, S., Strøm, M., Weihe, P., & Petersen, M. S. (2022). Long COVID in the long run: 23-month follow-up study of persistent symptoms. *Open Forum Infectious Diseases*, *9*(7).

Högenauer, A.-L., Sarapuu, K., & Trimikliniotis, N. (2021). Small states and the governance of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Small States & Territories*, *4*(1), 3–12.

í Skorini, H., & Albinus, H. (2022). Pandemien i Nordatlanten: Hvordan covid-19 har forenet en polariseret mikronation – og hvordan velkendte konflikter stadig ulmer. *Politica*, *54*(4), 364–388.

Johannesen, K. H. (2012). *Den moderne lilleby og det åndelige liv* [Masters dissertation]. Copenhagen University.

Jugl, M. (2019). *Country size and state performance: How size affects politics, administration and governance*. PhD thesis. Berlin: Hertie School.

Levi-Faur, D. (2012). From "big government" to "big governance"? In D. Le-Faur (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of governance* (pp. 3–18). Oxford University Press.

Luhmann, N. (2017). *Trust and power*. Polity. https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Trust+and+Power-p-9781509519453

Matthews, F. (2012). Governance and state capacity. In D. Levi-Faur (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of governance* (pp. 281–293). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maxmen, A. (2021). How the world failed to curb COVID. *Nature*. https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01284-5

Newton, K. (1982). Is small really so beautiful? Is big really so ugly? Size, effectiveness, and democracy in local government. *Political Studies*, *30*(2), 190–206.

Olavson, R. (2023a). *Hvussu stýrdu Føroyar gjøgnum Covid-19 kreppuna?* Government of the Faroe Islands. https://landsstyri.cdn.fo/savn/17512/koronueftirmeting-110223.pdf?s=hoVmquCTKI8FAZjjrhbv0deB2gY&s=T3nwWUpyVE7oNRQ47bzLV_HIWGA

Olavson, R. (2023b). *Ískoyti til Covid-19 eftirmeting frá 9. januar 2023*. Government of the Faroe Islands. https://www.lms.fo/fo/kunning/utgavur-fragreidingar-alit-ot/covid-19-eftirmeting

O'Leary, N. (2020). The West has failed: US and Europe have made a mess of handling the crisis. *The Irish Times*. https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-west-has-failed-us-and-europe-have-made-a-mess-of-handling-the-crisis-1.4395473

Ott, D. (2018). *Small is democratic: An examination of state size and democratic development*. New York: Routledge.

Petersen, M. S., Hansen, C. B., Kristiansen, M. F., Fjallsbak, J. P., Larsen, S., Hansen, J. L., Jarlhelt, I., Pérez-Alós, L., á Steig, B., Christiansen, D. H., Møller, L. F., Strøm, M., Andorsdóttir, G., Gaini, S., Weihe, P., & Garred, P. (2021). SARS-CoV-2 Natural Antibody Response Persists for at least 12 months in a nationwide study from the Faroe Islands. In *Open Forum Infectious Diseases* (Vol. 8, Issue 8). Oxford University Press.

Petersen, M. S., Kristiansen, M. F., Hanusson, K. D., Danielsen, M. E., Á Steig, B., Gaini, S., Strøm, M., & Weihe, P. (2021). Long COVID in the Faroe Islands: A longitudinal study among nonhospitalized patients. *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, *73*(11), E4058–E4063.

Petersen, M. S., Kristiansen, M. F., Hanusson, K. D., Foldbo, B. M., Danielsen, M. E., á Steig, B., Gaini, S., Strøm, M., & Weihe, P. (2022). Prevalence of long COVID in a national cohort: longitudinal measures from disease onset until 8 months' follow-up. *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, *122*, 437–441.

Petersen, M. S., Kristiansen, M. F., Reinert, H. W., Fjallsbak, J. P., Christiansen, D. H., Gaini, S., á Steig, B., Møller, L. F., Strøm, M., & Weihe, P. (2021). Seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2–specific antibodies among quarantined close contacts of COVID-19 patients, Faroe Islands, 2020. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, *27*(11), 2795.

Petersen, M. S., Pérez-Alós, L., Armenteros, J. J. A., Hansen, C. B., Fjallsbak, J. P., Larsen, S., Hansen, J. L., Jarlhelt, I., Kristiansen, M. F., við Streym, F., á Steig, B., Christiansen, D. H., Møller, L. F., Strøm, M., Andorsdóttir, G., Gaini, S., Weihe, P., & Garred, P. (2023). Factors influencing the immune response over 15 months after SARS-CoV-2 infection: A longitudinal population-wide study in the Faroe Islands. *Journal of Internal Medicine*, *293*(1), 63–81.

Petersen, M. S., Strøm, M., Christiansen, D. H., Fjallsbak, J. P., Eliasen, E. H., Johansen, M., Veyhe, A. S., Kristiansen, M. F., Gaini, S., Møller, L. F., Steig, B., & Weihe, P. (2020). Seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2–specific antibodies, Faroe Islands. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, *26*(11), 2760–2762.

Petersen, M. S., Strøm, M., Fjallsbak, J. P., Hansen, J. L., Larsen, S., Eliasen, E. H., Johansen, M., Veyhe, A. S., Kristiansen, M. F. heim, & Weihe, P. (2022). Low Seroprevalence among undetected COVID-19 cases, Faroe Islands, November 2020. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, *28*(1), 242.

Philo, C., Parr, H., & Burns, N. (2017). The rural panopticon. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *51*, 230–239.

Rocha, R. (2020). What countries did right and wrong in responding to the pandemic. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-countries-response-1.5617898

Sarapuu, K., Thorhallsson, B., & Wivel, A. (2021). Analysing small states in crisis: Fundamental assumptions and analytical starting points. In T. Joensen & I. Taylor (Eds.), *Small states and the European migrant crisis* (pp. 19–40). Berlin: Springer International.

Scognamiglio, F., Sancino, A., Caló, F., Jacklin-Jarvis, C., & Rees, J. (2023). The public sector and co-creation in turbulent times: A systematic literature review on robust governance in the COVID-19 emergency. *Public Administration*, *101*(1), 53–70.

Strøm, M., Kristiansen, M. F., Christiansen, D. H., Weihe, P., & Petersen, M. S. (2021). Elimination of COVID-19 in the Faroe Islands: Effectiveness of massive testing and intensive case and contact tracing. *The Lancet Regional Health: Europe*, *1*, 100011.

Thorhallsson, B. (Ed.) (2019). *Small states and shelter theory: Iceland's external affairs*. London: Routledge.

Thorhallsson, B., Steinsson, S., & Kristinsson, T. (2019). The small state in international relations. In B. Thorhallsson (Ed.), *Small states and shelter theory: Iceland's external affairs* (pp. 13–23). London: Routledge.

Veenendaal, W. P. (2015). Democracy in microstates: why smallness does not produce a democratic political system. *Democratization*, *22*(1), 92–112.

World Health Organization. (2020, October 29). *Small countries and COVID-19: how can they improve resilience and strengthen capacity?* World Health Organization - Europe. https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/29-10-2020-small-countries-and-covid-19-how-can-they-improve-resilience-and-strengthen-capacity-

Yougov UK. (2020). *Covid-19: Government handling and confidence in health authorities*. https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2020/03/17/perception-government-handling-covid-19