

The Rise and Fall of the Norwegian Example as an Argument for Irish Self-Government

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Abstract: The article explores the use of Norway as an example in debates on Irish self-government from 1840 to 1914. Which lessons were drawn from the Norwegian example regarding self-government in Ireland? The main purpose of the study is to shed new light on the application of Norwegian experiences with self-government in an Irish context and thereby provide insights into the nature of political exchange.

The study outlines several purposes of the Norwegian example in the debates on Irish self-government. Firstly, and particularly in the Repeal campaign, the references served as evidence of all the good things that would happen as a result of self-government, such as economic development, prosperity and political stability. Secondly, the references played a significant part in establishing a counter narrative to the hegemonic narrative at the time, which maintained that Irish self-government would lead to chaos, stagnation and division. The Repeal campaign, the Home Rule campaign and William Gladstone substantiated this counter narrative stressing that Home Rule was sensible, safe and feasible. Thirdly, to unionists in both Britain and Ireland particularly from the 1890s and onwards, the references to Norway served as a warning of what could happen if Ireland got Home Rule.

Keywords: Political exchange, Irish Home Rule, Repeal movement, William Gladstone, Norwegian self-government