

Political alienation and council amalgamations: The effect of municipality size on levels of political efficacy and political participation

Joshua McDonnell

PhD Candidate
University of Western Australia



Institute for
Public Policy
and Governance

UTS

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Political alienation and council amalgamations

Does municipality size matter for democracy?

Joshua
McDonnell
*PHD Candidate,
University of
Western Australia*

"But local government also plays a pivotal role in Australian democracy by providing local representation, increasing 'local voice' and facilitating 'local choice'. This second dimension of local government has been almost entirely ignored in the reform process"

(Brian Dollery and Bligh Grant, 2010:2).

*The
delocalisation
of local
government*

Local government bodies in Australia by state/territory, 1910 – 1913					
State/Territory	1910	1991	2001	2008	2013
New South Wales	324	176	172	152	152
Victoria	206	210	79	79	79
Queensland	164	134	125	73	73
Western Australia	147	138	142	140	138
South Australia	175	122	68	68	68
Tasmania	51	46	29	29	29
Northern Territory	n/a	n/a	7	61	16
Total	1,067	826	622	602	555

Table adapted from Dept. Infrastructure & Regional Development (2015:42).

The delocalisation of local government

	<i>Number of Local Authorities</i>	<i>Average Population of Local Authorities*</i>
France	36,783	1,500
Czech Republic	6,230	1,500
Slovakia	2,875	2,000
Switzerland	2,758	3,000
Hungary	3,133	3,000
Austria	2,357	3,500
United States	71,343	4,500
Germany	12,340	6,500
Ireland (pre-2014 town councils)	80	8,000
Canada	3,752	9,000
Slovenia	210	10,000
Poland	2,793	13,500
Finland	342	16,000
Belgium	589	18,500
Sweden	290	32,500
Portugal	308	34,500
Netherlands	441	37,500
Australia	550	41,000
New Zealand	85	52,000
Denmark	98	56,500
Northern Ireland (pre-2015 councils)	26	69,500
Ireland (pre-2014 city/county councils)	34	134,500
England and Wales	383	146,500
Ireland (post-2014 councils)	31	148,000
Scotland	32	164,000
Northern Ireland (post-2015 councils)	11	164,500

Average Pop. Size of Local Authorities, 2010-11 . Table sourced from Callanan, Murphy and Quinlivan (2014:386).

*What is
alienation and
why does it
matter?*

- Benefits of high levels of political participation
 - Accountability
 - Legitimacy
 - Political equality – aggregate preferences
 - Collective action
 - Sense of community and personal wellbeing
- Local government – a training ground for democracy
 - Human scale
 - More amenable to high levels of participation

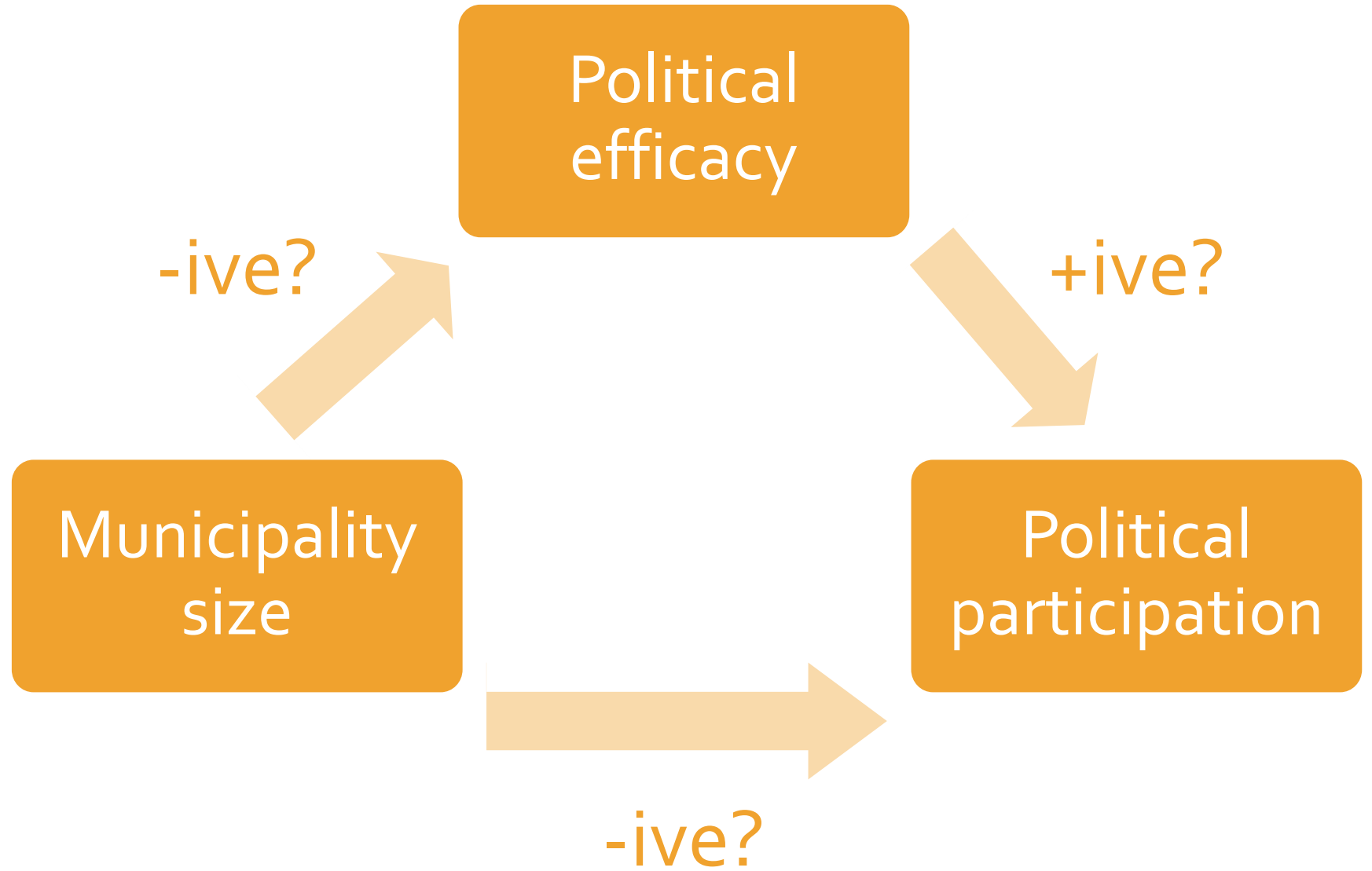
*What is
alienation and
why does it
matter?*

- Political Efficacy
 - The feeling that individual political action does/can have an impact upon the political process
- Internal Political Efficacy
 - Beliefs about one's own competence to understand and participate effectively in politics
- External Political Efficacy
 - Beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demand

*How might
size affect
participation?*

- Large is lively:
 - Decisions are more important?
 - Policy is more divisive?
 - Politics is more interesting?
 - Politics is more competitive?
- Small is beautiful:
 - Voice less likely to be drowned out?
 - More responsive council?
(i.e. higher external political efficacy)
 - Participation is not so difficult?
 - Less time, money and skill required to make an impact?
(i.e. higher internal political efficacy)

*My study:
Conceptual
schema*



*Existing
empirical data*

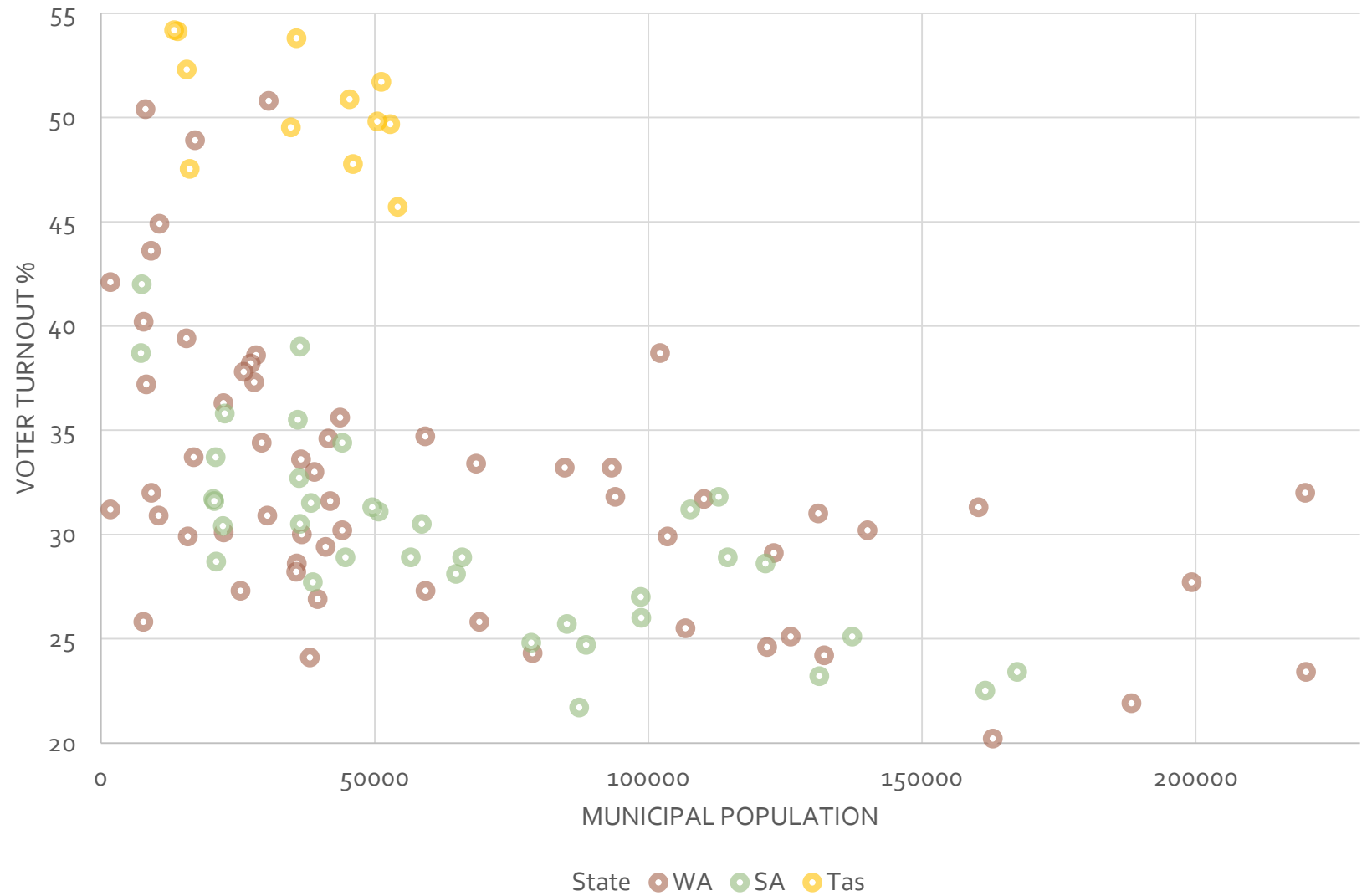
Municipality size & local political efficacy			
Dimension	Negative	Positive	Non-significant
Internal political efficacy	6	-	-
External political efficacy	13	-	2

Municipality size & participation			
Participatory act	Negative	Positive	Non-significant/ No relationship
Voting in municipal elections	26	1	10
Contacting local elected officials	6	-	1
Contacting local civil servants	3	-	-
Contacting unspecified	5	-	1
Meeting/assembly attendance	4	-	3
Political party involvement	3	-	1
Other (index of meeting and contacting)	1	-	-

My study: Research methods

- Citizen surveys:
 - Political efficacy
 - Various modes of political participation
 - Metro Perth and Adelaide
 - Intercept method
- Electoral data:
 - Voter turnout
 - Candidacy rate (likelihood of standing for election)

*Municipal size
& voter
turnout in
Perth,
Adelaide &
Hobart*



*Municipal size
& candidacy in
Perth,
Adelaide &
Hobart*

