Designing Network Design Spaces

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Abstract

In this work, we present a new network design paradigm. Our goal is to help advance the understanding of network design and discover design principles that generalize across settings. Instead of focusing on designing individual network instances, we design network design spaces that parametrize populations of networks. The overall process is analogous to classic manual design of networks, but elevated to the design space level. Using our methodology we explore the structure aspect of network design and arrive at a low-dimensional design space consisting of simple, regular networks that we call RegNet. The core insight of the RegNet parametrization is surprisingly simple: widths and depths of good networks can be explained by a quantized linear function. We analyze the RegNet design space and arrive at interesting findings that do not match the current practice of network design. The RegNet design space provides simple and fast networks that work well across a wide range of flop regimes. Under comparable training settings and flaps, the RegNet models outperform the popular EfficientNet models while being up to 5× faster on GPUs.

1. Introduction

Deep convolutional neural networks are the engine of visual recognition. Over the past several years better architectures have resulted in considerable progress in a wide range of visual recognition tasks. Examples include LeNet [12], AlexNet [10], VGG [22], and ResNet [6]. This body of work advanced both the effectiveness of neural networks as well as our understanding of network design. In particular, the above sequence of works demonstrated the importance of convolution, network and data size, depth, and residuals, respectively. The outcome of these works is not just particular network instantiations, but also design principles that can be generalized and applied to numerous settings.

While manual network design has led to large advances, finding well-optimized networks manually can be challenging, especially as the number of design choices increases. A popular approach to address this limitation is neural architecture search (NAS). Given a fixed search space of possible networks, NAS automatically finds a good model within the search space. Recently, NAS has received a lot of attention and shown excellent results [29, 15, 25].

Despite the effectiveness of NAS, the paradigm has limitations. The outcome of the search is a single network instance tuned to a specific setting (e.g., hardware platform). This is sufficient in some cases; however, it does not enable discovery of network design principles that deepen our understanding and allow us to generalize to new settings. In particular, our aim is to find simple models that are easy to understand, build upon, and generalize.

In this work, we present a new network design paradigm that combines the advantages of manual design and NAS. Instead of focusing on designing individual network instances, we design design spaces that parametrize populations of networks.1 Like in manual design, we aim for interpretability and to discover general design principles that describe networks that are simple, work well, and generalize across settings. Like in NAS, we aim to take advantage of semi-automated procedures to help achieve these goals.

1We use the term design space following [18], rather than search space, to emphasize that we are not searching for network instances within the space. Instead, we are designing the space itself.
The general strategy we adopt is to progressively design simplified versions of an initial, relatively unconstrained, design space while maintaining or improving its quality (Figure 1). The overall process is analogous to manual design, elevated to the population level and guided via distribution estimates of network design spaces [18].

As a testbed for this paradigm, our focus is on exploring network structure (e.g., width, depth, groups, etc.) assuming standard model families including VGG [22], ResNet [6], and ResNeXt [26]. We start with a relatively unconstrained design space we call AnyNet (e.g., widths and depths vary freely across stages) and apply our human-in-the-loop methodology to arrive at a low-dimensional design space consisting of simple “regular” networks, that we call RegNet. The core of the RegNet design space is simple: stage widths and depths are determined by a quantized linear function. Compared to AnyNet, the RegNet design space has simpler models, is easier to interpret, and has a higher concentration of good models.

We design the RegNet design space in a low-compute, low-epoch regime using a single network block type on ImageNet [2]. We then show that the RegNet design space generalizes to larger compute regimes, schedule lengths, and network block types. Furthermore, an important property of the design space design is that it is more interpretable and can lead to insights that we can learn from. We analyze the RegNet design space and arrive at interesting findings that do not match the current practice of network design. For example, we find that the depth of the best models is stable across compute regimes (~20 blocks) and that the best models do not use either a bottleneck or inverted bottleneck.

We compare top RegNet models to existing networks in various settings. First, RegNet models are surprisingly effective in the mobile regime. We hope that these simple models can serve as strong baselines for future work. Next, RegNet models lead to considerable improvements over standard ResNeXt(X)T [6, 26] models in all metrics. We highlight the improvements for fixed activations, which is of high practical interest as the number of activations can strongly influence the runtime on accelerators such as GPUs. Next, we compare to the state-of-the-art EfficientNet [25] models across compute regimes. Under comparable training settings and flops, RegNet models outperform EfficientNet models while being up to $5 \times$ faster on GPUs. We further test generalization on ImageNetV2 [20].

We note that network structure is arguably the simplest form of a design space design one can consider. Focusing on designing richer design spaces (e.g., including operators) may lead to better networks in future work. We strongly encourage readers to see the extended version of this work on arXiv\(^2\) and also to check the code\(^3\).

3https://github.com/facebookresearch/pycls

2. Related Work

**Manual network design.** The introduction of AlexNet [10] catapulted network design into a thriving research area. In the following years, improved network designs were proposed; examples include VGG [22], Inception [23, 24], ResNet [6], ResNeXt [26], DenseNet [8], and MobileNet [7, 21]. The design process behind these networks was largely manual and focussed on discovering new design choices that improve accuracy e.g., the use of deeper models or residuals. We likewise share the goal of discovering new design principles. In fact, our methodology is analogous to manual design but performed at the design space level.

**Automated network design.** Recently, the network design process has shifted from a manual exploration to more automated network design, popularized by NAS. NAS has proven to be an effective tool for finding good models, e.g., [30, 19, 14, 17, 15, 25]. The majority of work in NAS focuses on the search algorithm, i.e., efficiently finding the best network instances within a fixed, manually designed search space (which we call a design space). Instead, our focus is on a paradigm for designing novel design spaces. The two are complementary: better design spaces can improve the efficiency of NAS search algorithms and also lead to existence of better models by enriching the design space.

**Network scaling.** Both manual and semi-automated network design typically focus on finding best-performing network instances for a specific regime (e.g., number of flops comparable to ResNet-50). Since the result of this procedure is a single network instance, it is not clear how to adapt the instance to a different regime (e.g., fewer flops). A common practice is to apply network scaling rules, such as varying network depth [6], width [27], resolution [7], or all three jointly [25]. Instead, our goal is to discover general design principles that hold across regimes and allow for efficient tuning for the optimal network in any target regime.

**Comparing networks.** Given the vast number of possible network design spaces, it is essential to use a reliable comparison metric to guide our design process. Recently, the authors of [18] proposed a methodology for comparing and analyzing populations of networks sampled from a design space. This distribution-level view is fully-aligned with our goal of finding general design principles. Thus, we adopt this methodology and demonstrate that it can serve as a useful tool for the design space design process.

**Parameterization.** Our final quantized linear parameterization shares similarity with previous work, e.g. how stage widths are set [22, 5, 27, 8, 7]. However, there are two key differences. First, we provide an empirical study justifying the design choices we make. Second, we give insights into structural design choices that were not previously understood (e.g., how to set the number of blocks in each stages).
3. Design Space Design

Our goal is to design better networks for visual recognition. Rather than designing or searching for a single best model under specific settings, we study the behavior of populations of models. We aim to discover general design principles that can apply to and improve an entire model population. Such design principles can provide insights into network design and are more likely to generalize to new settings (unlike a single model tuned for a specific scenario).

We rely on the concept of network design spaces introduced by Radosavovic et al. [18]. A design space is a large, possibly infinite, population of model architectures. The core insight from [18] is that we can sample models from a design space, giving rise to a model distribution, and turn to tools from classical statistics to analyze the design space. We note that this differs from architecture search, where the goal is to find the single best model from the space.

We begin by describing the basic tools we use for design space design in §3.1. Next, in §3.2 we apply our methodology to a design space, called AnyNet, that allows unconstrained network structures. In §3.3, after a sequence of design steps, we obtain a simplified design space consisting of only regular network structures that we name RegNet. Finally, as our goal is not to design a design space for a single setting, but rather to discover general principles of network design that generalize to new settings, in §3.4 we test the generalization of the RegNet design space to new settings.

Relative to the AnyNet design space, the RegNet design space is: (1) simplified both in terms of its dimension and type of network configurations it permits, (2) contains a higher concentration of top-performing models, and (3) is more amenable to analysis and interpretation.

3.1. Tools for Design Space Design

We begin with an overview of tools for design space design. To evaluate and compare design spaces, we use the tools introduced by Radosavovic et al. [18], who propose to quantify the quality of a design space by sampling a set of models from that design space and characterizing the resulting model error distribution. The key intuition behind this approach is that comparing distributions is more robust and informative than using search (manual or automated) and comparing the best found models from two design spaces.

To obtain a distribution of models, we sample and train \( n \) models from a design space. For efficiency, we primarily do so in a low-compute, low-epoch training regime. In particular, in this section we use the 400 million flop \( (400 \text{MF}) \) regime and train each sampled model for 10 epochs on the ImageNet dataset [2]. We note that while we train many models, each training run is fast: training 100 models at 400MF for 10 epochs is roughly equivalent in flops to training a single ResNet-50 [6] model at 4GF for 100 epochs.

As in [18], our primary tool for analyzing design space quality is the error empirical distribution function (EDF). The error EDF of \( n \) models with errors \( e_i \) is given by:

\[
F(e) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} 1[e_i < e].
\]

(1)

\( F(e) \) gives the fraction of models with error less than \( e \). We show the error EDF for \( n = 500 \) sampled models from the AnyNetX design space (described in §3.2) in Figure 2 (left).

Given a population of trained models, we can plot and analyze various network properties versus network error, see Figure 2 (middle) and (right) for two examples taken from the AnyNetX design space. Such visualizations show 1D projections of a complex, high-dimensional space, and can help obtain insights into the design space. For these plots, we employ an empirical bootstrap\(^4\) [4] to estimate the likely range in which the best models fall.

To summarize: (1) we generate distributions of models obtained by sampling and training \( n \) models from a design space, (2) we compute and plot error EDFs to summarize design space quality, (3) we visualize various properties of a design space and use an empirical bootstrap to gain insight, and (4) we use these insights to refine the design space.

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\(^4\)Following common practice, we use flops to mean multiply-adds. Moreover, we use MF and GF to denote \( 10^6 \) and \( 10^9 \) flops, respectively.

\(^5\)Given \( n \) pairs \((x_i, e_i)\) of model statistic \( x_i \) (e.g. depth) and corresponding error \( e_i \), we compute the empirical bootstrap by: (1) sampling with replacement \( 5\% \) of the pairs, (2) selecting the pair with min error in the sample, (3) repeating this \( 10^3 \) times, and finally (4) computing the 95% CI for the min \( x \) value. The median gives the most likely best value.

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Figure 2. Statistics of the AnyNetX design space computed with \( n = 500 \) sampled models. Left: The error empirical distribution function (EDF) serves as our foundational tool for visualizing the quality of the design space. In the legend we report the min error and mean error (which corresponds to the area under the curve). Middle: Distribution of network depth \( d \) (number of blocks) versus error. Right: Distribution of block widths in the fourth stage \( (w_4) \) versus error. The blue shaded regions are ranges containing the best models with 95% confidence (obtained using an empirical bootstrap), and the black vertical line the most likely best value.
Figure 3. General network structure for models in our design spaces. (a) Each network consists of a stem (stride-two $3 \times 3$ conv with $w_0 = 32$ output channels), followed by the network body that performs the bulk of the computation, and then a head (average pooling followed by a fully connected layer) that predicts $n$ output classes. (b) The network body is composed of a sequence of stages that operate at progressively reduced resolution $r_i$. (c) Each stage consists of a sequence of identical blocks, except the first block which uses stride-two conv. While the general structure is simple, the total number of possible network configurations is vast.

3.2. The AnyNet Design Space

We next introduce our initial AnyNet design space. Our focus is on exploring the structure of neural networks assuming standard, fixed network blocks (e.g., residual bottleneck blocks). In our terminology the structure of the network includes elements such as the number of blocks (i.e., network depth), block widths (i.e., number of channels), and other block parameters such as bottleneck ratios or group widths. The structure of the network determines the distribution of compute, parameters, and memory throughout the computational graph of the network and is key in determining its accuracy and efficiency.

The basic design of networks in our AnyNet design space is straightforward. Given an input image, a network consists of a simple stem, followed by the network body that performs the bulk of the computation, and a final network head that predicts the output classes, see Figure 3a. We keep the stem and head fixed and as simple as possible, and instead focus on the structure of the network body that is central in determining network compute and accuracy.

The network body consists of 4 stages operating at progressively reduced resolution, see Figure 3b (we explore varying the number of stages in §3.4). Each stage consists of a sequence of identical blocks, see Figure 3c. In total, for each stage $i$ the degrees of freedom include the number of blocks $d_i$, block width $w_i$, and any other block parameters. While the general structure is simple, the total number of possible networks in the AnyNet design space is vast.

Most of our experiments use the standard residual bottleneck blocks with group convolution [26], shown in Figure 4. We refer to this as the X block, and the AnyNet design space built on it as AnyNetX (we explore other blocks in §3.4). While the X block is quite rudimentary, we show it can be surprisingly effective when network structure is optimized.

The AnyNetX design space has 16 degrees of freedom as each network consists of 4 stages and each stage $i$ has 4 parameters: the number of blocks $d_i$, block width $w_i$, bottleneck ratio $b_i$, and group width $g_i$. We fix the input resolution $r = 224$ unless otherwise noted. To obtain valid models, we perform log-uniform sampling of $d_i \leq 16$, $w_i \leq 1024$ and divisible by 8, $b_i \in \{1,2,4\}$, and $g_i \in \{1,2,\ldots,32\}$ (we test these ranges later). We repeat the sampling until we obtain $n = 500$ models in our target complexity regime (360MF to 400MF), and train each model for 10 epochs.

Basic statistics for AnyNetX were shown in Figure 2. There are $(16-128-3-6)^4 \approx 10^{18}$ possible model configurations in the AnyNetX design space. Rather than searching for the single best model out of these $\sim 10^{18}$ configurations, we explore whether there are general design principles that can help us understand and refine this design space. To do so, we apply our approach of designing design spaces. In each step of this approach, our aims are:

1. to simplify the structure of the design space,
2. to improve the interpretability of the design space,
3. to improve or maintain the design space quality,
4. to maintain model diversity in the design space.

We now apply this approach to the AnyNetX design space.

AnyNetX\(_a\). For clarity, going forward we refer to the initial, unconstrained AnyNetX design space as AnyNetX\(_a\).

AnyNetX\(_b\). We first test a shared bottleneck ratio $b_i = b$ for all stages $i$ for the AnyNetX\(_b\) design space, and refer to the resulting design space as AnyNetX\(_b\). As before, we sample and train 500 models from AnyNetX\(_b\) in the same settings. The EDFs of AnyNetX\(_a\) and AnyNetX\(_b\), shown in Figure 5 (left), are virtually identical both in the average and best case. This indicates no loss in accuracy when coupling the $b_i$. In addition to being simpler, the AnyNetX\(_b\) is more amenable to analysis, see for example Figure 5 (right).

6Our training setup in §3 exactly follows [18]. We use SGD with momentum of 0.9, mini-batch size of 128 on 1 GPU, and a half-period cosine schedule with initial learning rate of 0.05 and weight decay of $5 \cdot 10^{-5}$. Ten epochs are usually sufficient to give robust population statistics.
AnyNetXc. Our second refinement step closely follows the first. Starting with AnyNetXa, we additionally use a shared group width \( g_i = g \) for all stages to obtain AnyNetXc. As before, the EDFs are nearly unchanged, see Figure 5 (middle). Overall, AnyNetXc has 6 fewer degrees of freedom than AnyNetXa, and reduces the design space size nearly four orders of magnitude. Interestingly, we find \( g > 1 \) is best (not shown); we analyze in more detail in the arXiv.

AnyNetXb. Next, we examine typical network structures of both good and bad networks from AnyNetXc in Figure 6. A pattern emerges: good network have increasing widths. We test the design principle of \( w_{i+1} \geq w_i \), and refer to the design space with this constraint as AnyNetXb. In Figure 7 (left) we see this improves the EDF substantially. We return to examining other options for controlling width shortly.

AnyNetXa. Upon further inspection of many models (not shown), we observed another interesting trend. In addition to stage widths \( w_i \) increasing with \( i \), the stage depths \( d_i \) likewise tend to increase for the best models, although not necessarily in the last stage. Nevertheless, we test a design space variant AnyNetXa with \( d_{i+1} \geq d_i \) in Figure 7 (right), and see it also improves results. Finally, we note that the constraints on \( w_i \) and \( d_i \) each reduce the design space by 4!, with a cumulative reduction of \( O(10^7) \) from AnyNetXa.

3.3. The RegNet Design Space

To gain further insight into the model structure, we show the best 20 models from AnyNetXa in a single plot, see Figure 8 (top-left). For each model, we plot the per-block width \( w_j \) of every block \( j \) up to the network depth \( d \) (we use \( i \) and \( j \) to index over stages and blocks, respectively). See Figure 6 for reference of our model visualization.

While there is significant variance in the individual models (gray curves), in the aggregate a pattern emerges. In particular, in the same plot we show the line \( w_j = 48 \cdot (j+1) \) for \( 0 \leq j \leq 20 \) (solid black curve, please note that the y-axis is logarithmic). Remarkably, this trivial linear fit seems to explain the population trend of the growth of network widths for top models. Note, however, that this linear fit assigns a different width \( w_j \) to each block, whereas individual models have quantized widths (piecewise constant functions).

To see if a similar pattern applies to individual models, we need a strategy to quantize a line to a piecewise constant function. Inspired by our observations from AnyNetXb and AnyNetXa, we propose the following approach. First, we introduce a linear parameterization for block widths:

\[
 u_j = w_0 + w_a \cdot j \quad \text{for} \quad 0 \leq j < d
\]

This parameterization has three parameters: depth \( d \), initial width \( w_0 > 0 \), and slope \( w_a > 0 \), and generates a different block width \( u_j \) for each block \( j < d \). To quantize \( u_j \),
we introduce an additional parameter \( w_m > 0 \) that controls quantization as follows. First, given \( u_j \) from Eqn. (2), we compute \( s_j \) for each block \( j \) such that the following holds:

\[
w_j = w_0 \cdot w_m^{s_j}.
\]

Then, to quantize \( u_j \), we simply round \( s_j \) (denoted by \( \lfloor s_j \rfloor \)) and compute quantized per-block widths \( w_j \) via:

\[
w_j = w_0 \cdot w^{\lfloor s_j \rfloor}
\]

We can convert the per-block \( w_j \) to our per-stage format by simply counting the number of blocks with constant width, that is, each stage \( i \) has block width \( w_i = w_0 \cdot w_m^d \) and number of blocks \( d_i = \sum_j \lfloor |s_j| = i \rfloor \). When only considering four stage networks, we ignore the parameter combinations that give rise to a different number of stages.

We test this parameterization by fitting to models from AnyNetX. In particular, given a model, we compute the fit by setting \( d \) to the network depth and performing a grid search over \( w_0, w_a \) and \( w_m \) to minimize the mean log-ratio (denoted by \( e_m \)) of predicted to observed per-block widths. Results for two top networks from AnyNetX are shown in Figure 8 (top-right). The quantized linear fits (dashed curves) are good fits of these best models (solid curves).

Next, we plot the fitting error \( e_m \) versus network error for every network in AnyNetX through AnyNetX_e in Figure 8 (bottom). First, we note that the best models in each design space all have good linear fits. Indeed, an empirical bootstrap gives a narrow band of \( e_m \) near 0 that likely contains the best models in each design space. Second, we note that on average, \( e_m \) improves going from AnyNetX_e to AnyNetX_e, showing that the linear parameterization naturally enforces related constraints to \( w_i \) and \( d_i \) increasing.

To further test the linear parameterization, we design a design space that only contains models with such linear structure. In particular, we specify a network structure via 6 parameters: \( d, w_0, w_a, w_m \) (and also \( b, g \)). Given these, we generate block widths and depths via Eqn. (2)-(4). We refer to the resulting design space as RegNetX, as it contains only simple, regular models. We sample \( d < 64, w_0, w_a < 256, 1.5 < w_m < 3 \) and \( b \) and \( g \) as before (ranges set based on \( e_m \) on AnyNetX).

The error EDF of RegNetX is shown in Figure 9 (left). Models in RegNetX have better average error than AnyNetX while maintaining the best models. In Figure 9 (middle) we test two further simplifications. First, using \( w_m = 2 \) (doubling width between stages) slightly improves the EDF, but we note that using \( w_m \geq 2 \) performs better (shown later). Second, we test setting \( w_0 = w_a \), further simplifying the linear parameterization to \( u_j = w_0 \cdot (j + 1) \). Interestingly, this performs even better. However, to maintain the diversity of models, we do not impose either restriction. Finally, in Figure 9 (right) we show that random search efficiency is much higher for RegNetX; searching over just \( \sim 32 \) random models is likely to yield good models.

Table 1 shows a summary of the design space sizes (for RegNet we estimate the size by quantizing its continuous parameters). In designing RegNetX, we reduced the dimension of the original AnyNetX design space from 16 to 6 dimensions, and the size nearly 10 orders of magnitude. We note, however, that RegNetX still contains a good diversity of models that can be tuned for a variety of settings.

### 3.4. Design Space Generalization

We designed the RegNet design space in a low-compute, low-epoch training regime with only a single block type. However, our goal is not to design a design space for a single setting, but rather to discover general principles of network design that can generalize to new settings.

In Figure 10, we compare the RegNetX design space to AnyNetX_a and AnyNetX_e at higher flows, higher epochs, with 5-stage networks, and with various block types (described in the arXiv). In all cases the ordering of the design spaces is consistent, with RegNetX > AnyNetX_a > AnyNetX_e. In other words, we see no signs of overfitting. These results are promising because they show RegNetX can generalize to new settings. The 5-stage results show the regular structure of RegNet can generalize to more stages, where AnyNetX_e has even more degrees of freedom.
4. Comparison to Existing Networks

We now compare top models from the RegNetX and RegNetY design spaces (see arXiv) to the state-of-the-art on ImageNet [2] across regimes. We denote individual models using small caps, e.g., RegNetX. We also suffix the models with the flop regime, e.g., 400MF. For each flop regime, we pick the best model from 25 random settings of the RegNet parameters \((d, g, w_{ip}, W, w_{g})\), and re-train the top model 5 times at 100 epochs to obtain robust error estimates.

Resulting top RegNetX and RegNetY models for each flop regime are shown in Figures 11 and 12. In addition to the simple linear structure and the trends we analyze in the arXiv, we observe an interesting pattern. Namely, the higher flop models have a large number of blocks in the third stage and a small number of blocks in the last stage. This is similar to the design of standard ResNet models. Moreover, we observe that the group width \(g\) increases with complexity, but depth \(d\) saturates for large models.

Our goal is to perform fair comparisons and provide simple and easy-to-reproduce baselines. We note that along with better architectures, much of the recently reported gains in network performance are based on enhancements to the training setup and regularization scheme (see arXiv). As our focus is on evaluating network architectures, we perform carefully controlled experiments under the same training setup. In particular, to provide fair comparisons to classic work, we do not use any training-time enhancements.

Figure 11. **Top RegNetX models.** We measure inference time for 64 images on an NVIDIA V100 GPU; train time is for 100 epochs on 8 GPUs with the batch size listed. Network diagram legends contain all information required to implement the models.

Figure 12. **Top RegNetY models** (\(\pm X \pm SE\)). The benchmarking setup and the figure format is the same as in Figure 11.

### 4.1. State-of-the-Art Comparison: Mobile Regime

Much of the recent work on network design has focused on the mobile regime (\(~600MF\)). In Table 2, we compare RegNet models at 600MF to existing mobile networks. We observe that RegNets are surprisingly effective in this regime considering the substantial body of work on finding better mobile networks via both manual design [7, 21, 16] and NAS [30, 19, 14, 15].

We emphasize that RegNet models use our basic 100 epoch schedule with no regularization except weight decay, while most mobile networks use longer schedules with various enhancements, such as deep supervision [13], Cutout [3], DropPath [11], AutoAugment [1], and so on. As such, we hope our strong results obtained with a short training schedule without enhancements can serve as a simple baseline for future work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>FLOPs (B)</th>
<th>Params (M)</th>
<th>Top-1 Error</th>
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<td>MOBILENET [7]</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHUFFLENET-V2 [16]</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>25.1</td>
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<td>DARTS [15]</td>
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Table 2. Mobile RegNet. We compare existing models using originally reported errors to RegNet models trained in a basic setup. Our simple RegNet models achieve surprisingly good results given the effort focused on this regime in the past few years.
Table 3. **RESNe(X)T comparisons.** (a) Grouped by activations. **REGNeT** show considerable gains (note that for each group GPU inference and training times are similar). (b) **REGNeT** models outperform **RESNe(X)T** models under fixed flops as well.

### 4.2. Standard Baselines Comparison: ResNe(X)t

Next, we compare **REGNeT** to standard **ResNet** [6] and **ResNeXt** [26] models. All of the models in this experiment come from the exact same design space, the former being manually designed, the latter being obtained through design space design. For fair comparisons, we compare **REGNeT** and **ResNe(X)T** models under the same training setup (our standard **REGNeT** training setup). We note that this results in improved **ResNe(X)T** baselines and highlights the importance of carefully controlling the training setup.

Comparisons are shown in Figure 13 and Table 3. Overall, we see that **REGNeT** models, by optimizing the network structure alone, provide considerable improvements under all complexity metrics. We emphasize that good **REGNeT** models are available across a wide range of compute regimes, including in low-compute regimes where good **RESNe(X)T** models are not available.

Table 3a shows comparisons grouped by activations (which can strongly influence runtime on accelerators such as GPUs). This setting is of particular interest to the research community where model training time is a bottleneck and will likely have more real-world use cases in the future, especially as accelerators gain more use at inference time (e.g., in self-driving cars). **REGNeT** models are quite effective given a fixed inference or training time budget.

Figure 13. **RESNe(X)T comparisons.** **REGNeT** models versus **RESNe(X)T**-(50,101,152) under various complexity metrics. As all models use the identical components and training settings, all observed gains are from the design of the **REGNeT** design space.

Table 4. **EFFICIENTNET comparisons using our standard training schedule.** Under comparable training settings, **REGNeT** outperforms **EFFICIENTNET** for most flop regimes. Moreover, **REGNeT** models are considerably faster, e.g., **REGNeT-X-F8000** is about 5× faster than **EFFICIENTNET-B5**. Note that originally reported errors for **EFFICIENTNET** (shown grayed out), are much lower but use longer and enhanced training schedules, see [arXiv].

### 4.3. State-of-the-Art Comparison: Full Regime

We focus our comparison on **EFFICIENTNET** [25], which is representative of the state of the art and has reported impressive gains using a combination of NAS and an interesting model scaling rule across complexity regimes.

To enable direct comparisons, and to isolate gains due to improvements solely of the network architecture, we opt to reproduce the exact **EFFICIENTNET** models but using our standard training setup, with a 100 epoch schedule and no regularization except weight decay (effect of longer schedule and stronger regularization are shown in the [arXiv]). We optimize only **lr** and **wd**, see [arXiv]. This is the same setup as **REGNeT** and enables fair comparisons.

Results are shown in Figure 14 and Table 4. At low flops, **EFFICIENTNET** outperforms the **REGNeT-Y**. At intermediate flops, **REGNeT-Y** outperforms **EFFICIENTNET**, and at higher flops both **REGNeT-X** and **REGNeT-Y** perform better.

We also observe that for **EFFICIENTNET**, activations scale linearly with flops (due to the scaling of both resolution and depth), compared to activations scaling with the square-root of flops for **REGNeT**. This leads to slow GPU training and inference times for **EFFICIENTNET**. E.g., **REGNeT-X-8000** is 5× faster than **EFFICIENTNET-B5**, while having lower error.

### 5. Conclusion

In this work, we present a new network design paradigm. Our results suggest that designing network design spaces is a promising avenue for future research. See the [arXiv] for substantial additional experiments and ablations.
References


