

# The spread of uvular /r/ in Norway - an updated survey

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Norwegian has two main types of realisations of /r/: alveolar and uvular. The uvular realisation of /r/ is a relatively recent innovation that spread from continental Europe to Norway, probably sometime between 1700 and 1800. It first spread to urban areas in the southwestern part of the country, and has since then spread out in the surrounding areas.

Foldvik (1988) has studied how the uvular /r/ spread in Norway throughout the 20th century, and created three maps showing the geographic spread for people born 1900, 1950 and 1970. At the beginning of the century, the uvular /r/ was found mainly in larger towns and cities along the southwestern coast, but it had also started to spread to the surrounding rural areas, especially in southern Norway. Within the next seventy years, the uvular /r/ expanded rapidly. On the map showing people born 1970, the uvular /r/ covers a large and contiguous area of southwestern Norway.

The uvular /r/ spread rapidly throughout the 20th century, and many Norwegian linguists claim that it is still spreading further north and inland today. However, no systematic surveys on the subject have been done after Foldvik (1988), and the extent of its distribution today is unknown. Therefore, we sought to conduct an updated survey and create a new map showing the spread of uvular /r/ in Norway among people born 2010.

Similar to Foldvik (1988), we have gathered data on the pronunciation of /r/ from students in elementary schools in southern and western Norway. The data was collected through a digital questionnaire sent to school teachers. The results from the survey were then displayed on a map, making it easier to compare our findings with Foldvik's. The results from our survey show that the rapid spread of uvular /r/ has slowed down greatly, and in some areas the uvular /r/ has even started to retreat.

On the whole, the distribution of uvular /r/ among people born in 2010 is very similar to that of people born in 1970. The main changes are found in the western and southern edges of the uvular /r/ area. In the west, the uvular /r/ has spread to a few new areas, but it has also decreased or vanished in others. In southern Norway, the boundary for uvular /r/ remains the same, but it has started to decrease in many municipalities, especially in the towns along the coast. In the town of Arendal, only about 25% of the students had a uvular /r/ in this study, compared to 100% in all the earlier surveys. The uvular /r/ in southern Norway has thus gone from being an urban phenomenon to being found mainly in rural areas as the alveolar /r/ is regaining ground in the towns, probably due to influence from east Norwegian dialects.

## References

Foldvik, A.K. (1988). Spredning av skarring i Norge i løpet av om lag 70 år. *Norsk lingvistisk tidsskrift*, 1(2), 1988.

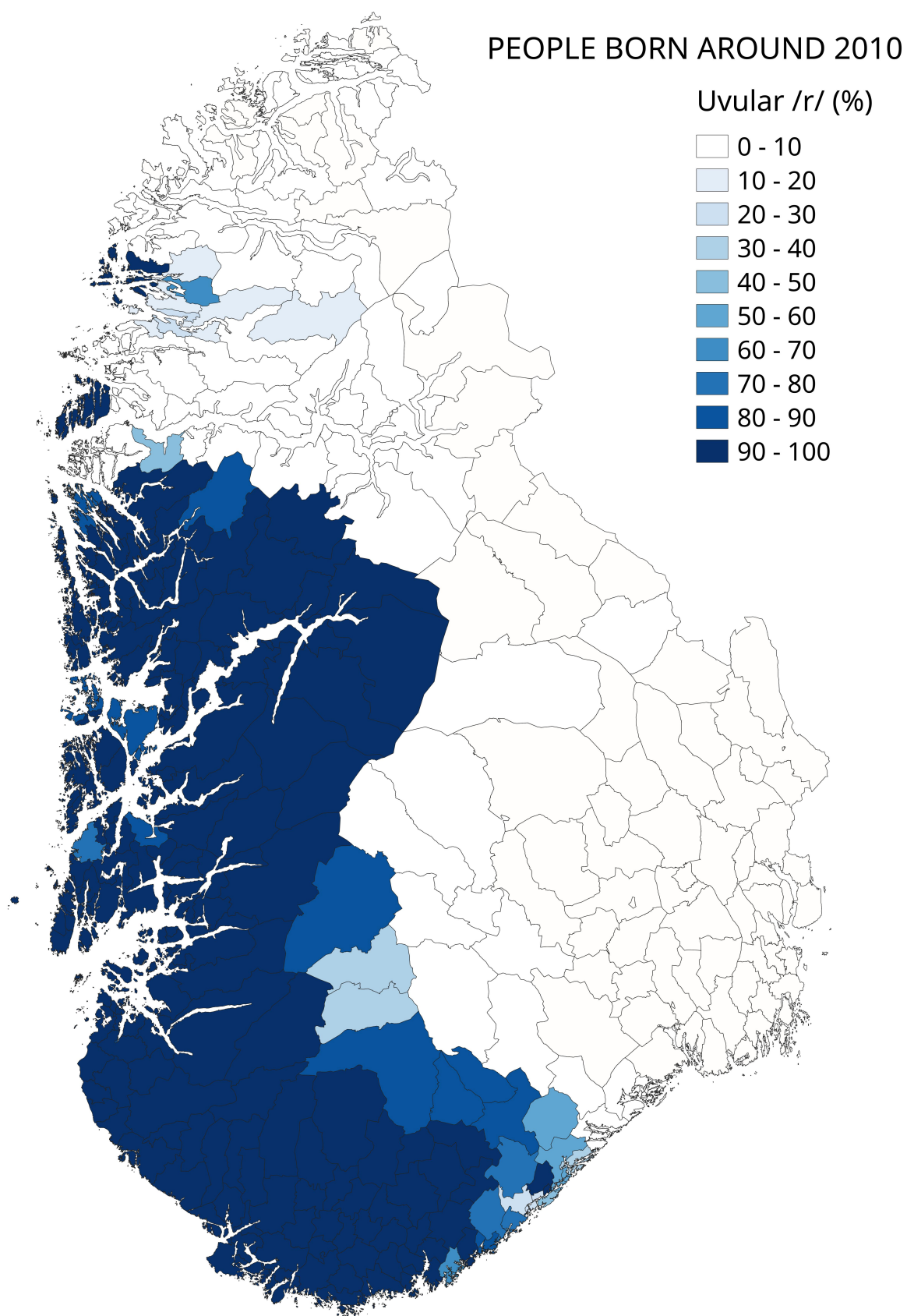


Figure 1: Map showing the spread of uvular /r/ (skarre-r) in respondents born around 2010.