

Political Alienation and Council Amalgamations: The Effect of Municipality Size on Levels of Political Efficacy and Political Participation

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Abstract

In Australia, as in many other liberal-democratic states, citizens are said to be growing ever more alienated from politics and the democratic process. If democratic values remain (for now) intact, satisfaction with, and trust in, the personnel, the procedures and the products of politics is slipping. An extensive literature has been dedicated to diagnosing these trends, with a host of plausible explanations offered. Concerned with the way in which institutions shape political attitudes and behaviours, this study concentrates on one, almost wholly overlooked explanation for political alienation: local government amalgamation and the growth in municipality population size. Local government has long been seen as a training ground for democracy. Its human scale means that citizens can contribute effectively and meaningfully to decisions that affect their lives. However, as a result of state government-led programmes of forced amalgamation, implemented in successive and intensive fashion over the past three decades, the number of municipalities across Australia has fallen by a third, while the average municipality population size has more than doubled.

While the economic implications of this intensive period of municipal amalgamation have been extensively studied in an Australian context, the democratic consequences have been comparatively under-researched. Given that amalgamation, being state governments' preferred lever of structural reform, lingers as an ever-present spectre over Australia's local government sectors, this gap in our empirical understanding has important practical implications. Responding to this problem, this study seeks to answer the question: *are citizens of smaller municipalities less politically alienated than citizens of larger municipalities?*

Examining the connection between political alienation and council amalgamations, this study analyses the relationship between municipality population size, citizens' sense of political efficacy (i.e., their sense that engaging in the political process is worthwhile) and levels of engagement in four quintessentially local forms of political participation – voting, candidacy, contacting local representatives, and council meeting attendance. To answer the research question, the study draws upon a survey of over 500 citizens of metropolitan Adelaide and Perth, in combination with electoral data, and employs advanced statistical techniques – in particular multilevel regression and mediation analysis – to discern and quantify the effect of municipality size on these key democratic indicators. With the study finding that citizens of larger municipalities are indeed more politically alienated, both in terms of their sense of their own capability of participating effectively (internal political efficacy) and in terms of their predilection to actually participate, the

study makes an important empirical contribution to the amalgamation debate here in Australia and internationally.

The question of size and alienation, moreover, is just as much a normative one as it is empirical. Beyond the study's substantive findings, this thesis also offers a much-needed discussion of the normative role for local government and local democracy with the Australian state. The movement towards fewer and larger municipal units has been impelled by an instrumental conception of local government, which both emphasises its service delivery function and minimalises the centrality of citizen participation in the democratic process. Drawing on the theory of participatory democracy, this thesis outlines not only the normative value of widespread citizen participation in a democratic polity, but also the potentiality of (small) local government as a forum for fostering such a participatory culture.

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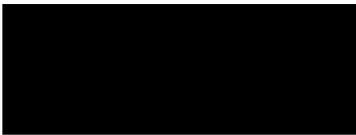
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Chapter 1. Introduction

“Democracy is in trouble”! So pronounced the Australia-based research group, Democracy 2025 (2020), upon reporting of a pervasive and precipitous decline in levels of trust and satisfaction felt by Australians towards their democratic institutions. Certainly, having been established by the Museum of Australian Democracy and the University of Canberra with the goal of “igniting a national conversation on strengthening Australian democratic practice” (Stoker et al., 2018b: 5), the group’s task couldn’t be more timely. In their national survey (n=1021) conducted in 2018, it was revealed that less than half (41%) of Australians are satisfied with the way democracy works in this country, only around a quarter trust members of parliament, and even fewer (11%) believe that politicians uphold high standards of honesty and integrity (Stoker et al., 2018b).

These findings, which the Democracy 2025 group attribute to a culture of “citizen disengagement, cynicism and divergence from the political elite” (Stoker et al., 2018b: 12), is by no means a mere anomaly. Previous studies also reveal a similarly deflating image of Australia’s waning democratic culture. A 2013 survey of Australians (n=1377) by the ANZSOG Institute for Governance, for example, revealed “widespread evidence of negative attitudes towards politics and politicians” (Evans et al., 2013: 5). That survey provided indications of a general sense of powerlessness, marked by a body of citizens who are “overwhelmingly observers rather than participants in formal politics” (Evans et al., 2013: 5). Over half (55%) of respondents could not recall partaking in any political activity in the three years prior (beyond compulsory voting), while 90% felt they had little influence over national politics (75% for local politics). Evidence pointed, in particular, to a crisis of youth disengagement from formal politics.

Worse still, such figures cannot be attributed to the vagaries of seasonal fluctuation. Longitudinal survey data from the Australian Electoral Study (Cameron and McAllister, 2019) reveals that Australians’ satisfaction with democracy in 2019 was at its lowest point since the constitutional crisis (Whitlam dismissal) of the 1970s, and trust in government lower than any time since measurements began in 1969. The study similarly found that only 12 percent of Australians believe that the government is run for all the people (over half believe it is run for only a few big interests) – less than any time since measurements began in 1998 – and that over half of Australians believe that politicians do not know what ordinary people think (again, reflecting a worsening trend over the past two decades).

While cross-national comparisons by Democracy 2025 and the Australian Electoral Study indicate that Australia’s democratic culture is trending in particularly poor shape in comparison with other

countries, concerns regarding political alienation are by no means limited to Australia. Similarly alarming trends are also evident in most other liberal democratic states. Data compiled by Hay (2007: 13), for example, demonstrates a long-term and consistent decline in average voter turnout across the OECD, with this decline appearing to accelerate since the 1990s. In short, evidence of declining rates of participation and rising levels of ‘anti-political’ sentiment abounds (Dalton, 1999; Dempsey, 2017; Macedo et al., 2005; Norris, 1999b; Putnam, 2000).

The present study seeks to respond to this growing concern with political alienation, by examining one potential source of citizen disaffection and disengagement. Different, however, from most other studies on political alienation, which focus most intently on attitudes towards national governments, here the focus is on alienation from local government.

As will be discussed, a long tradition of thought posits that local government is a training ground for democracy; that its small, human scale enables more people to participate and to influence decisions that affect their lives. Over the past three decades, however, Australia's systems of local government have been subject to significant structural alteration. Most notably, programmes of large-scale municipal amalgamation have been undertaken in all jurisdictions (except Western Australia), dramatically reducing the number of municipal bodies and increasing their average population size.

Despite representing an enormous structural change to one of Australia's most fundamental democratic institutions, there has been very little empirical investigation concerning the effects that these changes have had on local democratic attitudes and practices (Dollery and Grant, 2010; Vince, 1997). As a potential cause, moreover, of Australians’ diffuse sense of “political disenchantment” (Evans et al., 2017: 30), this ‘de-localisation’ of local government has been almost wholly overlooked (Cameron, 2020; Leigh and Terrell, 2020; Stoker et al., 2018b)¹. By investigating, empirically, the effects of municipality size on democratic attitudes and behaviours, this study contributes to a fuller understanding of the institutional origins of political alienation in Australia.

¹ Indeed, in searching for causes for Australians’ democratic dissatisfaction, Cameron (2020: 4) goes as far as to rule out institutional factors, on the stated basis that Australia’s “institutional context has remained reasonably stable over time”.

The potentiality of the local

Since trends of citizen disengagement and disillusionment first came to the attention of political scientists during the last half of the twentieth century, diagnosing and addressing alienation has continued to prove one of the discipline's most evocative and intractable challenges. Many of the discipline's most prominent works of the last several decades have been those setting out to tackle this alienation crisis (Barber, 1984; Hay, 2007; Macedo et al., 2005; Norris, 1999b; Putnam, 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Stoker, 2006).

It is popular to offer top-down explanations for the rise of anti-political sentiment – that is, attributing blame to, and demanding better leadership from, political actors (Cameron, 2020; Fawcett, 2014; Stoker et al., 2018b). After all, if citizens cannot trust their leaders, the leaders must be untrustworthy. Those who subscribe to this “deficiency narrative” (Barnett et al., 2019: 775) – including many citizens and, ironically, often political actors themselves (having internalised the image of the rationally self-seeking politician (Hay, 2007)) – argue that we need to “change the way that politicians do politics” (Stoker, 2009: 88). To improve elite behaviour – to keep them “in check” (Hay, 2007: 153) – we turn instinctively to a proliferating assortment of oversight and accountability mechanisms. We even attempt to take politicians out of the picture entirely, by moving political decisions from the realm of politics and discretion and into the realm of experts or the market – in a process known as depoliticisation (Fawcett et al., 2017; Hay, 2007).

Such efforts to increase governments' *output legitimacy* imply, in effect, that citizen disenchantment with politics is rooted in dissatisfaction with the performance and the outputs of government – with the quantity, quality or composition of the policies, goods and services being offered. For a growing number of democratic theorists, however, such attempts to constrain politicians and to narrow the scope of ‘the political’ tend, perversely, to exacerbate citizen disengagement and disaffection – by closing down opportunities for contestation and deliberation over policy alternatives, and by obviating the need for citizens to become informed and involved at all in the process of holding their leaders to account (Fawcett et al., 2017; Hay, 2007). For many, what democracy needs instead is a renewal of *input legitimacy* – a much greater role for citizen participation and involvement in the democratic and governing process (Barber, 1984; Dalton, 1999; Macedo et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000; Stoker, 2006).

Widespread citizen participation has not always been considered a necessary – or indeed beneficial – precondition for a well-functioning democratic system. For much of the twentieth century, the orthodox conception of democracy – coined as ‘competitive elitism’ (Held, 2006) –

afforded “only the most minimal role” to citizen participation (Pateman, 1970: 1). With the public seen as largely irrational and ignorant – uncertain in its views, easily led, too emotional and not sufficiently competent to be trusted with decision making authority (Held, 2006), citizen participation, it was thought, should be limited to voting, with voting merely the means of “accepting or refusing the men who are to rule” (Schumpeter, 1994: 285).

Contemporary scholars have a much more sanguine view of citizen participation (Denters et al., 2014; Macedo et al., 2005), and are thus increasingly critical of a system wherein the extent of participation is to “file into a curtained box, mark a preference, and file out” (Mansbridge, 1983: 301). It is now widely held that the diminution of citizens’ real or perceived sense of influence over the decisions that govern their lives has been a critical factor in the emergence of this widespread sense of cynicism, disillusionment, and powerlessness. Thus, what is needed to bridge the trust divide is to re-engage citizens with practice of democracy (Barber, 1984; Dalton, 1999; Macedo et al., 2005; Stoker, 2006).

Two (by no means mutually exclusive) approaches are proffered to achieve this. First, for those who subscribe to the deliberative theory of democracy, is a focus on the process and content of politics. Deliberative democrats argue that citizens have grown distrustful and disillusioned not with the principles of democracy per se, but with an agonistic political process set up as contest of winners and losers, of unhappy compromise between untenable positions. To be accepted as legitimate, deliberative democrats argue that decisions must be the result of a deliberative process where there is the possibility for holders of different opinions to interact, “reciprocally transform each other’s views” (della Porta, 2013: 10), and arrive at reasoned consensus (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2006; Fung, 2003). The principles of deliberative democracy have proven particularly influential in recent years, inspiring the diffusion of a range of ‘democratic innovations’ – or community engagement mechanisms – that transcend representative politics (Christensen and McQuestin, 2019; Smith, 2009).

This study aligns more closely to the second approach; that promoted by a succession of ‘participatory democrats’, who emphasise the virtues of proximity and accessibility in politics (Barber, 1984; Gould, 1988; Mansbridge, 1983; Pateman, 1970; Stoker, 2006). The key contention for participatory democrats is not so much with the agonistic nature of representative democratic politics, but with the idea that it can be scaled up without bounds and without consequence. For participatory democrats, society’s civic culture is fostered at the local level, in the collective pursuit of community. While the minimalist conception of democracy may have enabled popular government to extend to the scale of the nation-state, it is nonetheless a “remote, inaccessible,

and unresponsive” form of government, “in which only a few can ever hope to participate actively” (Dahl, 1967: 967). Put simply, for participatory democrats, minimalist, nation-state democracy has sapped societies of their democratic spirit.

Rekindling and preserving that democratic spirit requires that citizens take an active and engaged role in the governance of their communities. For participatory democrats, widespread participation at the local level not only promotes more representative policy that is reflective of the preferences of the citizenry, but it is also fundamentally a civic education – an exercise in self-development and social integration; it allows citizens to learn the ropes and realities of government and makes visible the ties that bind their private interests with those of the community (Mansbridge, 1983; Pateman, 1970; Teorell, 2006). Such a “participatory society” (Pateman, 1970: 106), it is contended, will give all people a greater stake in society, foster a more informed and understanding citizenry, and produce more representative and responsive government.

For many, then, local government offers the key to combating political alienation. It offers, according to Robert Dahl (1967: 967) – late Political Science Association President and lone localist voice in the headwind of mid-twentieth-century centralism – “a political unit of more truly human proportions in which a citizen can acquire confidence and mastery of the arts of politics”. Certainly, local government has long been seen as a training ground for democracy and the glue of the nation-state. According to Goldie (2001: 153), the parish could be regarded as the “unacknowledged republic” of pre-democratic England, offering at that time a vital – indeed the only – space for active citizenship. For Toulmin Smith (1849), local self-government at the smallest, parish level, was the beating heart of English liberty and the germ of its free institutions. Across the Atlantic, Tocqueville (1839) hailed the USA’s rich municipal culture as foundational to the success of that nation’s democratic project, including its ability to remain cohesive as it stretched across the continent. As it builds then, perhaps it can also repair. As Pratchett (2004: 360) remarks:

“recent interest in local government has focused on its capacity to facilitate and enhance participatory democracy. This focus on participatory democracy argues that local government is closer to citizens and deals more directly with the issues that impinge on them. Consequently, local government is more accessible and its institutions are easier to engage with”.

Amalgamation and the de-localisation of local government

Participatory democrats often invoke older, civic-republican ideas about the role of local government. Leading theorists of the participatory ilk, from Pateman (1970) to Mansbridge (1983) to Barber (1984), all recount the virtues of small-scale republics and pre-reform/pre-federation local government. However, in doing so, there can be a tendency to assume that modern local government continues to exist on a small, human scale; to assume, as it were, the *localness* of local government. As Macedo et al. (2005: 69) attest, “[t]he unique value of *local* government flows from its closeness to the people”. Indeed, by its very name, as Copus et al. (2017: 1) remark, “[t]he reasonable assumption is that it will be ‘local’”. But the local government of today is a far cry from the local government of Tocqueville and Toulmin Smith’s day. It is a far cry, even, from what it was at the time of Australia’s federation in 1901.

Over the course of the twentieth century, local government in Australia (as in most other similar countries) has grown almost beyond recognition. Due to population growth and successive rounds of municipal amalgamation, the average population size of a local government area in Australia has increased eleven-fold, from just over four thousand at the beginning of the twentieth century, to over forty-six thousand today (see chapter 3 for detailed figures). Much of this growth has occurred in only the past three decades, where an incessant urge by state governments to reform and consolidate their local government sectors saw the average municipality size double. The average *metropolitan* municipality is far larger still, standing at 121,708 in 2019. Indeed, Australia’s largest local government area – the City of Brisbane, at over one million people – has a population as large as the state of Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory combined.

With amalgamation still widely held by state politicians to be the favoured lever of local government structural reform, it appears necessary to ask: if a participatory local democracy thrives because of its human proportions, can it still flourish in a context of ever-increasing municipality size? And by extension, then, can large local government still be effective as a school for civic culture, or does it merely exacerbate and entrench our sense of powerlessness, malaise, and discontent?

The Study

This study seeks to investigate, empirically, the potential link between municipality size and political alienation. By way of a citizen survey, involving residents of metropolitan municipalities

in the cities of Adelaide (South Australia) and Perth (Western Australia), and associated statistical analysis, this study seeks to answer the question:

Are citizens of smaller municipalities less politically alienated than citizens of larger municipalities?

In order to operationalise such a question, to gather and interpret the data, several steps are required. First is to define *political alienation*. As Aberbach (1969: 86) has pithily remarked, “[a]lienation is both one of the most popular and vague concepts used by contemporary social scientists”. This introductory chapter has already offered several synonyms: cynicism, disengagement, disenchantment, disillusionment, dissatisfaction, distrust, malaise, powerlessness. Drawing upon a rich literature dedicated to the conceptualisation and measurement of political alienation (see Chapter 4), this study adopts a bi-dimensional approach, defining it in terms of internal and external political efficacy; where:

- *internal political efficacy* (IPE) relates to “beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics” (Niemi et al., 1991: 1407); and
- *external political efficacy* (EPE) refers to “beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands” (Niemi et al., 1991: 1408).

IPE and EPE, when taken together, denote an individual's sense that their active involvement is likely to have a meaningful effect upon the political process (Campbell et al., 1954). Someone with a low level of political efficacy will feel a sense of powerlessness in the political realm, due both to a lack of confidence in their own capability and capacity to project their voice, and to a lack of confidence in the capacity or willingness of political institutions and actors to hear and heed said voice. Defining political alienation as internal and external political (in)efficacy, **sub-question 1** asks:

Do citizens of smaller municipalities have a higher sense of (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy than citizens of larger municipalities?

In combination, political efficacy is widely acknowledged as an important democratic attitude in its own right; an indicator of system support and legitimacy (Almond and Verba, 1963; Gamson, 1968; Vetter, 2002). But its predominant value for political science has been its role as a determinant of political participation (Balch, 1974; Fox and Lawless, 2011; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011; Vetter, 2002). For participatory democrats, a participatory society requires not simply a

citizenry with the latent capacity to participate, but a citizenry that actually does participate. Of course, local government's role as a training ground for democracy is prefaced on widespread participation; as Pateman (2012: 10) has stated, "individuals learn to participate by participating". In examining the democratic implications of municipal amalgamation, then, it is also necessary to consider not only how municipality size affects political efficacy, but how political efficacy in turn affects levels of political participation.

As with alienation, many broad definitions exist regarding the nature and scope of political participation. This study takes a deliberately narrow or conventional view, adopting Yang's (2012) idea of 'electoral participation', which addresses acts of participation associated with electoral politics. For the purposes of this study, this includes *voting* in local elections, *candidacy* (standing for election), *contacting* a local elected representative and council meeting *attendance*. This decision to focus on these four acts of participation has both a methodological and normative rationale. As set out in Chapter 4, these are archetypically local acts, the nature of which remain consistent across all local government areas in Australia – a necessary requirement in order to make comparisons. Moreover, while much is often said of the potential that new and innovative modes of participation hold as regards reengaging disaffected citizens (Dalton, 1999; Smith, 2009), alienation from formal, local elected politics remains of vital concern, given that it is the elected council which has ultimate accountability and decision making authority.

As well as considering the direct effect of size on participation, it is important to specifically examine the intervening, or mediating effect of political efficacy. As scholars such as Norris (1999b) and Dalton (1999) emphasise, just because someone fails to participate, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are alienated. They may, instead, be participating in different or non-traditional ways, beyond the scope of the definition of participation set out for this study. They may, indeed, be satisfied with the status quo (Gamson, 1968: 46). For this reason, it is necessary to consider not simply whether someone fails to participate, but whether their decision not to participate is a result of (is mediated by) an alienated attitude structure. **Sub-question 2**, therefore, is in two parts:

Do citizens of smaller municipalities (a) participate to a greater extent in local political affairs, and (b) is this due to the mediating effects of political efficacy?

The effects of municipality size

There is little doubt that political efficacy – internal and external – and political participation are determined to a large extent by individual factors. Studies have consistently found, for example, that those with higher levels of education tend to have a higher sense of political efficacy and are more likely to participate (Almond and Verba, 1963; Finifter and Abramson, 1975; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011; Verba and Nie, 1972). Indeed, much of the theoretical and empirical research into participation has tended to focus on those individual-level factors – resources, dispositions and motivations – that drive people to participate (Hay, 2007; Oliver, 2000; Swain and Lien, 2017). Verba and colleague’s Resources Model, for example, focusses on the role that time, money and civic skills plays in determining who participates (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1995). Putnam (2000), as well as Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), focus on the role of social networks in building participatory norms and mobilising political action.

Such studies, which Hay (2007) refers to as the ‘demand side’ of the participation equation, are certainly of fundamental importance. They have been, in particular, an important means of identifying how participatory differentials – and thus invariably differentials in influence and power – arise between different social groups. Yet, it is also true that social, political, and institutional context – the ‘supply side’ – matters. The relevance of context is most obvious in relation to one’s sense of EPE, which represents a subjective evaluation of governmental responsiveness. If one believes that a government will be receptive to their attempts to participate, they will – it is usually expected – be more likely to participate. Yet, context is also likely to have an effect upon one’s sense of IPE, for unlike one’s level of education or income, IPE is not an absolute value. Instead, it is determined in a relative sense – relative to the difficulty or complexity of the task at hand.

This study focusses on one aspect of the ‘supply side’ of the participation equation. Where Hay (2007) focusses on the alienating effect of depoliticisation, this study focusses on the alienating effect of ‘delocalisation’ (although, as will be emphasised, these processes are not mutually exclusive). The enquiry begins from participatory democracy’s normative standpoint that a disengaged citizenry represents a problem to be addressed, but it does not blame citizens for their lack of engagement, nor does it merely demand that they participate more. Instead, it posits that, to a material degree, people’s political attitudes and behaviours are determined by, or responsive to, institutional design and context. Specifically, it hypothesises that a municipality’s social, political, and institutional context will vary depending upon its population size, and that

these variations will have a meaningful effect upon residents' sense of political efficacy and rates of participation.

Despite the long-held view that democracy flourishes in smaller polities, the literature is replete with a variety of claims and counterclaims about the various potential effects of size – and it is not at all obvious, once all potential effects are taken in to consideration, which direction the size effect will ultimately flow (Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Denters et al., 2014). Two strongly divergent viewpoints have taken shape on the democratic implications of municipality size. On the one hand is a set of arguments – the *small-is-beautiful* school – which align with the traditional view that the increased proximity, simplicity, and accessibility of small municipalities will enable citizens to feel a greater sense of political efficacy and to participate to a greater degree in local politics. On the other hand, a plausible set of theoretically informed counter arguments have been proffered – the *large-is-lively* school – to suggest that participation might actually increase in line with population size, on the basis that the greater importance and scope of political matters will spur interest, competition and party-political mobilisation. Between these two contrasts, of course, lies the default position that municipality size has no effect on participatory attitudes and behaviours, and that any perceived effect is rather the result of indirect factors, such as differences in socio-economic status (Denters et al., 2014).

Rather than illuminating our understanding of the effect of municipality size on democracy, however, these perspectives give rise to 'strikingly contradictory conclusions' (Oliver, 2000: 362). Where a-priori deduction leads to impasse, empirical evidence is necessary to move the debate forward. This study represents an important effort to provide such evidence.

Chapter structure and substantive contributions

This study aims to contribute to ongoing discussion about the origin and nature of alienation, by furnishing evidence to suggest that one possible, yet very much underappreciated, source for the 'post-Cold War' "legitimacy crisis for traditional political institutions" (Fawcett et al., 2017: 9), may be the almost universal trend towards larger local government. Despite the traditional role for local government as a training ground, and despite renewed interest in the potentiality of local government among participatory democrats, the impact of municipal amalgamation remains conspicuously absent from most explanations of alienation. This study seeks to make this connection more explicit.

Yet, as much as this is a study of political alienation – its psychological determinants and its behavioural manifestations – this is also a study about local government and its role within the nation-state. Providing context and background for the present study, Part I is dedicated to examining the institution of local government in concept and as it has developed on the ground in Australia. Beginning with Chapter 2, the normative role for local government and local democracy within a nation-state is explored. Despite the earlier-noted claims of localists, local government’s normative value is by no means uncontested. This chapter identifies an inherent conflict lying at the heart of the institution of local government, between the principles of liberty and efficiency. For localists, local government is an institution of liberty – a means of local self-government, a venue for the expression of local voice and local choice, and a check on the overbearing authority of central government. In this model, local democracy has intrinsic value, as a school for, and expression of, liberty. For centralists, on the other hand, local government is subordinate in right to central government, and exists for merely instrumental purposes. Specifically, local government offers an efficient means of delivering local services, thus freeing central government to concentrate on more general affairs. While local democracy remains important in this model, it is as an efficient means of preference signalling and accountability, rather than for any intrinsic cultural or self-developmental value.

The discussion in Chapter 3 demonstrates how the tension between these two principles has had a critical influence upon the development of local government in Australia – its function and its form. Chapter 3 traces the development of local government in Australia from its establishment to the most recent period of structural and territorial reform, concentrating most thoroughly on the intensive efforts that have taken place since the 1990s to rationalise the local government sector. Amalgamation, it will be argued, represents one further – and particularly devastating – battle won for centralism in the long war against localism. As will be documented, the pursuit of efficiency has dominated the municipal reform agenda, with relatively little concern offered as regards the potential implications that amalgamation may have for liberty or democracy. As Dollery and Grant (2010: 2) have saliently stated,

“These reform processes have all addressed the administrative, financial and technical capacity of local councils in local service provision. 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”.

By examining how the ideologies of localism and centralism have influenced the path-dependent development of Australian local government, Chapter 3 offers insight into why amalgamation has

been so fervently pursued in this country in recent decades. In so doing, the chapter contributes to the comparative literature on the topic of municipal amalgamation, where, as Swianiewicz (2018: 3) has noted, there is a lack of understanding as to why these reforms "happen in some but not in other countries". Chapter 3 also uniquely contributes to the "small, somewhat esoteric" (Fawcett et al., 2017: 3) literature on depoliticisation, by demonstrating not only how strategies of depoliticisation have been employed in the pursuit of amalgamation, but also how municipal amalgamation itself operates to "remove or displace the potential for choice, collective agency, and deliberation" (Fawcett et al., 2017: 5). For example, while the overt impetus for amalgamation is the pursuit of efficiency, Chapter 3 posits that, by disassociating local government from local community and by rescaling 'the political' away from the neighbourhood and towards a more distant and amorphous jurisdiction, amalgamation has operated to diminish local government's appeal as a rival object for citizen allegiance (and a rallying point for dissent), deprive local government of its claim to popular authority, and raise barriers of entry for dissenting (i.e. independent or non-aligned) voices to enter the local political arena.

Where Part I deals with normative theory, Part II deals with empirical theory – the causal models that help us to understand the mechanisms by which the size of a municipality might influence political attitudes and behaviour. Chapter 4, in the first instance, conceptualises and defines the study's key concepts. Here, the concepts of political alienation and political participation are explored in order to gain greater insight into the nature and the consequences of the pathology that is said to be ailing the world's democracies. A concrete definition of each of these concepts is established to enable their measurement in the context of Australian local government. In addition, this chapter draws upon the literature to develop hypotheses on the expected relationships between attitudes (IPE/EPE) and behaviours, including their direction and intensity. By postulating that political efficacy (and thus size) will have a differential effect depending upon the type of participation in question, this study moves beyond the common practice of using a single measure of participation (usually voter turnout) as a proxy for participation and democratic culture more generally.

The following chapter, Chapter 5, then explores the theoretical basis for the assumed relationship between political alienation and municipality size. This chapter offers an advance on much previous work on the issue of size and participation, which has often failed to establish "a theoretical bridge" (Oliver 2000:362) between the isolated individual and the social context. Specifically, the chapter follows the suggestion of Oliver (2000: 362), by first identifying individual determinants of participation, before then formulating hypotheses on whether these determinants differ between large and small municipalities. Such an approach ensures that the

study's hypotheses as to the expected size-effect are grounded in theory, rather than on long-held, "intuition-based" axioms (Swianiewicz, 2018: 5). To this end, the chapter commences with a comprehensive examination of prominent empirical models of participation, to identify the individual-level (i.e., demand side) factors which are thought to inform people's sense of political efficacy and drive them to participate in politics. Subsequently, the chapter considers how the political, institutional, and social contexts of small and large municipalities are likely to differ, and how these contextual differences are likely to bear upon these individual-level determinants.

In addition to reviewing the theory, Chapter 5 offers a systematic literature review of extant empirical evidence from Australia and abroad, aiming to identify the extent of present research into the relationship between municipality size, political efficacy, and participation, whether any trends can be discerned, and where research gaps lie. This systematic review, which reveals a consistent negative association between municipality size and both political efficacy and political participation, provides an important contribution to a literature that continues to characterise the democratic effects of municipality size as contested and undetermined. Finally, Chapter 5 (and Part II) concludes with the presentation of a conceptual framework that draws upon the work of Chapters 4 and 5 to posit hypotheses on the relationships between the study's key variables.

Guided by the conceptual framework, Part III outlines the research methodology and presents the study's empirical findings. The research design, methods, measures, and survey administration procedure are documented in Chapter 6. As noted, the study's data derives primarily from a citizen survey of residents of metropolitan Adelaide and Perth, Australia. The survey was conducted using the 'street-intercept method', subject to a rigorous design that involved the researcher visiting 80 individual sites across the two cities, with locations selected to ensure citizens from the full gamut of municipality sizes and demographic strata are included in the sample. Any member of the public present onsite was invited to complete the questionnaire on the spot, using a tablet device. In all, 565 valid responses were received, with all 48 target municipalities represented. For triangulation purposes, the survey data are complemented by secondary source electoral data, providing local election voter turnout and candidacy rates.

The study offers several methodological contributions to the literature on local politics. Notably, the rigorous design and detailed description of the street intercept survey method – from sampling/site selection, to questionnaire design and survey administration/on-site participant selection – provides an exemplar for the method's application to questions concerning politics

and local government (where its use in social sciences is more commonly limited to the fields of public and environmental health). With traditional, probability-based survey methods increasingly beset by low response rates and self-selection bias (Baker et al., 2013; Stopher, 2012; Wang et al., 2014), this study demonstrates that well-designed street-intercept surveys, though based on a non-probability sample, can offer a viable alternative – providing a means of accessing hard to reach population cohorts and thus enabling the full range of the target population to be included in the study.

Chapter 7 outlines the statistical method that is applied to analyse the data, before providing a detailed breakdown of the research findings. Advanced quantitative statistical techniques are utilised to analyse the survey and electoral data, including confirmatory factor analysis, multilevel regression analysis and ‘product of coefficients’ mediation analysis. In summary, the findings offer support to the small-is-beautiful arguments, namely that levels of IPE and rates of political participation tend to be higher among citizens of smaller municipalities than among citizens of larger municipalities. Specifically, a statistically significant negative relationship is found between municipality size and IPE, and between municipality size and all four forms of political participation. In addition, there is partial evidence that IPE mediates the size–participation relationship, indicating that the reduced likelihood of participating in larger municipalities is at least partly due to an increased sense of powerlessness. No evidence was found, on the other hand, for the existence of a relationship between municipality size and EPE. Given that this finding sits in contrast with theoretical expectations and available international research, hypotheses are formulated to inform further study of the size-EPE link.

The empirical contributions of this research, though naturally limited by the study’s geographic scope and standard methodological caveats (including the use of a non-probability sample and a cross-sectional design), offer several important contributions to the literature. As noted, the push for amalgamation in Australia has been driven primarily by economic concerns, with minimal regard afforded to any potential deleterious effects that amalgamation might have on local democracy (Dollery and Grant, 2010; Vince, 1997). While much of this failure to value local democracy can be attributed to normative considerations – the triumph of centralism over localism – and some to political expediency, the lack of empirical evidence is another likely reason. Without empirical evidence on the democratic effects of size, it is difficult to appropriately weigh the relative merits of democratic concerns against the (eminently quantifiable) economic concerns. The argument becomes, as it has in Australia, one which is limited to proving or disproving the economic case; without data, received wisdoms about the democratic benefits of

smallness are side-lined and derided as mere nostalgia (Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz, 2016; Grant and Drew, 2017).

The paucity of data currently available on the relationship between municipality size and political attitudes and behaviours has been well noted internationally (Denters et al., 2014: 25; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011: 238). Indeed, for Denters et al. (2014: 25), the extent of this oversight is "bordering on the unbelievable". Although there has been a slow-but-steady uptick in the empirical study of these questions internationally over the past two decades, the question remains – with some limited exceptions – almost wholly unexamined in the Australian context (see Chapter 5). As Dollery and Grant (2010: 3) lament, "The comparative neglect of local government democracy in the reform process has been echoed by a corresponding lack of interest in the academic literature on Australian local government". This study is one effort then to address this lacuna and to furnish the amalgamation debate with some much-needed data.

Beyond the substantive findings on the effect of municipality size on political efficacy and participation, the study also adds to the literature on the conceptualisation and measurement of IPE and EPE. Specifically, by confirming a valid and reliable two-factor political efficacy measurement model, additional empirical weight is offered in support of Niemi et al.'s (1991) IPE scale – which is slowly becoming a standard measure in the literature on local democracy despite not having (until now) been confirmed for validity and reliability when adapted for a local government context (Denters et al., 2014; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011). The confirmatory factor analysis also provides support for Niemi et al.'s (1991) hypothesised EPE scale, and suggests that previous efforts to develop a satisfactory EPE scale may have been hampered by negative wording 'method effects'. Future use of an EPE scale should either avoid reverse-worded items, or should be cognisant to account for this type of measurement error. Finally, divergence in the substantive findings on the relationship between IPE/EPE and external variables (size and participation) provides further empirical evidence of the conceptual distinction between the two efficacy constructs (i.e., their external validity), thus aiding any future efforts to (re)conceptualise the dimensions of political alienation.

The final chapter (Chapter 8) concludes the thesis by considering a range of potential reforms which may enable us to re-localise local politics and recapture the democratic benefits of small size. Focusing most intently on the prospect of municipal (re)fragmentation, past examples of municipal secession are chronicled (several for the first time in scholarly literature) in order to understand the political and logistical conditions that are necessary to enable successful and viable secession processes to take place. Most importantly, these examples demonstrate not

simply that municipal secession has been carried out on many occasions and in different contexts, but also that it can be a logistically tenable and politically feasible reform option. Just as governments can impose amalgamation, they can decree fragmentation. Several alternatives to secession are also discussed as recommendations for further research.

From the discussion in Chapter 8, it becomes apparent that, for any alienating effect that amalgamation may have had, there is hope yet that this damage can be reversed. For, in contrast with many other accounts of alienation, including those that implicate changing economic patterns and techno-social norms (Putnam, 2000; Leigh and Terrell, 2020) or those that lament the deleterious impacts that liberal-philosophic orthodoxy has had upon civic virtue (Macintyre, 2007), institutional causes are eminently amenable to rectification (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011). As Kelleher and Lowery (2009: 60) state,

“Even if institutional contexts influence rates of political participation far less than their demographic and psychological antecedents, the former are much more subject to conscious and direct policy manipulation”.

Unlike solutions that focus on individuals, such as those which call for people to be more trusting (Hay, 2007), informed and engaged (Flinders, 2012), or which beseech politicians to be more moral, the institutional reforms offered here do not presume to contend against the weight of culture or the inertia of human nature. The solutions are evident and they are achievable. With quantitative, empirical evidence on the alienating effect of larger municipalities now in hand, the case for reform has become much more difficult to ignore.

**PART I. Local Government, Local Democracy
and Municipal Amalgamation**

Chapter 2. Pushed by localism, pulled by centralism: traditions of local government and theories of local democracy

“If there is a problem nowadays of loss of initiative... of citizen alienation, participation, redress of grievances, protection of rights... then perhaps we ought, in a quiet moment, to go back to the beginning and look at the controversy that flurried then, for it stated the choices clear and stark”.

(Greenleaf, 1975: 41)

Debates about amalgamation and municipality size are, at their heart, debates about the normative role for local government and local democracy within the nation-state. Empirical examination can offer support to normative models and it can expose faults in normative assumptions, but it must always grow out of some normative conception. “Normative democratic theory” Teorell (2006: 788) insists, “suggests what questions are important to ask and it provides the standards needed to evaluate the empirical findings”. That is, a study of normative theory helps us to understand the possibilities, interpret the facts, and comprehend their implications. This chapter, therefore, explores these normative questions, by seeking to understand the ideas that would come to underlie our systems of local government in Australia.

Yet, despite being as old as human civilisation, and despite being, in its various institutional guises, an intrinsic fixture of almost every political system, “[t]here *is*”, as Mackenzie has famously asserted, “no theory of local government... no normative general theory from which we can deduce what local government ought to be” (1975: 68 italics in original). Nevertheless, while there may be no theory, there is “certainly talk, certainly ideas” (Mackenzie, 1975: 68). In seeking to understand the institution of local government, its purpose and its potential, it is necessary to understand the ideas that have fashioned it, and which continue to lend it legitimacy (Greenleaf, 1975).

It is in this spirit that this chapter sets out to trace the development of the tradition of local government that would eventually emerge in Australia, beginning by examining the ideas that were circling – primarily in England – prior to its adaptation in the Australian context. Local government, it will be demonstrated, has been shaped by a perpetual and inevitable tension between two competing rationales for its existence – that of liberty and that of efficiency. Those prioritising liberty – the localists – and those prioritising efficiency – the centralists – see two sharply deviating visions for the role (and, by implication, the size) of local government, including

the place of local democracy within the nation-state. Whereas the former sees local government primarily as the instantiation of the right to self-government – an expression and guarantor of liberty, the latter sees local government primarily as an instrumentality of the state – an efficient means through which to delegate public authority and deliver public services. Both hold that local government should operate under democratic authorisation, but whereas localists emphasise the emancipatory potential of widespread and inclusive participation in the democratic process, centralists value democracy for its ability to efficiently aggregate preferences and ensure governmental accountability.

While, on the surface, some may find the English connection to be “both highly unlikely and a trifle offensive” (Grant and Drew, 2017: 53), it is relevant in several respects to begin in nineteenth century England. First, it is the source of local government theorising. It is in those turbulent times, marked by a liberal-utilitarian effort to usher the medieval institution of local government into the age of enlightenment, that the localist-centralist tension first erupted (Loughlin, 1996; Roe, 2016). As will be demonstrated in the succeeding chapter (Chapter 3), the debates set out in this period not only had an indelible influence upon the path-dependent development of Australian local government, but they continue to echo to this day, with municipal amalgamation representing merely the latest staging ground of this long-running battle between localism and centralism – and the latest victory for the principle of efficiency over liberty. Understanding the philosophic underpinnings of these debates is important for, as Swianiewicz (2010: 199–200) has emphasised, the likelihood of amalgamation being posited as a policy option, not to mention its political feasibility, is intimately related to how a society conceives of the role of local government.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, with Australian local government set in course in large part *after* these contests had already played out, that is *after* one conception of local government became dominant, it has since been largely devoid of grand normative theorising. It has, for the most part, been a practical matter, with its immanent ideas remaining uncontested. In this context, as Jessop (2014: 216) remarks, there can be a tendency to ‘forget’ “the contested origins of political discourses, structures, and processes”, giving them “the form and appearance of objective facts of life”. The perpetual tension between liberty and efficiency may linger, but the debate takes as a reference point – or fulcrum – the structures and normative assumptions of the present day. It is only by taking a historical view that it can be demonstrated how far the fulcrum itself has shifted – from the localist’s ideal towards the centralists’ ideal. This is important to acknowledge in the context of a study on local democracy, because as Toulmin Smith (1851: 211) once remarked, in the face of the present realities of centralised, professionalised and enlarged

local government, we might never have believed, were it not for historical record, “that men [*sic*] are capable of Local Self-Government”.

The chapter proceeds by setting out the localist justification for local government, focussing on how the institution of local government is thought to uphold the principle of liberty – both in the sense of *freedom to* and *freedom from*. A normative case for local democracy within this model is then outlined, with an emphasis on the role that widespread participation plays as an expression and guarantor of local liberty. Subsequently, the chapter turns to the centralist justification for local government, and its association with the principle of efficiency. As will be emphasised, local democracy continues to have normative justification from the centralist perspective; however, here the conception of democracy takes on a more minimalist slant, with less emphasis on active citizenship. The discussion of this chapter will then lead into Chapter 3, which traces how the tension between these opposing normative ideals has influenced the development of Australian local government and, in particular, how an assertive centralist ideology has impelled the recent trend towards municipal consolidation.

A localist’s conception of local government

In the breadth of Western civilisation, the flame of liberty has flittered only rarely and fitfully. Were this history a fresco, adorned in the iconography of monarchy, despotism, theocracy, and empire, a study of freedom would be a study of the cracks. But the light that shines through these brittle slivers has provided inspiration to generation after generation. Classical precedents, most notably the small city states of Greece and early republican Rome, with their innovative institutions of popular self-government (however limited in implementation and inclusivity), have shone as beacons millennia later – not only for the cause of liberty, but also for democracy and the virtues of small polities (Goldie, 2001; Held, 2006; Macintyre, 2007). Montesquieu (1752/2001) characterised the small classical republics as possessing a strong sense of citizenship, high in a sense of selfless civic virtue that enabled them to achieve things “which would astonish our little souls” (Montesquieu (1757), as cited in Rahe, 2001: 74). After a long period of empire, the localist tradition was reignited in the Italian city states of the Renaissance. Sellers (2011) relates, for example, the popular usage of the word *libertà* (recalling the liberty of republican Rome) as a motto of pride at their independence and defiance in the face of external oppressors. As Sellers (2011: 29) explains, these small, self-governing states served as “an argument in favour of republican liberty, and an inspiration to opponents of despotism and theocracy throughout Europe”.

For localists, the institutions of local government, as they existed in pre-industrial England, offer a similar beacon of inspiration. As Goldie (2001: 153) has argued, at a time where “[o]nly a small minority of people could vote in parliamentary elections”, there existed an “unacknowledged republic” at the local, parish level. Indeed, long before the holding of parliamentary franchise came to be regarded as the pre-eminent criterion of citizenship, political institutions, traditions and “a spirit of public service” (Goldie, 2001: 181) – forged through the shared experience and daily practice of municipal politics – was already well-ingrained at the local level.

While, prior to the industrial era, the English themselves engaged very little in theorising on the largely practical matter of local government (Loughlin, 1996; Tocqueville, 1862: 16), for “outsiders who were anxious to discover the mainspring of the English system” (Loughlin, 1996: 14), this tradition of local self-government was not only unique, but was regarded as the foundation upon which that nation’s progressive and resilient political institutions – its parliament, its constitutionally constrained monarchy, its common law, its separation of powers – were built (Wickwar, 1970). Among the outside admirers of English municipal culture were French and German theorists of the nineteenth century – most notably Tocqueville (1839: 429), who considered it elemental to the success of the colonies and federation of the United States – and Prussian statesman and constitutional historian Rudolf von Gneist², who saw it as a model for a nation re-building after revolution in 1848. Gneist, like fellow German thinkers Lorenz von Stein to Ferdinand Tönnies, was influenced by the Hegelian conception of civilisation’s evolution as a dialectic between the state and society (Emerson, 2015; Wickwar, 1970). Seeing in Prussia “a land in which the government was not interwoven with society, but was imposed upon it” (Keith-Lucas, 1961: 249), Gneist sought a means of inculcating a civic spirit that would bound the state from below (Loughlin, 1996; Palmowski, 2002; Wickwar, 1970). He believed he found it in the municipal traditions of pre-industrial England, particularly the spirit of self-government that was practiced via the “personal co-operation of all... in the daily duties of the state” (Gneist, 1886, as cited in Loughlin, 1996: 15).

Within England, perhaps the most impassioned and evocative proponent of the traditions of local self-government was Joshua Toulmin Smith, whose work, it has been said “constitutes the most elaborate theoretical defence of local independence that has ever been produced in Great Britain” (Greenleaf, 1975: 25). Writing at a time of great technological, economic, and social change, when the traditions of local government were being subject to systematic and

² Gneist’s influence as a theoretician of local government was substantial, having been an advisor to the likes of Otto Von Bismarck, who would become the first chancellor of a united Germany, as well Itō Hirobumi, Japan’s modernising Meiji era Prime Minister (Wickwar, 1970).

comprehensive reform from the centre, Toulmin Smith produced an outpouring of work defending the place of local government. Toulmin Smith, a barrister, not only vociferously championed the social and political value of local self-government, but also asserted the foundational right – deriving from the ancient constitution (1849: 51) – of the of localities to maintain their own government. Thus, like Gneist, Toulmin Smith cast his eye to the past for lessons that could be applied to the present. However, whereas Gneist was a rational reformer seeking, for the purpose of the central state, to build a new system of local government as a synthesis of the virtues from the traditional past (thesis) and the liberalism of the nation-state era (antithesis), Toulmin Smith³ was a romantic localist focussed on local rights and tradition, seeking continuation rather than reform (Loughlin, 1996).

Although subsequent localists may resist Toulmin Smith's more romantic and historical invocations, they continue to share with him a belief that local government is, at heart, a grass-roots institution – an expression of self-government. It is not a mere administrative subdivision, a “creature of the state” (Wickwar, 1970: 1) – otherwise it would not be local *government*. Localists did and do certainly accept that local government exists within a nation-state context, where the national government is “entrusted with the management of the more general affairs of the nation” (Toulmin Smith, 1849: 51) – otherwise it would not be *local* government. Nevertheless, localists – both those traditionalists of the nineteenth century, ramparting against the incoming tide of centralism, and the reformists of the twenty-first century, tilting against the centralist hegemony – are as one in the belief that local governments should be “independent in all that concerns themselves” (Tocqueville, 1839: 60). That is, they should have substantial levels of autonomy – “if not sovereignty over everything within a territory, then at least sovereignty over certain spheres of activity” (Pratchett, 2004: 362). In this sense, localists subscribe to the principle of subsidiarity, wherein, paraphrasing the work of Grant and Drew (2017: 416–417), power entrusted to a central authority should only be exerted when a local authority is unable to achieve a particular task (including where a policy would have externalities beyond the locality), and, importantly, only in so far as such central interference does not impinge upon the agency, dignity and mutuality of citizens – particularly in their collective enterprise of self-government.

³ Toulmin Smith “attracted the support of many tory, whig, and radical ratepayers alike” (Palmowski, 2002: 387). While Toulmin Smith has been characterised as a libertarian due to his opposition to central bureaucracy (Greenleaf, 1975), this author tends to support the alternative, communitarian, portrayal by Weinstein (2008: 1196), of a man who “actually promoted collectivism at the local civic level as a corrective to both constitutional impropriety and an overly selfish and 'atomised' citizenry...”.

Liberty

The principle of liberty is key to localists' understanding of local government. Liberty is the germ of local self-government, and local self-government the guarantor of liberty, as Toulmin Smith (1849: 52) asserts:

“Freedom of opinion, freedom of discussion, the preservation of all free institutions, and the progress and full development of all the resources of any state, unquestionably depend... on the maintenance of local self-government, and on the restricting, and jealously guarding against, all encroachment upon that local self-government by the general governing body”.

Localists – that is, those (ancient or modern) who espouse local government primarily as ‘self-government’ – have generally emphasised two ways in which local government can promote liberty. In the first, it is a guarantee of communities’ right to exercise discretion; to exert influence over, and take part in directing its own affairs (Sharpe, 1970). Analogous to the concept of *positive liberty*⁴, in Pratchett’s (2004: 365) formulation, this is autonomy in the ‘freedom to’ mode⁵, and it goes to the heart of the definition of local self-government. It is, as Wilson and Game argue (1998: 29), “precisely what local government should be about: locally elected and accountable representatives developing policies embodying *their* judgement of the best interests of *their* local community, not the judgement of the centre”.

The inevitable result of such freedom is a patchwork of policy variation across a nation, where the policies, services, and governing structures of one locality, developed to suit its unique local circumstances and preferences, will invariably differ from the next. These differences “may be obvious variations in policy outcomes... [or] they may also be more subtle expressions of local difference...” (Pratchett, 2004: 367). To localists, this patchwork is a virtue: it not only engenders an environment of learning and innovation in policy and service (Wilson and Game, 1998), but it also enhances liberty by enabling citizens to choose between different bundles of political and service priorities (Sharpe, 1970; Watt, 2006).

This idea has been most prominently propounded by economist Charles Tiebout (1956: 418), who argues that in a metropolis that is highly fragmented by small municipalities, “the consumer-voter moves to that community whose local government best satisfies his set of preferences. The

⁴ The bifurcation of the concept of liberty into positive and negative variants can be attributed to the seminal work of Berlin (2002).

⁵ Pratchett (2004) also talks of a third mode of autonomy – ‘reflection of local identity’. For the purposes of this section, I consider this an element of ‘freedom to’.

greater the number of communities and the greater the variance among them, the closer the consumer will come to fully realizing his preference position". As a result of this competition and the threat of 'exit', the responsiveness and accountability of local government actors is said to be enhanced (Sharp, 1984), and in turn, the quality and effectiveness of services improved (Sharpe, 1970).

In addition to the 'freedom to', the second way in which local government can promote liberty is as a safeguard against central interference. This is *negative liberty*, or in Pratchett's (2004: 363) formulation, autonomy in the 'freedom from' mode. By dividing governmental power on a territorial basis (a vertical separation of powers), local government acts as an intermediary authority distilling, mediating, and moderating the absolute authority of the centre (Loughlin, 1996; Sharpe, 1970; Toulmin Smith, 1857; Wickwar, 1970). The importance of intermediary institutions in a pre-democratic state was made clear by Montesquieu, who, asserting that "power should be a check to power" (2001: 172) focussed on the role that the institutions of the nobility, including "the lords, the clergy and cities" (2001: 32) had in curbing the power of a monarchy. Subsequent writers would extend this concept to sub-national tiers of government in a democratic state. Tocqueville (1839: 270), most notably, writing with respect to the United States, remarked that "[t]he townships, municipal bodies, and counties may... be looked upon as concealed break-waters, which check or part the tide of popular excitement". In this observation, Tocqueville is echoing the sentiment of Thomas Jefferson (1816), whose eager defence of local liberties, advocacy of vertical separation of powers, and vehement opposition to the 'tyranny' of concentrated power, resound still as "elemental parts of the language of America" (Meacham, 2012: 502).

The normative role for local democracy in the localist mode: a participatory democracy

It is common to conflate liberty with democracy. However, as Pratchett (2004) argues, the two are not identical. Local authorities may, for example, act as intermediary authorities, with 'freedom from' central control, without themselves being democratic. This was the case in the many oligarchic, closed vestries of pre-nineteenth century parishes, as it was in Enlightenment Florence. On the other hand, liberty in the sense of a positive 'freedom to' exercise local discretion is intimately linked with democracy. Indeed, for Toulmin Smith (1851: 32), local government without regular, widespread citizen participation is not self-government at all:

"Local jobbing,' and the influence of 'local interests,' are often held up as bugbears [of local self-government]. But each of these, wherever it be found, exists, and only ever can exist, because true Local Self-Government is not there found; because the discussion and management of matters is practically left in the hands of a Local clique or oligarchy,—

under the form and name, it may be, of a Town Council or otherwise, but without the practical activity of the Folk and People themselves...”.

Active citizen participation in local affairs has been considered to be intrinsic to localist conceptions of self-government because it is through participation that citizens express their positive political liberty; it is how they make their preferences known and how they, collectively, realise them (Gould, 1988). It is through democratic processes that citizens exercise their “discretion to practice politics in preferred ways” and realise their “freedom to express and develop local identity” (Pratchett, 2004: 367). Thus, while the freedom from central oppression may conceivably be achieved without democracy, the freedom to self-govern – to express local voice and choice – does require the active, democratic participation of citizens (Barber, 1984: xv; Pratchett, 2004).

While in modern times, local self-government is “intrinsically linked to the institutions of local representative democracy” (Pratchett, 2004: 367), the term when originally coined had a much more literal meaning; it referred, explicitly, to citizens governing for and over themselves through active participation – particularly through officeholding. As Beatrice and Sidney Webb (as cited in Loughlin, 1996: 18), authors of a ground-breaking history of English local government, contended, the principle of personal obligation – the duty of “every respectable male resident... to undertake, without salary or other remuneration, one or other of the customary or statutory offices of Manor, Parish or County” – was foundational to the notion of local self-government (of course, in practice, ‘respectable male’ often meant land owning, white adult male – the liberties of local self-government being not immune from gender, class and racial prejudice). In addition to periodic officeholding, local self-government was also reflected in a highly engaged citizenry, sharing in collective decision making at the folkmote:

“The system of local self-government provides for regular, fixed, frequent, and accessible meetings together of the folk and people themselves; at which all matters of common interest shall be deliberated and administered” (Toulmin Smith, 1851: 21).

For early localists, it was through a collective pursuit of self-government, within inherited and transformative institutions of local government, that individuals attained *positive liberty*, and with it “all that is higher and nobler” (Toulmin Smith 1857:4). This conception of democracy sees participation as essential to self-development and to the realisation of one’s full capacities as a

social being; as a civic duty, carried out by virtuous and self-sacrificing citizens (Woods, 2005)⁶. As Stoker (2006: 24) states:

“The intrinsic value of democracy is something much celebrated by political philosophers and rests on the idea that it is an integral part of being human to share decisions and choices with other humans. Participation in the political life of a community makes us more whole as people and gives us a chance to express ourselves as human beings”.

In a very practical sense, too, participation was seen as an education in liberty. As Goldie (2001: 165) observes, officeholding in early-modern parishes often reflected a sort of *cursus honorum*, where one could not hope to rise to the great office of mayor before serving in one of the many lesser offices – whether steward, sheriff, bailiff, receiver, constable or scribe. “Only by actually governing”, Goldie (2001: 184) insists, “could people be responsible citizens”. The importance of local participation for fostering a spirit of liberty was particularly influential in the early history of the United States, where it was seen as the glue for the federal project. For both Tocqueville (1839: 56; 90; 247) – who famously held that “[m]unicipal institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to science” (1839: 56) – and Jefferson (1816), the success of a continental-wide republic rested on a citizenry that cherished *its* free institutions; and this could best be fostered through participation at the municipal level – “not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day” (Jefferson, 1816).

The arguments advanced by nineteenth-century localists in favour of local democracy – what we can call the civic republican conception of democracy – have found a modern home in the normative theories of participatory democracy. Brought to prominence initially through the work of Carole Pateman (1970), and subsequently advocated by writers such as Barber (1984), Gould (1988), Mansbridge (1983) and Stoker (2006), participatory democracy represents an attempt to recapture the benefits of localism in the context of the modern nation-state. While modern participatory democrats are less likely to stress the value-laden aspects concerning civic duty, human nature or ‘man’ as *zoon politikon* (Barber, 1984: 117; Gould, 1988: 43; Stoker, 2009: 24), participatory democracy nonetheless continues to embrace the link between participation and positive liberty. Participation is emancipatory (Bherer et al., 2016); citizens are empowered through their active and collective involvement in decisions that affect them (Gould, 1988).

⁶ It is in this spirit that Tocqueville (1839: 247), speaking of the United States’ rich municipal culture, notes: “if an American were condemned to confine his activity to his own affairs, he would be robbed of one half of his existence; he would feel an immense void in the life which he is accustomed to lead, and his wretchedness would be unbearable”.

For modern participatory democrats, participation is emancipatory in two respects. First, participation provides a means of self-development (Barber, 1984; Gould, 1988; Pateman, 1970). As Pateman (1970: 42) states, “[t]he major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is... an educative one, educative in the very widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures”. It is axiomatic in participatory democratic theory that “individuals learn to participate by participating” (Pateman, 2012: 10) – beginning in more local settings, people are able to develop the civic skills, political efficacy, and sense of reciprocity and trust that enables participation at higher levels (Held, 2006; Pateman, 1970; Teorell, 2006).

Second, participation is emancipatory as it lends voice, power and influence to those who participate (Gould, 1988; Pateman, 1970). By insisting not only upon widespread participation but also upon an equal right to participate (Gould, 1988: 25; Stoker, 2006: 22), a participatory democracy aims to redress, rather than merely reproduce, socio-economic disparities. It is egalitarian, as Pateman (1970: 43) relates: “in the participatory theory, ‘participation’ refers to (equal) participation in the making of decisions, and ‘political equality’ refers to equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions...”. For participatory democrats, widespread and inclusive participation is vital for the legitimacy of a political system, where legitimacy in this sense – i.e. input legitimacy – refers to “the participatory quality of the process leading to laws and rules” (Schmidt, 2013: 4). As input legitimacy depends vitally upon the extent to which the terms of participation are perceived to be ‘fair’ (Teorell, 2006), participatory democracy eschews high barriers to entry, insisting instead upon democratic institutions that are amenable to all. Indeed, local democracy could hardly fulfil its promise as a school for civic education if only the highly educated can take part; it could hardly empower those it excludes.

From the perspective of participatory democrats and localists more generally, it is precisely because local government enables more people to participate in public affairs – on account of its greater proximity, relative simplicity, and lower barriers to entry – that its existence within a state is justified. As Sharpe (1970: 160) states, “Clearly local government does have a democratic primacy over national government because it does enable more people to participate in their own government... if the nation state is here to stay, in the larger democracies at least, the role of local government in mitigating their participatory inadequacies will presumably remain”. By the same token, high levels of participation reinforce the autonomy of local government as a governing institution, by conferring upon it a level of input legitimacy that ensures its decisions are accepted and respected, not only by constituents themselves, but also by higher tiers of government (Evans, 2014; Gustavsen et al., 2014). Without the input legitimacy that comes from

high levels of participation, local government's claim to autonomy is rendered fragile, both ethically and politically (particularly in countries such as Australia, where municipal entities cannot so directly stake their claim of legitimacy upon ancient rights or a Crown charter).

The small, human scale of local government has also always been central to notions of its democratic primacy. Indeed, from the early theorising of Aristotle and Marsilius of Padua, through to Montesquieu, Rousseau, Toulmin Smith and Jefferson, it has long been assumed that the civic republican life could only function in small polities, be they the polis, the city state or the municipality (Dagger, 2004; Held, 2006). Subsequent chapters will explore whether these assumptions hold in relation to municipality size, but it is sufficient to note here that smallness was considered, at least by early localists, to be integral to the achievement of municipal liberty. It is why, for example, Toulmin Smith (1851: 22) argued that the size of local jurisdictions should be such that participation would be "in numbers not too great to have a true deliberative character". It is why, also, Thomas Jefferson (1816) once implored:

"As Cato, then, concluded every speech with the words, "*Carthago delenda est*," so do I every opinion, with the injunction, "divide the counties into wards".

A centralist's conception of local government

As briefly noted, by the mid-nineteenth century, urbanisation and the industrial revolution were wrecking fundamental change upon the social and physical context within which local government operates. In important ways, the existing local government structures were being exposed as unfit to respond to the increasingly complex set of demands placed upon them, from the challenges of urban poverty and environmental health, to congested and outmoded infrastructure (Kingdom, 1993; Palmowski, 2002). As Loughlin (1996: 28–29) colourfully illustrates,

"the responsibility to maintain a lane did not extend to the construction of a new highway to cater for new demand... [and] even if, through some action or other, a new highway were to be built, nothing could be expected of the parish by way of maintenance other than that provided by an untrained farmer who had accepted a year's service as Surveyor of the Highways".

To a growing chorus of voices, change was inevitable, and its motivating impulse was "the pursuit of efficiency" (Loughlin, 1996: 39). In particular, the efficiency-minded utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham played a fundamental role in dictating the spirit and the detail of the local government reforms in this transformative era (Loughlin, 1996). Dedicated to the rationality of

(proto-) scientific management, this “highly centralist philosophy” (Loughlin, 1996: 30), sought wholesale, top-down, reformulation of multi-level governance structures (Wickwar, 1970).

For many of the period, the mere existence of intermediary bodies, such as municipalities, was anathema to the natural rights of citizens; municipalities represented special interests, and these were derogations from the general (national) interest (Chandler, 2001; Wickwar, 1970). John Adams (1775/1963), for example, expressed concern that local parochialism can often be “so powerfull [*sic*] as to become partial, to blind our Eyes, to darken our Understandings and pervert our Wills”. While arriving at a similar concern for the general interest, utilitarian thinkers in the mould of Bentham eschewed the idea of natural rights; to the utilitarian mind, “political institutions are human contrivances, not divinely ordained” (Collins, 1985: 149). Instead, utilitarian thinkers and reformers took a much more pragmatic view of intermediary bodies. They did not seek to eliminate local government but to mould it for their purposes: to assist in the achievement of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Rather than the rights-based subsidiarity of localism, then, centralists – both the nineteenth-century architects of the modern liberal state, and its twenty-first century *neo*-liberal defenders – favour the principle of decentralisation, where governmental power is delegated downwards, conditionally, only insofar as it proves instrumental to this goal (Grant and Drew, 2017: 134).

Utilitarians were scathing of the patchwork of local privileges – those vestiges of historical arrangements – that composed the system of English local government at the time. Instead of the idealised democracy of the vestry, they saw increasingly unrepresentative local oligarchies and exclusionary officeholding (including selection by co-option) – “a self-perpetuating group representing landed interests ruling largely for their own ends” (Kingdom, 1993: 10; Whalen, 1961). Rather than responsible and accountable self-governance, they saw unresponsiveness, incompetence and corruption – the “rapacity of the local job-ocracies” (Chadwick, 1837: 58). Through a series of centre-led reforms, Radicals – utilitarians among them – sought to institute a rationally-planned network of jurisdictions that were larger in size, uniform in pattern, and consistent in function (Kingdom, 1993; Loughlin, 1996; Wickwar, 1970). They sought to increase political equality by widening the franchise and instituting representative governance (Finlayson, 1966; Loughlin, 1996; Wickwar, 1970)⁷, and they sought to improve accountability by professionalising administration and imposing central oversight (including the establishment of a myriad of ad hoc bodies to bypass municipalities entirely) (Loughlin, 1996).

⁷ As achieved through the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835.

The tension between liberty and efficiency played out in the pursuit of these reforms. Utilitarians evidently, did not immediately achieve wholesale restructuring of local government (though that would come, in time). They did, however, set out on a path that would eventually see local government accepted less as self-government and more as an apparatus of a rational central state, to be arranged and re-arranged as suited. This instrumental conception of local government was first and most clearly seen in the Edwin Chadwick⁸ drafted Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which, based on principles explicitly utilitarian, “marked a... distinct break with the historic traditions of local self-government” (Loughlin, 1996: 34). As Crowther (2016: 6) has argued, the Act presented as “a striking example of central policy contending against local independence”. Whereas poor relief was previously the responsibility of some 14,000 parishes with local discretion (Goldie, 2001: 162), the Poor Law Amendment Act created large districts with a uniform – “coldly impersonal” (Wickwar, 1970: 36) – system of administration, subject to the oversight and direction of a central board (Loughlin, 1996: 34)⁹. The unpopular and austere reforms (Keith-Lucas, 1961) condemned the common practice of outdoor relief (such as the provision of a dole or housing assistance) as an artifact of familiarity and profligacy. In its place, the punitive and oppressive workhouse system was instituted as essentially the sole source of poor relief. Likened as a cross between a residential institution and a prison (Crowther, 2016), the centrally imposed workhouse – designed and operated upon a centrally devised, uniform model to be as impersonal and uninviting as possible – represented, for many, the concrete and ever-looming “harbinger of centralization” (Loughlin, 1996: 35).

As the most prominent and most ardent opponent of such centralising tendencies (Greenleaf, 1975), Toulmin Smith presented as a counterpoint to an academic establishment beholden by “a narrow and selfish Officialism” (Toulmin Smith, 1857: iv). His work flowed as a reaction to the Chadwickian reforms (Keith-Lucas, 1961), with whom he was engaged in a long war against (Mackenzie, 1975: 76)¹⁰. Toulmin Smith considered centralisation as rule by the few (1851: 12/34), “the prop and means of despotism and tyranny” (1851: 55), stating in no uncertain terms, “The fundamental idea of Centralization is, *distrust*” (1851: 54 italics in original):

⁸ Chadwick was a prominent practical utilitarian – an acquaintance of both Bentham and Mill.

⁹ This Board (originally the Poor Law Commission) was the first central government department established for the purpose of regulating and controlling local authorities in the execution of their functions (Loughlin, 1996: 40).

¹⁰ Their rivalry had all the hallmarks of drama. In Keith-Lucas’s (1961: 248) interpretation, “Toulmin Smith was a crank”, while as for Chadwick: “A more tactless man has rarely if ever held public office”. Whereas Toulmin Smith “based his conception of ideal local government on a hypothetical golden age of folk-moots, courts leet and witenagemots”, Chadwick “had no time for local licence and variation” (Keith-Lucas, 1961: 248).

“It is ever an anxious care for the welfare, the safety, the health, the souls, or the property, of the unthinking multitude, that has stirred the paternal breast of the autocrat... They are let dabble in ‘aesthetics’ and art, and no end of astronomy and grammar: but, as for the education of free men in the functions that belong to the member of a free State, – that is a sealed book” (Toulmin Smith, 1857: 6).

Despite the pleas of Toulmin Smith, utilitarian thinkers and reformers had a lasting influence upon both the theory and the system of local government in post-nineteenth century England and progeny colonies. They, of course, dismissed as “fallacy” any notion that there existed any ancient right of local self-government (Chadwick, 1837: 53). In the pursuit of efficiency, any local discretion that did exist was to be increasingly at the dictate of the positive law of Parliament, with autonomy limited by the doctrine of *ultra vires* and conditional on the contribution it offers to national good government (Chandler, 2010; Loughlin, 1996; Wickwar, 1970).

Efficiency

For centralists, being those who see local government primarily as an instrumentality of the state, local government is thought to enhance efficiency in two primary ways. In the first, it enables alignment of local services with local preferences. As Watt asserts, “A particular advantage of local government lies in its ability to arrange for the provision of local public goods in line with local tastes and preferences” (Watt, 2006: 4). Secondly, it facilitates more efficient national governance, through the division of governmental labours.

Rationalising through the lens of efficiency, John Stuart Mill (1861) – adherent of Bentham and perhaps the most systematic articulator of utilitarian philosophy – did certainly acknowledge the benefit of local control and did not believe that central government should micro-manage localities. As Mill (1861: 266–267) states,

“It is but a small portion of public business of a country, which can be done, or safely attempted, by the central authorities... if only on the principle of division of labour, it is indispensable to share them [governmental duties] between central and local authorities”.

After all, local government, by virtue of proximity, has more detailed knowledge of local circumstances, and the local authorities and public have a greater interest in the decisions to be made. Mill (1861: 273–274), like Sharpe (1970: 166–167) after him, thought that as general purpose organisations – as contrasted with a departmental system, where administrative

functions are divided into 'silos' of specialisation – local governments are better positioned to coordinate responses to 'wicked' social issues in a holistic manner (at least within their own geographic boundaries).

Yet, to his eye, certain natural deficiencies of local government meant that central government should have an oversight role – that is, local government should be “placed under central superintendence” to ensure “that the local officers do their duty” (Mill, 1861: 280). In particular, Mill (1861: 283) believed that central government is composed of “superior” individuals, endowed with a higher grade of intelligence and knowledge, and possessing a greater understanding of “the principles” of management. For this reason, Mill felt that “[t]he principle business of the central authority should be to give instruction, of the local authority to apply it” (Mill, 1861: 283). Too much discretionary power, and inferior management, inefficiency, and violations of justice are likely to result (Mill, 1861: 284). Concerned with enhancing efficiency as a means to securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number, it was this empirical argument – rather than a philosophical stance on localism *per se* – which underpinned Mill’s influential case for constraining local liberty (Mill, 1861: 267–268).

Whilst the institution of local government – at least in its conditional form – has utility for centralists, the prioritisation of efficiency has tended to lead centralists to advocate for large municipalities. Mill (1861: 272–273), for example, adjudged that municipal fragmentation

“prevents the possibility of consecutive or well regulated co-operation for common objects, precludes any uniform principle for the discharge of local duties, [and] compels the general government to take things upon itself which would be best left to local authorities...”.

The cause of municipal consolidation was particularly strongly advocated by Chadwick (1884: 794), who saw the “disunity” of London as having “retarded improvements, diminished efficiency, and increased cost in every branch of local service”. Efficiency in the delivery of services was his chief concern, and he firmly believed that this was best achieved in larger jurisdictions: “The larger the district, the more efficient the management” (Chadwick, 1837: 34). In drafting and defending the Poor Law Amendment Act, Chadwick made public the principles upon which he justified the “extension of the districts of management” (Chadwick, 1837: 33). Of these principles, most prominent was his conviction that larger jurisdictions would yield economies of scale. He argues, for example that: “a small parish may not have more than a dozen able-bodied paupers, yet, for the separate superintendence of their labour, the same expense would be requisite as for the superintendence of the labour of one or two hundred labourers” (Chadwick, 1837: 34). As will be

later discussed in relation to more recent experiences with municipal amalgamation in Australia, the prospect of economies of scale in service delivery continues to be the most pervasive and persuasive argument advanced in favour of larger municipalities.

Chadwick also believed that the administration in larger jurisdictions would be less personal and more objective, and therefore less inclined to maladministration. In comparison, officers in smaller parishes were likely to “have local acquaintance-ships with persons applying for relief, may be considered to be liable to their influence; and may also be deemed liable to bias, from local interests of other descriptions” (Chadwick, 1837: 34). Similarly, both Chadwick (1837: 35, 62) and Mill (1861: 276–277) believed that larger municipalities would have more competent representative and administrative officers, given the larger pool available within which to select personnel. Mill (1861: 276–277), suggested that the dearth of competent officers in smaller parishes could be overcome by way of merger, or by delegating some higher functions from parish to county level.

The normative role for local democracy in the centralist mode: a minimalist democracy

While, to localists, local government is legitimised through citizen participation in the democratic process (*input legitimacy*), for centralists, local government’s existence hinges upon its ability to deliver valued services in an efficient and effective manner (*output legitimacy*) (Evans, 2014; Quinlivan, 2017). Nonetheless, local democracy does remain important to the centralist conception of local government, if not for its intrinsic value, then for instrumental purposes – as a means of assuring governmental accountability and responsiveness in the delivery of outputs.

The most influential exposition of this view remains that of Mill (1861), who saw local representative democracy as important to affecting a division of political labour within a nation. To the extent that local governments are empowered with decision-making authority, they are able to debate and deliberate on the appropriate mixture of services in their locality. As Mill (1861: 272), asserts, “The very object of having a local representation, is in order that those who have any interest in common, which they do not share with the general body of their countrymen, may manage that joint interest by themselves”. In so doing, central government is freed to pursue the “more important tasks” (Sharpe, 1970: 168) best suited to it, while central parliamentarians are freed to concentrate on “proper occupations of the great council of the nation” (Mill, 1861: 266). Were local issues to be placed in the basket of issues to be decided in a national election, they would rank very lowly on the political radar, and there would be no reasonable way for locals to signal, let alone attain, their local preferences (Sharpe, 1970: 173).

Thus, centralists have not, at least as yet in England or Australia, sought the wholesale replacement of elected councils with technocratic boards. Again, this reflects an empirical, rather than ethical, consideration. According to Sharpe (1970: 174), where public services are delivered by professionals with a high degree of autonomy, and where they are not subject to the discipline of the market and cannot be regulated with strict performance criteria, the mixture of services that are delivered may gradually come “to serve objectives set by the professional group or groups running the service rather than those of its recipients or society at large”. Thus, as Sharpe (1970) insists, some mechanism of accountability external to the professional group is necessary. Therefore, to centralists, citizens of a locality should have the ability to have a voice in the development of local policy and the delivery of local services. That is, local government should be democratic. However, whereas localists value high levels of participation – a mixture of both representation and direct citizen engagement – centralists tend to subscribe to a more minimal notion of democracy, with participation generally limited to voting at elections.

Two primary variants of democratic minimalism can be discerned in the arguments of centralists. In the *competitive elitist* (Held, 2006) variant, participation – which is limited to voting – is valued only insofar as it acts as a mechanism for regime change. Most famously expounded by Schumpeter (1994), it is the fear of losing an election that ensures governments are held to some degree of accountability and responsiveness. This conception of democracy has little interest in any intrinsic benefits that might accrue from participation – whether self-development or civic education (Held, 2006: 125); voting is merely the means of “accepting or refusing the men who are to rule” (Schumpeter, 1994: 285). In the competitive elitist mode, voter participation does not necessarily even need to be high; turnout simply needs to be sufficient to ensure that elections are competitive. Indeed, with the public-at-large considered largely irrational – uncertain in its views, easily led, too emotional and not sufficiently competent to be trusted with decision making authority (Held, 2006) – the fear has been that too much participation could result in perverse outcomes (Almond and Verba, 1963; Schumpeter, 1994). In the very least, it is seen as presenting as “an obstacle to effective management” (Larsen, 2002: 319).

In the *pluralist* variant of democratic minimalism, politics is also carried out via electioneering and the activities of political parties. However, acknowledgement is also made of the influence (or power) that an equilibrium of different interest groups bring to bear upon the political parties and actors (Held, 2006). Pluralists assume a utilitarian, rational-actor conception of human behaviour where, as in the marketplace, citizens act “in competitive exchanges with others” (Held, 2006: 159). This is, one could say, an ‘economic theory of democracy’ (Downs 1957) for an economic theory of local government. Through constitutional protections, the state facilitates a

political 'free market' where the citizenry, "fragmented into individuals, groups and parties (political and otherwise), formulates and aggressively pursues private interests within a framework of competitive legislative bargaining" (Barber, 1984: 143). The pluralist conception does not require the full and regular participation of individual citizens; it merely requires that their interests are represented at some point in the bargaining process (Held, 2006: 162). In contrast with civic republicanism, where the notion of a public good "is prior to and characterizable independently of the summing of individual desires and interests" (Macintyre, 2007: 236), the role of voting in the pluralist mode is to discern the general will through the aggregation of individual preferences (Barber, 1984; Larsen, 2002; Villa, 2005: 677).

This aggregative, minimalist mode of (representative) democracy became tightly associated with utilitarianism, providing the means of arriving at the (majoritarian) general will (Riley, 1990). Indeed, with the rising dominance of the utilitarian doctrine, this mode of democracy came to *be* democracy, assuming, and paradoxically superseding, the original meaning of *demokratia* as given by the Greeks ('paradoxically' because *demokratia* much more closely resembles the localist versions of democracy)¹¹ (Held, 2006; Kagan, 2007; Mansbridge, 1983; Riley, 1990). For liberal reformers, instituting democracy meant instituting a system of regular elections for representative positions, and enhancing democracy meant electoral reform to widen the franchise and eliminate lingering special privilege (Riley, 1990). With democracy seen not as participation but as the aggregation of preferences and a check on power, the old rationale for smallness – the need to ensure that all residents could attend and deliberate at the folk-mote – had all but disappeared. Liberal-minded reformers could, as we will see in following sections, advocate for larger and larger local government – indeed, larger and larger nation-states – on the promise of efficiency, while also claiming to be the defenders of democracy (Dahl, 1984; Held, 2006: 55; Mansbridge, 1983: 5).

Not unsurprisingly, localists like Toulmin Smith, railed against the emergence of such a view of democracy, where one is "made into a mere Vote-giving machine" (Toulmin Smith, 1851: 198). Without coming together to deliberate, one could not be impressed with the merits of a question or with "a moral sense of due responsibility" (Toulmin Smith, 1851: 198). Not only was voting to become the primary means for citizen activity, but opportunities for elective officeholding were

¹¹ As Held (2006: 29) states, quoting Aristotle (*The Politics*, p. 169), "In ancient Athens, a citizen was someone who participated in 'giving judgement and holding office'. Citizenship for free adult men meant participation in public affairs". Commenting on the distinction between this view of democratic citizenship and citizenship in the context of the modern nation state, Held (2006: 29) proffers that "the ancient Greeks would have found it hard to locate citizens in modern democracies, except perhaps as representatives and office holders".

narrowing, being increasingly limited to the realm of representation, rather than administration. From the mid-nineteenth century, “the old principle of personal obligation”, as Loughlin (1996:31) defines it, was to be superseded by paid contractors and salaried officers, appointed for their technical competence. The foremost concern for centralists was that the management of local governmental affairs be conducted by those suitably qualified. According to Mill (1861: 267), it is “evidently inadmissible” for the lay-public to exercise these municipal functions directly: “Administration by the assembled people is a relic of barbarism, opposed to the whole spirit of modern life”.

Chadwick expressed a similar caustic view of widespread, amateur officeholding, though his concerns were further coloured by class prejudice. Specifically, he predicted that as demands on local office become “more complex and laborious”, the most qualified candidates for local office (“the educated classes”) would be the least likely to participate – with business and other pursuits taking priority (Chadwick, 1837: 36). In their stead, “the ignorant, who perceive no requisites, impelled by vanity or the torments of *ennui*, the disease of unfurnished minds, rush in and seize the most important trusts” (Chadwick, 1837: 36). Better, then, to consolidate duties of unpaid, amateur service into the hands of a professional administration.

Contributing to Mill and Chadwick’s views on amateur officeholding was their concern that local democratic processes would be less effective than national processes when it comes to holding incumbents to account. As Mill (1861: 281) has stated, besides local officeholders being “of inferior qualifications”, they are also “watched by, and accountable to, an inferior public opinion”. Mill saw the local voting public as “far less enlightened” than their national counterparts (Mill, 1861: 281), while Chadwick (1837: 36) feared that in the increasingly busy and enterprising times of modernity, discerning voters would have less vigilance over local officers, and be liable to elect those of “unprincipled and rapacious” character. Compounding this dilemma, Mill (1861: 281) considered that local media could be less confidently relied upon to provide the information and the checks expected of the fourth estate in the course of democratic debate.

As a means of alleviating the ineffective accountability structures and ‘divergent’ decisions, of local democracy, Mill (1861) believed that local decisions, even when democratically arrived at, should be subject to the central government’s final discretion: “If the local majority attempts to oppress the minority, or one class another, the State is bound to interpose” (Mill, 1861: 284). Chadwick, similarly, saw centralised control as imperative in efforts to overcome the corruption and oligarchy which he saw as inherent to local self-government (Greenleaf, 1975). Thus, while a centralist conception of local government retains a minimal local democracy, it is clear that this

local voice and local choice is less a right than a privilege; a privilege which is conditional upon the quality of the outputs, as assessed by the centre.

Finally, despite minimising local democracy, utilitarians generally did (and do) acknowledge the utility of local participation as a means of educating citizens in politics (Chandler, 2001; Mackenzie, 1975; Palmowski, 2002; Sharpe, 1970; Wickwar, 1970). Both Bentham and Mill, for example, acknowledged local government's role as an instrument for civic and political education, particularly to the extent that it allows those of a "lower grade in society" (local office "not in general being sought by the higher ranks") (Mill, 1861: 269) to hold political office, to deliberate on political matters, to speak publicly, and to act for the public interest (Mill, 1861: 268–269). Yet even in this regard, Mill (1861: 286) still saw an important role for central oversight – for functionaries of the centre to assume a tutelary role, teaching the locals the "value of, principles", instructing them on "the use of their reason" and, he keenly hoped, guiding them out of their sombre cave of "ignorance".

Conclusion

Local government, as has been demonstrated, is an intrinsic element of the common law constitution and is integral to our normative conception of local government – it is, as Sharpe (1970: 154) argues, "an almost primordial feature of the political landscape". This ancient tradition persists, if not in law or practice then in the persistent expectation of localities and communities to unite under a formal identity; it exists in the expectation of the right to exercise local voice and local choice. Local government is not merely a department of the central bureaucracy; there is an expectation for a degree of autonomy – both freedom from and freedom to. Yet, since the mid-nineteenth century, this expectation has been shown to be less a prerogative of localities than a contingent concession from the centre (Greenleaf, 1975). As Pratchett (2004: 362) states in relation to the English case – though as the next chapter will demonstrate, could also be said in relation to Australia:

"It is impossible to discuss local politics without acknowledging that local government exists in its current form and with its current powers because parliament allows it to".

It is nevertheless axiomatic, within both localist and centralist conceptions of local government, that the institution should be democratic (Haus, 2014; Pratchett, 2004). But localists and centralists idealise different conceptions of democracy. For localists, local democracy takes a participatory form. As an expression of positive liberty and self-government, and as a means of self-development, participation is important for its own sake. Localists also hold that a democratic

culture (if not a spirit of liberty) is fostered at the local level, so participatory democracy on this stage is indispensable to nation-state cohesion. Centralists, on the other hand, are drawn to a more minimalist conception of democracy, viewing it in instrumental terms, as a means of enhancing aggregate utility in a state. It can achieve this so long as it proves an efficient means of signalling constituents' preferred service mix, and so long as it holds elected representatives accountable for the satisfactory delivery of these services. Many, like Mill, acknowledge in principle the importance of local democracy for its educative utility, though in practice this is generally seen as a secondary benefit, and contingent upon the primary aim of efficiency.

With these normative debates around local government and local democracy identified and examined, the following chapter explores how these competing notions have come to influence the development of local government in Australia, in form and function, and in particular, how they have become imbued within debates concerning municipal amalgamation.

Chapter 3. Amalgamation and the delocalisation of Australian municipal politics

“It has been reserved for our day to see this leading principle of the institutions of the country systematically attacked... by a government... which sneers at and sets at naught institutions whose value has been tested by more than a thousand years of increasing prosperity and steady progress”.

(Toulmin Smith, 1849: 53)

If Aulich and Pietsch (2002: 14) are astute in their observation that the “Anglo variant” of local government systems “show a relative lack of enthusiasm for local democracy” then Australian local government is a particularly poor cousin indeed. Absent the ancient constitution to embolden a spirit of localism, Australian local government “simply has not won for itself that place in our polity which a long history has given it in Britain” (Finn 1990:49, as cited in Aulich, 1999: 12). Moreover, unlike, the much earlier-established colonies in the north-east of the United States, which retain a highly localist structure and culture, the Australian colonies developed in a post-Benthamite era, where the centralist conception of local government was taken for granted (Hirst, 1967: 58; Wood, 1981: 651).

Nevertheless, the inevitable tension between the centre and the locality has continued as a defining feature of state-local relations on this continent (Aulich, 1999; Grant and Drew, 2017)¹². This chapter examines how the principles of efficiency and liberty have jostled to define the form and function of Australia’s systems of local government. In addition to charting the path-dependent development of Australia’s municipal institutions, the chapter focuses most intently on the structural reform programmes carried out over the past three decades, which have seen a thirty-five percent fall in the number of municipalities nationally, and a doubling in average municipality size. As was the case in nineteenth-century England, it will be demonstrated that the pursuit of efficiency has been the primary driver of this municipal rationalisation.

Adding conceptual rigour to the liberty-efficiency rubric, this chapter also examines the role that depoliticisation – understood as the removal or displacement of opportunities for “choice,

¹² In Australian literature, the “efficiency versus democracy heuristic” (Grant and Drew, 2017: 125) is more common than the efficiency versus liberty heuristic (Aulich, 1999; Dollery, 2010). The primary conceptual difference between the two being that the latter accepts that centralists do also value, if only instrumentally, the role of democracy – though in a form which differs normatively from the one espoused by localists.

collective agency, and deliberation around a particular policy issue” (Fawcett et al., 2017: 5) – has played in local government structural reform. In many ways the servant of centralism, processes and tactics of depoliticisation have, the chapter demonstrates, hastened the course of municipal consolidation in Australia. In turn, municipal consolidation has itself exacerbated the depoliticisation of Australian local government, by compromising its input legitimacy and by narrowing opportunities for collective mobilisation, ‘parochialism’ and dissent.

The emergence of local government in Australia

Australia’s political history is generally told from the perspective of state and federal government – of the transition to colonial self-determination and the growing pains of inchoate nationhood. Certainly, there is much to be discussed in those efforts to attain responsible government, universal suffrage, and the federal compact. Under the influence of Chartist radicalism, Australia’s early political history is marked by prolific innovation and experimentation in electoral matters, from women’s suffrage to the secret ballot and proportional representation – areas in which Australian states were world leaders (Sawer 2001); though, notably, this liberalism had its limits: Indigenous Australians were not only systematically dispossessed – often with force (Litster and Wallis, 2011; Watson, 2019) and always without Treaty (Attwood and Markus, 2007) – of their lands, sovereignty and culture (Read, 2014), but their very right to citizenship and suffrage was not recognised nationally until the late 1960s (Attwood and Markus, 2007).

In the shadows of these grander schemes, however, a third staging ground for politics and democratic innovation often goes unremarked. This section documents the historical development of Australia’s institutions of local government, explaining the philosophic and political exigencies that led to the municipal fragmentation of Australia’s early towns and cities, and which fashioned, in large part, the role that local government would come to play in Australia’s governing hierarchy. Having developed contemporaneously with England’s liberal-utilitarian reform movement, Australia’s system of government was, from the outset, influenced by the rational thinking of the age (Collins, 1985; Hirst, 1967; Roe, 2016; Wood, 1981). However, as will be noted, the municipal proliferation which was early necessary for the efficient governance of the growing – but sparse and infrastructure-poor – nation, set in place institutional structures and an emerging commitment to a tradition of local self-government (however vaguely held) which would long-after thwart the Benthamite impulse to consolidate. By detailing the path-dependent characteristics of Australia’s institutions of local government, this section places into context the large-scale programmes of amalgamation, which would eventually take hold in the final decade of the twentieth century.

Establishing local government: the nineteenth century

While English localists may be apt to lay claim to ancient prerogatives of local self-government, local government has also been foundational to the civic life of Australia. The first institutions of local government on the continent, the Western Australian town trusts, were established in 1838, a mere nine years after the arrival of the Swan River Colonists (Johns, 1949). Set up to manage transport infrastructure for the colony, these trusts, representing the first vestiges of self-government in the West, were governed by parish-style, direct-democratic meetings of district residents (Johns, 1949). The first elected, general purpose local government body also came quickly: the Adelaide Corporation was established in 1840, just four years after settlers first arrived in the “radical and utopian” ‘free province’ of South Australia (Robbins, 1981: 575). In Victoria, local government actually preceded colonial government, with the Melbourne Town Council established in 1842 by free settlers of the Port Phillip region seven years after their arrival, as a means of achieving a degree of autonomy from the government in Sydney (Grant and Drew, 2017). Of course, given the different circumstances prevailing in each colony, the speed of municipalisation was not everywhere equivalent. For example, in contrast with the experience in those three ‘free settler’ states, local government was comparatively slow to take hold in the penal colonies of the East. Nevertheless, as the free settler population began to grow, the need for local government soon became unavoidable. After several false starts, the Sydney Corporation was eventually established in 1842 (some fifty years after first European settlement), with the incorporation of Hobart and Brisbane following in 1852 and 1859 (Kelly, 2011; Power et al., 1981).

Although systems of local government developed independently in each of the colonies/states (and, much later, in the Northern Territory), the manner of their establishment and their eventual structure share remarkable similarities. In all states, for example, early colonial governments supported the municipalisation of their cities and regions as a pragmatic means of efficiently delivering public services and infrastructure (Johns, 1949; Kelly, 2011). In the vein of Mill’s (1861) division of political labour, colonial governments were keen to shed their “local governing activities” (Manning, 2005a) in order to free themselves and their treasuries to concentrate on “the work which properly appertains to [them]” (NSW Premier Carruthers, 1905, as cited in Kelly, 2011: 5). The manner in which this was achieved was, however, by no means linear. In all states, systems of local government developed gradually via a mixture of central imposition and localist voluntarism – though the balance between these two methods differed by degrees in each state.

It was generally the case that the earliest efforts by colonial governments to establish compulsory systems of local government struggled to get off the ground or struggled to survive (most of those

initial municipalities mentioned earlier had dissolved soon after their founding) due to financial difficulties (Power et al., 1981). These difficulties, as has often been stressed by local government historians, can be attributed in no small part to “the natural reluctance of people to tax themselves” (Johns, 1949: 173); that is, an aversion to the introduction of the compulsory land rates that would be needed to fund municipal services and infrastructure (Davison and Dunstan, 2018; Grant and Drew, 2017; Johns, 1949; Kelly, 2011; Manning, 2005a; Roe, 2016).

However, these attitudes began to change somewhat with the introduction of legislation¹³ allowing permissive incorporation. Given the opportunity to petition colonial governments for the incorporation of their localities, citizens began to embrace the privilege and responsibility of local self-government (Grant and Drew, 2017; Kelly, 2011; Robbins, 1978). As a result of the permissive system of incorporation, Australia’s cities very quickly become highly fragmented into many small local government bodies (Grant and Drew, 2017). Take up was particularly rapid in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria, whose citizens appeared generally more proactive and enthusiastic about the prospect of local self-government (Grant and Drew, 2017; Power et al., 1981). In South Australia, for example, it took only four years from the date legislation permitting permissive incorporation was passed (1852) for 42 municipalities to be voluntarily established, serving the province’s entire settled (non-Aboriginal) population of 86,000 people (Robbins, 1978: 81)¹⁴. South Australians, it has been said, had if anything an “over-enthusiasm for creating a multiplicity of small authorities” (Robbins, 1981: 575). A very similar story can be told of the rapid diffusion of municipalities in the gold-rush colony of Victoria and, though at a more sedate pace in line with its slower growth, in Western Australia (Power et al., 1981; Wood, 1981).

Permissive incorporation, however, also often resulted in highly uneven systems; while many small inner-city municipalities were being intensively established, large swathes of unincorporated land was left under the authority of road trusts or ad hoc bodies (Grant and Drew, 2017; Kelly, 2011). By 1906, for example, less than 1% of the New South Wales land area, and only 25% of the (non-Aboriginal) population, lived within a municipality (Kelly, 2011). It was largely in an effort to regularise and expand these early arrangements that state governments again attempted, this time more successfully, to institute comprehensive, compulsory systems of local

¹³ Including the NSW Municipalities Act (1858) (which allowed incorporation via a petition of as few as 50 households), VIC Local Government Act (1863) (which called for petitions of at least 150 people); QLD Municipal Institutions Act (1864); WA Municipal Institutions Act (1900); SA District Councils Act (1852) (requiring support of two-fifths of potential rate-payers); TAS Rural Municipalities Act (1858).

¹⁴ The province’s population at the 1855 census was 85,821 (Finniss, 1855).

government, under consolidated legislative frameworks¹⁵ (Power et al., 1981: 14). By 1910, recognisably modern comprehensive systems had been established in all states, based more or less on the boundaries that had been permissively established – more in the case of South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, where the opportunity for voluntary establishment was widely taken up, and less in case of Queensland and New South Wales, which saw a need to impose a strongly top-down approach to incorporation upon a reluctant citizenry (Power et al., 1981: 12).

There has been a persistent perception among historians that local government in Australia has always been “primarily an administrative arrangement” (Atkins, as cited in Wood, 1981: 651); that it was, in other words, the demand for efficiency, rather than cries for liberty, which drove the development of Australian local government. While this has been derided as a particularly New South Wales’ centric view that doesn’t reflect the situation in other states – particularly South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria (Power et al., 1981: 20–21; Robbins, 1981; Wood, 1981), it is nonetheless true that early colonial governments were neither wary of devolving (or losing) power, nor were citizens always overtly enthusiastic about embracing the opportunity to secure local self-government and the responsibilities (and costs) that came with it (Grant and Drew, 2017; Johns, 1949; Kelly, 2011; Manning, 2005a, 2005b). The opportunity for permissive incorporation may have been widely taken up (at least in some states), but it is just as likely that the driving impetus for incorporation was less an affirmation of “abstract”, “inherent rights” (Hirst, 1967: 57) to local self-government than it was a parochial desire to secure state government grants, relief and patronage (Davison and Dunstan, 2018; Grant and Drew, 2017). As Grant and Drew (2017) detail, financial incentives often flowed to these new bodies – either via direct government funding or subsidies (as in Queensland), grants upon incorporation (as in South Australia), or the ability to charge the government for services rendered (as in Victoria). Elected local governments were also considered by petitioners as an advantageous platform from which to lobby state politicians for local infrastructure grants (Grant and Drew, 2017; Robbins, 1981).

Moreover, once municipalities were established, citizens were often reluctant to stake a loud claim to their ‘freedom to’ take on governing responsibilities. Australians’ laconic lack of enthusiasm towards participation in local politics, whether by voting or holding office, has been well noted (Gelling, 1904; Johns, 1949; Manning, 2005b). Their lack of enthusiasm to shoulder the burdens and responsibilities of local self-government has also been highlighted. Colonial

¹⁵ NSW Local Government Act (1906); VIC Local Government Act (1874); QLD Local Authorities Act (1902); WA Municipal Corporations Act (1906); SA District Councils Act (1887); TAS Local Government Reform Act (1906).

governments, for example, placed few limits on the functions that municipalities could assume; that local governments exercised only the most rudimentary of municipal functions – property services – is primarily down to the frugality of rate payers (given that local government has, for much of its existence, represented predominately propertied interests) (Hirst, 1967; Kelly, 2011; Robbins, 1981). Indeed, in all states, colonial governments responded to parsimonious local governments by establishing service delivery departments and statutory authorities, including housing commissions, roads boards, water boards, electricity commissions, and public transport authorities (Grant and Drew, 2017). This history goes a long way towards explaining why the Australian local government sector has tended to have “narrower responsibilities than its counterparts in other advanced countries” (May 2003:82) and “the weakest range of local government functions of any Western country” (Aulich 1999:12).

An emerged tradition of local self-government?

While centralism may have been the driving intellectual and political motivator for development of Australia’s institutions of local government, and while the privilege of local self-government may have always been contingent upon its utility to the state (i.e., the efficient delivery of services and governance), it does not mean that the practice of local self-government has not been, from the earliest period of municipal proliferation, a daily feature of community life. Nor does it mean, importantly, that this practice of local self-government has not made a mark upon the nation’s democratic culture and political institutions.

Whether seen as too mundane or banal, what is often left unmentioned in institutional histories of local government is an account of the role of participants, and the cultural effects of participation. Plainly, the wide proliferation of municipalities under the permissive systems – which, realistically, cannot be fully explained merely as a self-interested response to incentives¹⁶ – meant that there was an abundance of opportunities to take part in local affairs, particularly though the holding of office. Moreover, although layman officeholding was, in general, limited to the political/representative sphere – rather than the ‘barbarous’ (Mill, 1861: 267) practice of administrative officeholding – the inchoate administrations of early local government did mean that councillors often had to take on other municipal duties themselves, “including canvassing the town to collect rates” (Tucker, 1997: 73). As noted later in this chapter, the realm of the ‘political’ was also wider during the nineteenth and early-mid twentieth centuries, such that

¹⁶ Indeed as Wood (1981) contends, at least in the Western Australian case, the very fact that permissive incorporation was permitted by governments was in large part due to grass-roots lobbying.

councillors had a much greater responsibility and influence over day-to-day operations (Painter, 1974).

Whether such participation was regarded reluctantly as a civic duty¹⁷, or enthusiastically as a stately honour, local government could not have survived were it not for ordinary citizens assuming the responsibilities of suffrage. Amidst the focus on efficiency and the output-side of municipal government, the self-developmental and civic benefits that accrue to participants have often gone unacknowledged. As Hirst (1967: 54) saliently noted when writing about the debates surrounding the centralisation of the South Australian schooling system during the 1870s, while plenty was said regarding the deficiencies and incompetencies of local control, “[n]ot once in all the discussions on education did anyone think to commend the illiterate men who, under the old system, had concerned themselves with education when many politicians were neglecting it”. Since the very early days, local government has played a vital role as a training ground for state and federal politics (Davison and Dunstan, 2018: 20; Hirst, 1967: 55). Indeed, it has been estimated that up to thirty percent of parliamentarians elected to the first federal parliament of 1901 had earlier served in local government (Megarrity, 2011: 5).

During the pre-federation era of radical reformism, local government also played an integral role as a “laboratory for reform” (Palmowski, 2002: 405). Not only did elected local government precede the attainment of responsible colonial government in all states and the Northern Territory (Grant and Drew, 2017), but popular government in Australia began at the local level, when in 1840 the Adelaide Corporation became the first elected government of any form in Australia (Kelly 2011). Local government has also been an important staging ground for the advancement of women’s political rights. In 1861, South Australian women became the first in the nation to be eligible to vote in local government elections, 33 years before they could vote at state level (also in South Australia, in 1894) and 41 years before they could vote at national level. Notwithstanding the amusement of some parliamentarians, South Australian women “subsequently voted matter-of-factly in municipal elections, providing a salutary example when women’s suffrage later became a live issue” (Jones, 2013). Indeed, as demonstration of the galvanising and empowering effect of local policy innovation, the South Australian Parliament – faced with the energetic work of the Women’s Suffrage League and an enormous petition of over 11,000 signatures – became the first parliament in the nation to endorse women’s (including Indigenous women’s) right to vote, and the first in the world to endorse their right to stand for

¹⁷ As Gelling (1904: 61) recounts in relation to the Sydney Corporation (1942): “Every citizen elected to the office of councillor, alderman, auditor, or assessor, and every councillor elected to the office of mayor, was required to accept the office or pay a fine to the city fund”.

election (both in 1894) (Jones, 2013; Museum of Australian Democracy, n.d.). Notably, the first election of the Adelaide Corporation, which was the first in the world to trial a proportional representation electoral system, played an important role in inspiring the career of then 14 year-old Catherine Spence who, as the daughter of that first council's Town Clerk, would become a leading voice in the suffrage movement, a proponent of proportional representation, and the first ever woman to stand as a political candidate (to the 1897 Federal Convention) (Sawer, 1992).

Withstanding the impetus to consolidate: the twentieth century

As Collins (1985: 148) has remarked, Australia was and is a "Benthamite Society". Indeed, many of the most influential early colonial reformers, including Catherine Spence, were in direct communication with figures such as John Stuart Mill (Sawer, 1992, 2001). Surprisingly then, given the clean slate on offer, the early days of colonisation saw little clamour for a more radically utilitarian approach to local government organisation, like the hierarchical and comprehensively planned system espoused by Bentham (Wickwar, 1970).

This would soon change, however. Despite initially encouraging municipal fragmentation on pragmatic grounds, the increasingly secure and assertive colonial governments were soon demonstrating impatience with localist "dissension" and the amateur nature of small municipalities (Hirst, 1967: 54). While this was particularly true in states that Power et al. (1981: 21) label as 'state-interventionist' – New South Wales, Queensland and to a lesser extent, Tasmania, which were apt to consider municipal institutions as malleable service delivery "agents" (Power et al., 1981: 22) – it could also be discerned in the localist – or what Power et al. (1981: 21) label 'constitutionalist' – states, which tended to respect local autonomy (Wood, 1981). For example, as Hirst (1967) highlights in his earlier-mentioned study on the centralisation of the schooling system in South Australia in the 1870s, the emerging consensus among the political class was that local management in small municipalities was inefficient and incompetent, with municipal fragmentation seen increasingly as an impediment to uniformity and central coordination¹⁸.

Thus, with the progressive projects of responsible and representative government well on their way to being achieved, liberals' attention soon turned to reforming these fragmented local government systems. In the context of rapid urban growth, inchoate state welfare systems, and a leaner economic climate, 'greater city' advocates saw municipal consolidation – and in

¹⁸ Indeed, as Robbins (1981: 578) notes, an 1886 Bill to reinstate local control over schooling was predicated on consolidating the number of local authorities from 121 to 42; it failed on these grounds.

particular, metropolitan-wide governance – as vital for efficiency, capacity, coordination and the principle of popular rule (Davison and Dunstan, 2018; Gelling, 1904: 72; Grant and Drew, 2017: 55, 63). The cause of metropolitan government was even promoted by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, municipal socialists and founding members of the Fabian Society¹⁹, upon their visit to Australia in 1898. Speaking of Melbourne in particular, Sidney Webb implored:

“To become great she must become united; all her municipal strength must be concentrated. All cities situated as she is must necessarily waste their energies and resources in the conflicting pettiness of localism.” (Webb in an interview with the Melbourne Argus (20 October, 1898), as cited in Davison and Dunstan, 2018: 16).

By the early to mid-twentieth century, recurrent, mostly top-down²⁰ attempts were made in all states to create metropolitan-wide local government (Davison and Dunstan, 2018; Grant and Drew, 2017). Conferences for the greater-city movement were held as early as 1899 in Sydney and 1900 in Brisbane, with Western Australia (1910), Adelaide (1911) and Melbourne (1912) following soon after (Davison and Dunstan, 2018; Wood, 1981). The greater-city movement gained considerable traction, pushed variously by prominent and committed political and municipal figures, via a sympathetic press (Davison and Dunstan, 2018; Wood, 1981). The cause headlined the Labor Party platform in pre-WWI New South Wales, with an unsuccessful Parliamentary Bill introduced in 1915, while the greater-city principle was supported by both sides of politics in Queensland and Victoria – with unsuccessful Bills this time introduced by the Victorian Liberals in 1913 and 1915. The cause continued to simmer into the 1950s, with a 1951 Bill for a Greater Melbourne Council coming within one vote of victory (Davison and Dunstan, 2018).

Yet, despite these efforts, the established systems proved resilient. Only in unicameral Queensland – when in 1924, the state parliament passed legislation to abolish 50 separate local government bodies in favour of one metropolitan-wide, Brisbane Council (Grant and Drew, 2017) – did “the reformers’ dream of ‘greater’ metropolitan councils planning and governing the entire metropolis and delivering a wide range of services” come to fruition (Davison and Dunstan, 2018: 18). The failure of this ‘dream’ in all other jurisdictions often rested on the inability of stakeholders

¹⁹ At that time, as Davison and Dunstan (2018: 16) note, “The political watchword for English Fabians and American Progressives was ‘efficiency’ – the application of science to the organisation of society”.

²⁰ The 1910 greater-city movement in Western Australia, led by municipal socialist and long standing Perth Town Clerk, W.E Bold, is unique in that it was led by inner city municipalities themselves, seeking greater devolved power along with scale (Wood, 1981). This effort was rebuffed, however, by the state government, which wished neither to relinquish its accumulated functions, nor to establish a rival centre of power (Wood, 1981).

to agree on the governance model – with reformers and left-leaning politics often driving unitary schemes based on amalgamation (joined with principles of municipal socialism and popular franchise), and local authorities and right-leaning politics often supporting ‘federal’ models, retaining some local representation (resting on a property-based franchise) (Davison and Dunstan, 2018; Grant and Drew, 2017). Conservative-dominated upper houses and incumbent councillors also posed an ever-ready hurdle to reform. However, while it has been popular among proponents of greater-city schemes to characterise opponents as driven by a self-interested desire to maintain their small principalities and their propertied privileges – as many indeed were, Davison and Dunstan (2018: 22) stress also that the greater-city movement typically “stirred only tepid and fitful popular support”. Whether or not based on high-minded principles, in the end “the desire for local autonomy usually trumped the logic of centralisation” (Davison and Dunstan, 2018: 19).

Aside from these early attempts, for much of the twentieth century the states exhibited a general reluctance to institute any major reforms to their local government systems (Aulich, 1999; Marshall, 1998). Despite an “enduring belief by Australian state policymakers that ‘bigger is better’ in local government” (Dollery and Byrnes, 2008: 97), state governments were relatively reserved in their use of amalgamation as a tool of structural reform. While, as Vince (1997) makes clear, the topic of amalgamation was never far from the agenda in any state, over the course of the first century and a half of local government in Australia, it was only in New South Wales (1946 and the late 1970s), South Australia (in depression era 1930s, a reduction from 196 to 142) and Tasmania (in 1906 – a reduction from 149 to 46 local authorities) that any notable instances of large-scale amalgamation actually took place (Local Government Boundary Reform Board, 1998: 7; Robbins, 1981; Tiley and Dollery, 2010: 4–5; Vince, 1997: 160).

As the 1990s approached, however, changing economic conditions and the emerging realities of a globalised market led governments to initiate significant, structural public sector reform, driven by a resurgent and much more confident commitment to the neo-liberal ethos of economic rationalism and managerialism (Kelly, 2011; Kiss, 2003; Tucker, 1997). This impetus would, at last, instigate an unprecedented era of municipal consolidation, with comprehensive rounds of amalgamation taking place in all states except for Western Australia. As in 1830s England, efficiency was again the order of the day.

The delocalisation of Australian local government

The decade of the 1990s ushered in substantial changes to Australia's long inert systems of local government. A reinvigorated preoccupation with efficiency saw state governments introduce a series of transformative structural reforms designed to rationalise local government. While microeconomic reform, strategic management and oversight were important components of the reform toolkit, the most prominent and controversial of these efforts has been municipal amalgamation (Grant and Drew, 2017; Kelly et al., 2009; May, 2003). This section provides an account of the Australian experience with amalgamation over the past three decades. After first documenting the several amalgamation programmes and their aggregate results, the policy of amalgamation is then situated within the context of the broader structural reforms of the period. The section concludes by considering and critiquing the economic case for amalgamation.

Amalgamation at the turn of the twenty-first century

It can generally be stated that the municipal amalgamations which have taken place in Australia during the last three decades have occurred not as a result of local initiative, but as the result of top-down, state government direction. They have almost always been foisted upon the local government sector "under various degrees of state government coercion, ranging from outright compulsion to financial incentives and penalties" (Dollery and Byrnes, 2008: 100). As will be evident in the following chronological account of Australia's amalgamation experience, the typical amalgamation process tends to involve several key characteristics. First, as Drew and Dollery (2014: 129–130) identify, the respective state government typically establishes an 'independent' commission to investigate reform options, with this commission almost invariably recommending amalgamation. Next, as Grant and Drew (2017: 362) add, state governments will generally attempt to engage in constructive dialogue with the local government sector, seeking to encourage voluntary amalgamation. Finally, the government will grow dissatisfied with the pace of the discussion, and will, without electoral mandate (Grant and Drew, 2017: 362), turn to prescribed forced amalgamation, executed "swiftly to minimise opportunities for adversaries to marshal effective opposition" (Drew and Dollery, 2014: 130).

The first successfully implemented programmes of amalgamation during this period – the kindling on the fire – occurred in Tasmania in 1993 and Queensland in 1994. In Tasmania, a reduction in the number of municipalities from 46 to 29 proceeded at the initiative of the Groom (Liberal) Government, upon recommendation of its government-appointed advisory board (Marshall, 1998: 649). In Queensland, whose capital city was notably already the only example in Australia of metropolitan-wide government, it was the Goss (Labor) government who instigated the

modest reduction (from 134 to 125), similarly upon recommendation of a commission of inquiry. While relatively subdued affairs, marked by a notable degree of consultation and coordination from the local government sectors in the design and delivery of the structural changes (Marshall, 1998; Vince, 1997), the model provided by these cases would ignite a rush of activity among other governments seeking to follow in tow.

Subdued and consultative could not be used to describe the “forceful top-down style” of amalgamation (Marshall, 1998: 649) that took place the following year, under the stewardship of the Kennett (Liberal) Government in Victoria. Amalgamation had been on the agenda in Victoria since the mid-1980s, when the Cain (Labor) Government made an unsuccessful attempt, again on recommendation of a commission, to carry out large scale consolidation. While fierce grassroots opposition, including state-wide demonstrations, had scuppered that plan (Vince, 1997), the newly elected Kennett sought, boldly, to make a renewed attempt. Having appointed another local government board to undertake boundary reviews in 1993, the Kennett Government proceeded to act on its recommendation by embarking on a round of mergers which would, by 1995, cut the number of councils across that state from 210 to 78 (Marshall, 1998: 649). Remarkably, as Burdess and O’Toole (2004: 71) point out, “This was 10 less than the number of constituencies for the Lower House”! During the amalgamation process, Victorian municipalities were afforded very little say; indeed, the government proceeded along the unprecedented route of dismissing all sitting elected councillors and replacing them with appointed commissioners to administer the newly merged entities for a period of two years (Marshall, 1998: 649).

By the close of the decade, the South Australian, Tasmanian, and Western Australian governments had responded to this trend by launching their own reviews to investigate options for structural reform. In Tasmania’s case, this was a follow-up attempt by the Liberal government for further consolidation (from 29 to 11) that was thwarted only by a change in government in 1998 (Kiss, 2003: 108). Western Australia also avoided large-scale consolidation at this time, when the Court (Liberal) Government’s Local Government Structural Advisory Committee did not, in contrast with its interstate analogues, propose comprehensive or government-driven amalgamation when it handed down its reform recommendations in 1996. While the committee did identify amalgamation as an option some councils may wish to pursue of their own accord, its – and the government-of-the-day’s – preferred approach to structural reform encompassed resource sharing and inter-municipal cooperation (Marshall, 1998: 650).

For South Australia, on the other hand, the result was an extensive round of amalgamations in 1997, reducing the number of councils in that state from 118 to 68 (Local Government Boundary Reform Board, 1998). No doubt influenced by the negative response to the Victorian amalgamation process, the Olsen (Liberal) Government's process was more consultative (Marshall, 1998: 649); the government eschewed forced amalgamation and rigid outcomes-frameworks, allowing the councils themselves to decide whether and with whom to amalgamate. Nevertheless, amalgamation – as overseen by the Local government Boundary Reform Board – was “strongly encouraged” (Aulich et al., 2011a: 25) and strongly incentivised by both “carrot and stick” (Local Government Boundary Reform Board, 1998: 13) – in the form of financial resources (1998: 4) and a legislative backstop vesting authority in the Board “to formulate its own [amalgamation] proposals” (1998: iv). As a consequence of this unique process, South Australia maintains a greater degree of variation in municipality size than other reformed states (Aulich et al., 2011a).

Amalgamation remained on the agenda during the 2000s and 2010s, even among states that had already undergone amalgamation the decade before. Queensland, for example, saw a dramatic reduction in the number of councils in 2007, with the Beattie (Labor) Government (guided by the Local Government Reform Commission) cutting the number of councils by half (from 157 to 73) (Conroy, 2011). While the government had initially sought a collegiate and collaborative reform process, encouraging councils to formulate their own merger proposals with the aim of ensuring long-term financial sustainability, the government grew impatient with the slow-to-act local government sector, and instigated a remarkably rapid, top-down forced amalgamation scheme (Conroy, 2011). The acrimony of this reform led to a routing at the 2012 state elections, with the opposition's offer of de-amalgamation considered a key factor in their historic electoral win (Ryan et al., 2015). In turn, however – as will be discussed in Chapter 8 – once in office, the Newman (Liberal-National) Government “steadily ‘stacked the deck’ against de-amalgamation” (de Souza et al., 2015: 1406).

In 2008, the Northern Territory followed Queensland with its own amalgamation scheme, with the Martin/Henderson (Labor) Government consolidating that jurisdiction's 61 local government areas into 16 merged authorities (Conroy, 2011), including heavy consolidation in the vast regional areas populated by small and dispersed Indigenous communities. Amalgamation of these communities represented a particularly dour policy shift, given that from the early 1980s until the turn of the century, Federal and Territory governments had been encouraging these (mostly) Indigenous rural communities to separately incorporate as local governing bodies in an effort to support self-government and self-determination (Sanders, 2013). Even here thus, as Sanders

(2013: 483) laments, “[l]ocalism and self-determination were, as ideas, losing out to those of scale, centralization, planning and efficient and effective service delivery”. As in Queensland, this process of amalgamation has been slated as a key reason for the Territory government’s subsequent election loss (Ryan et al., 2015).

The spectre of amalgamation loomed menacingly, too, over New South Wales’ politics throughout this period, with the local government sector being in a state of almost constant trepidation at the prospect of forced mergers. Nor was this fear without reason, given successive governments’ penchant for backpeddling on earlier commitments of ‘no forced mergers’ (Tiley and Dollery, 2010). This trepidatious sentiment enveloped, for example, efforts by the Carr (Labor) Government in 2003 to rationalise local government (Cohen et al., 2003). Focussing predominantly on rural/regional municipalities, this process proceeded much like the one in Queensland, with the government inviting councils to submit proposals for reform despite nevertheless reverting to a programme of forced mergers (Dollery and Byrnes, 2008). Amalgamation remained close to the surface of state politics for the next decade (Tiley and Dollery, 2010), before boiling over once again during an elongated process which commenced in 2011 under Premier O’Farrell (Liberal) as “a collaborative and voluntary venture between the NSW local government peak bodies and the NSW state government” (Grant and Drew, 2017: 365), and ended in a cloud of acrimony, litigation, and electoral recrimination. While political and legal challenges led the now Berejiklian-led (Liberal) Government ultimately to abandon its full programme of amalgamations in 2017 (Grant and Drew, 2017), this was not before a reduction of 24 municipalities had already been effected.

Western Australia, which Grant and Drew (2017) characterise as having perhaps the strongest localist tradition of all states, has thus far been the only state to evade the cartographer’s eraser, with governments tending to prefer a voluntary approach to the question of amalgamation. Underlying this permissive orientation, Western Australia is also the only state with legislation providing (subject to citizen petition) for a binding poll of electors in relation to the issue of municipal amalgamation (Berry, 2016). As Berry (2016) argues, the poll provision has been instrumental to the maintenance of small municipalities and grass-roots influence in the face of the inevitable centralist impetus – which, despite the state’s localist slant, does also exist there. Indeed, the passage of the original poll provision in 1975 – a unique political moment largely attributed to the vigorous campaigning of Tom Dadour, simultaneously MP and Councillor for Subiaco – was opposed by a parliamentary opposition that saw the provision as “tak[ing] away from the Minister the right that all Ministers for Local Government have had up to the present” (Legislative Assembly of Western Australia, 1975: 1249, as cited by Berry, 2016: 30).

The importance of the poll provision was demonstrated in 2013, when the Barnett (Liberal) Government announced plans to reduce the number of metropolitan councils from 30 to 14 (Drew and Dollery, 2014). In an attempt to push through the amalgamations, the state government initially, but unsuccessfully, moved to remove the poll provisions from the Local Government Act, while later opting instead to pursue consolidation through 'boundary adjustment', which would not trigger a binding poll. In the end, citizens were afforded a right to vote in respect to only three mergers (Berry, 2016). Despite the high hurdle to prevent amalgamation – over 50% turnout and over 50% vote *against* the proposal – all three were defeated, leaving the exasperated Premier to place all consolidation plans on hold, declaring that he had "run up the white flag on the issue", and contending "I don't think local government is capable of reforming itself" (Barnett, as cited in O'Connor, 2015).

Notwithstanding the lonely localist holdout in Western Australia, the aggregate result of these successive, large-scale rounds of amalgamations is that the number of municipalities across Australia has, since 1991, fallen by 35%, from 826 to 536 (see table 3.1). With the notable exception of Western Australia, substantial reductions have taken place in all states and the Northern Territory (the Australian Capital Territory does not have a system of local government). Compounding the aggregate reduction in number of councils is the fact that the Australian population has, between 1991 and 2019, grown from 17.3 million to 25.4 million. As a result, while the number of municipalities has decreased by just over a third, the average municipal population size has more than doubled, from 20,575 to 46,525. Moreover, for most Australians, who reside in capital city metropolitan areas, the average municipality size is almost three-times larger still, at 121,708 (see Table 3.2). Taking a longer view helps to place the current average sizes in sober perspective – for, in 1910, the average municipal population size was a mere 4,147²¹.

²¹ These figures, calculated by the author, account for the fact that the Australian Capital Territory (population 426,709 in 2019) doesn't have a local government sector (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Knibbs, 1912).

Table 3.1. Number of local government bodies in Australia by state/territory, 1910-2020

State/Territory	1910	1948	1978	1991	2001	2008	2020
NSW	324	289	205	176	172	152	128
Vic	206	197	211	210	79	79	79
QLD	164	144	131	134	125	73	77
SA	175	143	132	122	68	68	68
WA	147	148	138	138	142	140	138
Tas	51	49	49	46	29	29	29
NT	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	61	17
TOTAL	1,067	970	866	826	622	602	536

Note. Data sourced from DIRD (2015: 42), Dollery and Byrnes (2008: 100) and council election reports from respective state electoral commissions (for 2020 figures).

Table 3.2. Municipal population size by state and geographic context

State/ Territory	State average municipal size		Average municipal size by context, 2019		Largest /smallest municipalities by context, 2019	
	1991	2019	Metro	Non-metro	Metro	Non-metro
NSW	33,516	63,199	150,550	32,849	377,917 /14,980	343,968 /1,611
Vic	21,049	83,479	146,236	69,967	202,847 /93,448	353,872 /2,940
QLD	22,097	66,170	487,785	36,378	1,253,982 /158,815	620,518 /266
SA	11,855	25,760	70,620	9,179	172,938 /8000	39,977 /64
WA	11,856	18,998	66,077	5,974	221,040 /1,732	86,474 /79
Tas	10,148	18,423	38,669	13,150	57,807 /15,603	68,007 /1,010
NT	n/a	14,463	82,886	9,729	82,886 /82,886	38,270 /175
TOTAL	20,575	46,525	121,708	27,607	1,253,982 /1,732	620,518 /64

Note. Data sourced from ABS (2019, 2020a).

To be sure, Australia is by no means alone in catching ‘amalgamation fever’. Similarly substantial programmes of municipal consolidation have been pursued in countries as diverse as New Zealand – where structural reforms instigated in 1989 saw the number of local government bodies fall from 741 to 92 (Marshall, 1998: 644), Canada, Israel, Japan, South Korea and Turkey (Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Nakagawa, 2016). Across Europe, as a stark example, the number of municipalities was cut by more than 5,000 during the decade from 2008 to 2017 alone (Swianiewicz, 2018). Nevertheless, the average size of Australian municipalities remains high by international standards and exceedingly high for nations with a federal constitution (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Number and average population size of local authorities in selected countries, 2017

Country	Number of municipalities	Average municipal population
Czech Republic	6,258	1,688
Slovak Republic	2,930	1,854
France	35,357	1,885
Cyprus	380	2,250
Hungary	3,178	3,088
Austria	2,098	4,166
Spain	8,124	5,720
Luxemburg	102	5,727
Malta	68	6,477
Romania	3,181	6,986
Germany	11,054	7,449
United States	35,748	7,453
Croatia	556	7,472
Italy	7,960	7,617
Slovenia	212	9,739
Canada	3,598	10,202
Poland	2,478	15,507
Latvia	119	16,476
Estonia	79	16,657
Finland	311	17,670
Belgium	589	19,177
Bulgaria	265	26,604
Greece	325	33,181
Portugal	308	33,524
Sweden	290	34,218
Netherlands	380	44,816
Australia	536	45,128
Lithuania	60	47,465
Denmark	98	58,459
New Zealand	67	73,143
Ireland	31	151,078
United Kingdom	391	167,898

Note. Table includes all European Union countries and a selection of comparable non-EU countries. In addition to the figures listed above, a number of countries also have a structured, sub-municipal level of government (e.g., parishes, villages, towns, community councils): Bulgaria (n=4,991), Greece, Ireland (166), Latvia (573), New Zealand (131), Portugal (3,092), Romania (12,957), Slovenia (6,035), United Kingdom (11,430). Several countries also have an intermediate level of governance between the local and regional/state tiers which are not included in the above figures (e.g., regional councils, counties): Belgium (10), Canada (145), France (101), Germany (401), New Zealand (11), Poland (380), Spain (50), United Kingdom (27), United States (3,031). The figure for the United States includes all general purpose, sub-county level districts (not included in this figure are the country's 51,296 special purpose districts).

Data sourced from ABS (2019), CLGF (2018), LGNZ (2021), OECD (2018), Stats NZ (2020), United States Census Bureau (2019).

Contextualising amalgamation: structural reform, managerialism and depoliticisation

While amalgamation can be “construed as the most decisive form of structural reform” (May, 2003: 83), it has nevertheless represented just one element of a broader ‘modernisation’ enterprise. Indeed, as Tan et al. (2016: 25) note, amalgamation was never “justified separately”, but was instead always “heavily linked” to a concomitant package of reforms. To understand, then, why governments resorted to amalgamation after such a long period of hesitation, and why they were so successful during this period in delivering upon comprehensive reorganisation of local government boundaries, it is necessary to examine how amalgamation fits within this wider scheme.

The reformist impetus that manifested in the rush to amalgamate can be traced back to the early 1980s, and the emergence of neo-liberalism as the dominant macro-economic paradigm in Australia (Hay, 2007: 98). As a counterpoint to the mixed economy of Keynesianism, neo-liberalism sought leaner or less-interventionist government focussed on facilitating economic competitiveness in an increasingly globalised market. This transformation was evidenced first in terms of macro-economic policy reform at the national level, including the lowering of trade barriers, the floating of the Australian Dollar, extensive industry deregulation, the privatisation of national assets, and a commitment to more restrained fiscal policy (Humphrys and Cahill, 2017). Soon after, the focus turned to structural reform of state and local government, in “a renewed preoccupation with...efficiency” (May, 2003: 79). As well as a formal commitment to microeconomic reform via the National Competition Policy (Aulich, 2005; Marshall, 1998; Tucker, 1997), this period was marked by the introduction, in all states, of governance and administrative reforms that sought to institute a more “businesslike” (Aulich, 1999: 13) approach within local government – in line with ‘New Public Management’ principles (Aulich, 1999; Marshall, 1998; Tan et al., 2016).

While, for much of the twentieth century, state governments remained mostly hands-off when it came to local government affairs, affording a high degree of ‘freedom from’ central interference, the local tier was also generally highly constricted in its ‘freedom to’ pursue a broad range of activities (Aulich, 1999; Marshall, 1998). Detailed and prescriptive Local Government Acts ensured that the sector played only a minimal role in the service mix of the federation. The reforms of the 1990s sought to change that. Ushering a striking degree of legislative harmonisation across the nation (Aulich, 1999), Local Government Acts in each state were revised and streamlined, granting powers of general competence to local governments (Aulich, 2005;

Grant and Dollery, 2012; Kiss, 2003; Marshall, 1998; Vince, 1997)²². As Aulich (1999: 14) states, “Common to all changes was the shift away from the prescriptive and limiting powers reinforced by the doctrine of *ultra vires*, which restricted councils to performing only those activities specifically nominated under the legislation”. Now local governments had increased legislative authority to pursue any activity necessary to fund and fulfil their functions (Aulich, 1999).

The hallmarks of New Public Management (NPM)²³ – which Swianiewicz presents as the “attempt to apply and operationalize neoliberal ideas to the public sector” – can be discerned in these reforms. As a set of ideas that promised to improve administrative efficiency and effectiveness, NPM was predicated on the introduction of private-sector styles of management to the public sector (Hood, 1991; Hood and Dixon, 2015). In place of rigid hierarchy and process, NPM moved the focus to outputs and outcomes (Hood, 1991; Tucker, 1997). With the shackles of *ultra vires* lifted, local governments were encouraged to be strategic, flexible, and entrepreneurial in their operations. In line with the NPM ethic of competition and user choice, local governments were encouraged to seek efficiencies through contracting out (i.e. competitive tender), public-private partnerships or the full privatisation of public assets and enterprises – rather than necessarily deliver all services in-house (Dollery and Grant, 2010; Hood, 1991; Tan et al., 2016; Tucker, 1997). Moreover, in what is often referred to as a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ (Swianiewicz, 2020b; Wilson and Game, 1998), councils were now expected to coordinate place-based projects, collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders – from state and federal government agencies, to non-government organisations to enterprise – in order to achieve holistic outcomes on ‘wicked’ social issues²⁴.

As a consequence of this change, local governments’ service portfolios expanded considerably in all states (Marshall, 1998; May, 2003) – precipitating a change in the mix of services delivered by local governments, from a predominant focus on property-based services and hard infrastructure, towards a much more prominent role in the delivery of human and social services. Yet, if these reforms signal that Australian local government has moved on from its original state of “functional inflexibility”, its current state is perhaps best described as one of “frustrated

²² New Local Government Acts were introduced in Victoria (1989), New South Wales (1993), Queensland (1993), Tasmania (1993), Western Australia (1995) and South Australia (1999).

²³ NPM has been considered by some to be a “revolution” in administrative philosophy (Hood, 1991: 6). Nevertheless, as Bowrey and Smark (2010) emphasise, there are many parallels between the principles and practices of NPM and the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, particularly with regard to reporting and oversight.

²⁴ The SA Local Government Act (1999) s.122(a), for example, requires that councils work with other councils, and with state and federal governments, when developing strategy and when planning and delivering services.

potential” (Kelly, 2011: 1). For the granting of general powers of competence and the devolution of service delivery responsibilities has “been accompanied by more stringent expectations in terms of performance and accountability” (Marshall, 1998: 646). State governments sought increasingly to influence local policy, dictate local procedures and shape local behaviours through regulation and through the terms of service delivery agreements (Dollery and Byrnes, 2008; Grant and Dollery, 2012; Marshall, 1998). While NPM is often presented as a means of “furthering accountability and empowering users” (Burnham, 2001: 140), it also “centralises policy-making in the hands of the core executive... whilst decentralising the delivery of policy to a number of agencies which operate within the limits set by the centre” (Burnham, 2001: 140). Increasingly, local government was seen, by state and federal tiers, as one such ‘rowing agency’.

The adoption of NPM principles can be seen to be associated with two processes of *governmental depoliticisation* – defined broadly as the stripping of decision making authority from political participants (Wood and Flinders, 2014). Firstly, in a process which Jessop (2014: 212) refers to as “the reorganisation of the division of political labour within the polity”, state governments have assumed increased discretion over both strategic directions and policy, including by enforcing the adoption of ‘model’ by-laws²⁵ and standardised policy (England, 2010; Kiss, 2001; McFarland, 2011). In relation to land use policy, for example, such reform is intended to streamline the development process and, in the rational, neo-liberal pursuit of economic development, provide certainty and consistency for developers and big business (Kelly, 2011; McFarland, 2011). Yet, by moving decision making authority away from the local level and towards the state level, the freedom of citizens resident of a particular locality to affect their own preferences is compromised, with their voice now diluted by the input of the wider political community of the state (Kelly, 2011).

Along with the diminution of the scope for local discretion, a second process of *governmental depoliticisation* has seen much of local government’s residual authority shifted away from councillors and the realm of politics and contestation, and into the hands of administrators and the realm of logic, “control and restriction” (Burnham, 2001: 141). This process of depoliticisation, characterised by Flinders and Wood (2014: 135) as “the denial of political contingency and the transfer of functions away from elected politicians”, can be seen in the professionalisation of local government administration and the growing rigor and rigidity of the expert-led, evidence-based

²⁵ Kiss (2001: 18), for example, details the onerous process that Queensland local governments are forced to follow in order to enact a bespoke law, including Ministerial approval and community consultation; rather the Queensland government, like other state governments, encourages councils to adopt ‘model’ by-laws, predesigned and pre-approved by the Minister (Kiss, 2001).

policy cycle – which countenances little room for the subjective (‘unlearned, parochial and self-interested’) input of lay-politicians (Aulich, 1999: 19; Jessop, 2014). In this context, “dispute and radical disagreement about the world we want to inhabit” (Swyngedouw, 2013) is constrained and treated merely as a matter of “managerial” (Swyngedouw, 2013) or “technocratic” (Jessop, 2014: 215) concern.

This shift in responsibilities is apparent in legislative reforms (in all jurisdictions) which have instituted a stronger distinction between the role of elected councillors and that of the non-elected administrators (Grant et al., 2011; Sanders, 2013). Whereas for most of the twentieth century, councillors had a much more active role in the oversight of day-to-day activities, enabling them a degree of influence over disbursements, services and personnel in response to constituent requests/complaints (Painter, 1974; Tucker, 1997), the role of the elected council was now drawn much more deliberately to be one of setting the strategic vision and policy framework – “to steer not row” (Kiss, 2003: 102). On the other hand, the senior administrative officer was now afforded “considerable authority and autonomy” (Sansom, 2014: 311) to execute policy (Kiss, 2003; Mouritzen and Svava, 2002; Tan et al., 2016). Sanders (2013: 483–484), for example, documents successive amendments to the Local Government Act of the Northern Territory from 2004 onwards, which have progressively shifted the balance of power from the council to the CEO, to the extent that it is now the CEO not the council who must *ensure* that council’s policies, plans and lawful decisions are implemented²⁶.

The economic case for amalgamation

With the greater part of the political class believing “trenchantly” that “amalgamation is the most effective way of enhancing the efficiency of councils” (May, 2003: 84), amalgamation has been state governments’ favoured lever for local government structural reform over the period (Dollery and Byrnes, 2008). Certainly, the prospect of increased efficiency has been the primary motivator for municipal amalgamation, both in Australia and internationally (Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Byrnes and Dollery, 2002; Callanan et al., 2014; Dollery et al., 2007; Dollery and Crase, 2004; Grant and Drew, 2017; Marshall, 1998; May, 2003; Soul and Dollery, 2000). This expectation of efficiency derives, as Byrnes and Dollery (2002: 391) state, from “the widespread belief that larger

²⁶ A similar example is the inclusion of independent experts onto development assessment panels and the gradual removal of elected councillors from the development assessment decision making process (Government of South Australia, 2018; Government of Western Australia, 2018; New South Wales Government, 2018) – a concerted and explicit endeavour, according to the NSW Government (2018), towards “depoliticising the assessment process”.

local government entities would be economically more efficient than their smaller constituent elements”.

Claims that larger municipalities are more efficient rest on four primary assumptions as to the linear effect of size on the per capita cost of service provision: (1) that larger municipalities benefit from economies of scale; (2) that they benefit from economies of scope; (3) that they accrue increased administrative and technical capacity; and (4), that they enjoy reduced administration and compliance overheads (Dollery and Crase, 2004; May, 2003). Among these four assumptions, the idea that larger local governments benefit from economies of scale – an argument with echoes all the way back to Chadwick (see Chapter 2) – has been most prominent. As Vince (1997: 153) states, “It is conventional wisdom that pecuniary economies of scale can be achieved by having fewer and larger local government units”. In the context of local government, economies of scale denotes a decrease in per capita cost for a given service level as the population served increases (Dollery et al., 2007: 3). Among other advantages, this is expected to result in lower unit costs of representation, increased purchasing power, and improved utilisation of resources such as depots, plant and equipment (Byrnes and Dollery, 2002).

Expectations regarding economies of scale have been pivotal to the case for amalgamation, as presented in commission reports (Aulich et al., 2014; Dollery and Byrnes, 2008: 103; Marshall, 1998). Indeed, as Soul and Dollery (2000: 13) state, “[t]he financial viability of local government jurisdictions has been considered by almost all Inquiries to be the most important factor”. The Report of the Queensland Local Government Reform Commission (2007: 13), for example, resolved that in order to future-proof that state’s local government sector, municipalities must be of a size and scale sufficient to “remove inefficiencies resulting from duplication and sub-optimal use of assets”. Similarly, Western Australia’s Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel (2012: 9) argued, in recommending amalgamation, that Greater Perth currently experiences “a significant level of duplication and wasted resources”. Plainly, as Marshall (1998: 650) explains, “All the states, to varying degrees, envisage that significant savings will be achieved through programs of consolidation”.

The argument that ‘bigger is cheaper’ is present not only in the commission reports, but also in political rhetoric. Headline savings figures are a popular tool for the justification and promotion of council amalgamations. The round of amalgamations which took place in Victoria in 1995, during a period of economic downturn in that state, had been justified on the basis that they would reap savings in the order of \$500 million (Aulich, 2005; May, 2003). The recent round of amalgamations in New South Wales, in similar manner, were claimed to be worth \$2 billion in

economic benefits (Robertson, 2016), while the Western Australian Premier (Barnett), in promoting his plan for amalgamations in that state in 2014, highlighted modelling which he claimed would save more than \$20 million in elected member allowances and \$30 million in chief executive packages over ten years (Strutt and Perpetch, 2014).

Public and political debate is also influenced by contributions from business and industry groups, which have an interest in ensuring that the topic of amalgamation remains at the forefront of the political agenda (Grant and Drew, 2017: 362–363). As Drew et al. (2013: 56) argue, “interest groups involved in property investment and associated business ventures have obvious pecuniary incentives to challenge the structure of local government, often contracting commercial consultants to produce ‘expert reports’ proposing various combinations of municipal consolidation and ‘streamlined’ planning systems to accelerate development”. The authors identify several instances across Australia of industry groups, including the Property Council of Australia, seeking to inject their own perspectives into the public realm, to shape public opinion and to ensure that the issue of amalgamation remains on the political agenda. In what can be identified as an example of *discursive depoliticisation* – which relates to the way language is used to deny or negate the existence of choice in relation to a particular issue, framing one particular view as the only rational and tenable view (Wood and Flinders, 2014: 156) – such lobby groups couch their interests through the objectivity of consultant reports, which emphasise the purported economic benefits that would accrue to citizens. This was seen, for example, in a recent attempt by the Property Council of Australia, leading a ‘coalition’ of business and industry, to reignite the issue of amalgamation in South Australia (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015). Via a commissioned report, the Property Council declared that ratepayers could save \$5.5 million per year from the reduction in the number of mayors and councillors, and \$50 million from executive redundancies (Acil Allen, 2016). Such efforts are persuasive among politicians and media outlets, with this attempt making headline news in South Australia and sparking renewed discussions on the topic (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2016).

Politics via commission

In promoting and justifying amalgamation, governments similarly appeal to the ‘objectivity’ of the ‘hard science’ of economics, rather than subjectivities of politics. This is achieved through the earlier noted trend of establishing ‘independent’ commissions to evaluate the options for local government reform. The use of such technocratic mechanisms – whether or not they are utilised with an honest intention of seeking evidence-based outcomes (Hay, 2007) – can be interpreted as yet another example of governmental depoliticisation; that is, an attempt to ‘deny political contingency’ (Flinders and Wood, 2014: 135). Yet, as writers such as Gerard (2017) and Burnham

(2001) stress, this form of depoliticisation does not extinguish the political, it merely reorganises how it takes place: “The form that politics takes... changes because of reforms to the structures within which people interact, raising questions regarding which social groups are empowered through this process, and why and how it progresses” (Gerard, 2017: 113). With the formal politics of amalgamation taking place via the commissions, the potential for dissent is ‘regulated’ (Gerard, 2017) by funnelling citizen and civil society participation through prescribed channels – usually that of the individual submission – and by limiting the scope of debate to align with the commissions’ terms of reference. Rather than a transparent process of political debate and contestation driving the process forward, the commissions have sole responsibility for evaluating the evidence through their ideological lens. Given this, views in opposition to amalgamation, particularly on democratic grounds, are often marginalised. This can be seen in the dismissive response of the Western Australian Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel (2012: 99) to submissions “based on unsubstantiated assertions”, and in the Panel’s attempt to diminish the credibility of literature opposing amalgamation – at one point stating blithely that “some of the literature cited as being critical of amalgamations as a reform option has been commissioned by the local government associations in each state, which typically oppose reform” (2012: 98).

By shifting the political process to ‘objective’ commissions, which can demonstrate to have engaged diligently (albeit on their own terms) with all relevant stakeholders, a government can claim input legitimacy for its policy choices and disparage any objections as illegitimate/subjective/partisan/parochial. Governments, as Fawcett and Marsh (2014: 176) note, can use commissions to remain at arm’s-length from the deliberations – “distancing themselves from blame if things go wrong” – while retaining control over the final decision²⁷. The desire to appear objective and blameless is particularly important where commissions are utilised as an arms-length means of “responding to the material interests of powerful groups in society” (Fawcett and Marsh, 2014: 176) – such as, in the case of amalgamation, the interests of the property industry.

Analyses of the independent commissions’ reports by Dollery, Ho, et al. (2008), Drew and Dollery (2014), and Marshall (1998), do indeed raise questions regarding their objectivity and

²⁷ Interestingly, such an approach was integral to the earliest centralist victory, the passage of the Poor Law Reforms of 1832. As Fawcett and Marsh (2014: 175) recount: “The Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws... allowed the Whig government to stay one step removed from the policy making process, while always in the knowledge that the Commission, in general, and Nassau Senior, the Commission’s Chair, in particular, were, like the government, supporters of Bentham and utilitarianism.” Toulmin Smith’s (1849) characteristically colourful reaction was reflected in the title of one of his books: “Government by Commissions Illegal and Pernicious: The Nature and Effects of all Commissions of Inquiry”.

impartiality²⁸. For example, reviewing the report that guided the Western Australian Government to announce plans for amalgamation in 2013, Drew and Dollery (2014) note that the terms of reference explicitly requested that the commission “[i]dentify new local government boundaries and a resultant reduction in the overall number of local governments to better meet the needs of the community” (2014: 131). Moreover, Drew and Dollery (2014: 131) found material gaps in the research utilised in the report, arguing that it furnished no evidence of econometric analysis of scale economies, nor did it canvass any of the extensive extant literature on the subject. Instead, the report relied upon the findings of a real estate industry sponsored paper, which was elsewhere found to have shortcomings in its statistical modelling (Drew et al., 2013). Similar criticisms were levelled at the Final Report of the Queensland Government’s Reform Commission, which “completely ignores Australian and international literature on structural reform... as if Queensland exists in a separate dimension of the universe” (Dollery, Ho, et al., 2008: 80).

Selective use of evidence has also been demonstrated in similar reports in other states. In the case of South Australia, Marshall (1998: 650–651) argues that despite the Ministerial Advisory Group on Local Government Reform’s consideration of the available evidence being “neither comprehensive nor convincing”, the committee members “nevertheless concluded that the arguments supporting economies of scale were ‘compelling’”. Indeed, Tasmania’s commission felt that the economic benefits of larger councils were “self evident” (Tasmanian Local Government Advisory Board, 1992, p.73, as cited in Marshall, 1998: 651). In general, Marshall (1998: 651) suggests, where adverse research findings are acknowledged by commissions, they tend to be “discounted as simply irrelevant”.

Evaluating the economic case for amalgamation

In justifying municipal consolidation, state governments have, in the words of Marshall (1998: 650), “managed to ignore the indefinite nature of these research findings”. A substantial literature has developed to evaluate the merits of the ‘bigger is cheaper’ rationale, and it has become increasingly clear that while it may make some intuitive sense, “it certainly does not enjoy much empirical support” (Dollery and Crase, 2004: 5).

²⁸ Beyond the use of independent commissions, there have been recent examples, including in New South Wales (Robertson, 2016) and Tasmania (Drew et al., 2013), of governments relying heavily on the technical reports of commercial consultants – a practice that Drew et al. (2013: 55) consider to be “fraught with problems, not least the fact that ‘hired guns’ have strong incentives to create the ‘answers’ sought by their employers”.

Evaluating the international empirical research, comprising multivariate statistical analyses of the relationship between population size and the cost of providing a range of municipal services, Byrnes and Dollery (2002: 393) find that “29 per cent of the research papers find evidence of U-shaped cost curves, 39 per cent find no statistical relationship between per capita expenditure and size, 8 per cent find evidence of economies of scale, and 24 per cent find diseconomies of scale”. A more recent systematic review conducted by Gendźwiłł et al. (2020) returned similarly equivocal results. Aggregating the findings of 31 studies from 15 countries, each utilising a quasi-experimental research design (i.e., where expenditure is compared before and after an amalgamation, with reference to a non-amalgamated control group), the evidence indicates that amalgamation is associated with systematic cost reductions only in relation to administrative expenditure. The effect on expenditure in other sectors is mixed – two studies found that spending on social services increases in the post-amalgamation period, one study found a decrease in expenditure on roads, and five found no effect. In relation to total spending, as well as most other budgetary and economic indicators, the aggregate impact is largely indeterminate.

Recent Australian studies on economies of scale in local government echo the international evidence. Evaluating the relationship between council size and per-capita operating expenditure in Tasmania, Drew et al. (2013) find evidence of a U-shaped curve, with economies of scale evident up to a population of 35,000, and diseconomies accruing thereafter. However, when controlling for confounding variables, including population density and demography, this relationship is no longer statistically significant. Undertaking a similar study for New South Wales, Drew et al. (2014) also find evidence of a U-shaped relationship, this time with diseconomies of scale setting in at a higher 155,000 population; controlling for population density attenuates this relationship, though it remains statistically significant. When disaggregating the data at the level of individual service areas, Drew et al. (2014) find no evidence of economies of scale (linear or otherwise) for per capita expenditure on community services, recreation services or environmental and health services. A final study, this time in the context of metropolitan Perth, found no evidence of a statistically significant relationship between council population size and per capita expenditure, whether in aggregate or in any of the ten individual service domains (Drew and Dollery, 2014). As Grant and Drew (2017: 430) conclude,

“diseconomies of scale are the elephant in the room of Australian (local) government—public policy architects seem to hold onto the fallacious idea that services can always be delivered more cheaply by making government bigger with what can only be described as religious fervour, but are completely oblivious to the fact that when output is too large unit costs can actually increase”.

Beyond the equivocal findings from these cross-sectional studies, there is also little evidence that the results of specific amalgamation rounds have achieved their proponents' expectations (Callanan et al., 2014). Indeed, in both the Australian and international experience, it has been rare for governments to commission ex-post studies to examine the effects of amalgamation (Aulich et al., 2014; Callanan et al., 2014). This represents a particularly curious omission given the purportedly objective economic case for amalgamation, which, if it came to fruition, would present as a 'good news story' for the governments that instigated the amalgamation process. Dollery and Byrnes (2008: 100–101) suggest an explanation:

“[N]o systematic official attempt has ever been made to evaluate the outcomes of amalgamation programs, despite confident and often detailed pre-consolidation forecasts by state government politicians of substantial savings derived from enhanced efficiency. A cynical view of this neglect might suggest that policymakers sense that cost savings have not eventuated and thus they deliberately avoid a public review that would demonstrate the counter-productive effects of amalgamation”.

Unsurprisingly, then, what limited evidence that is available in the Australian context, does indicate that little has been gained in terms of economies of scale and cost reduction (Allan, 2003). In one such evaluation, which relied upon practitioner interviews and desktop research, Aulich et al. (2014) found that while evidence for enhanced strategic capacity may be present, amalgamations achieved neither systematic economies of scale, nor significant reductions in rates and charges to citizens. Indeed, it was found that the process of amalgamation itself actually generated additional significant unanticipated costs (Aulich et al., 2014). Similarly, a study by Dollery et al. (2007), in the context of South Australia, found that population size had no bearing on whether or not a given municipality was considered, by an independent assessor, to be financially sustainable. Indeed, it has been elsewhere observed that the level of financial strain experienced by local government sectors remains similar both in those states that have pursued large scale amalgamation and those states that have not (Dollery, Ho, et al., 2008). In other words, wherever it has been undertaken, amalgamation has not proven to be the “magic bullet” that government and industry asserts that it will be to cure the financial ills of the sector (Dollery, Ho, et al., 2008: 80).

Local democracy under the radar and undermined?

If the tension between localism and centralism is inherent in the ideologies of both sides of politics (Clark, 1984; Hickson, 2013), in practice the exigencies of centralism generally overwhelm. Collins (1985: 154–155) makes the point that the dominant philosophy in Australian politics –

whether notionally to the left or to the right of the political spectrum – treads tightly to its utilitarian roots: “the competitors are offering only slightly different brews of the same ideological ingredients”. As has been documented in this chapter, municipal amalgamation and concomitant structural reform has been pursued, instigated, and carried through at various times by political parties on both sides of the notional political spectrum.

Where the previous section examined the role that a centralist pursuit of efficiency has played in driving amalgamation, this section considers how concerns for localist liberty and democracy have been treated by the reform movement. In particular, the section investigates why amalgamation has continued to be driven with bi-partisan political commitment despite bitter opposition from affected communities.

The politics of amalgamation

Instead of a left–right divide, “the real difference”, as Bogdanor (2006: 11–12) observes in the English context, “is not between the political parties, but between whether a party is in government or whether it is in opposition... In opposition, they are all in favour in localism [*sic*]; in government, they say Whitehall knows best”. This observation has proven true in Australia, particularly where parties elected on platforms of ‘no forced amalgamation’ proceed to force amalgamation, and where parties elected on a platform of de-amalgamation thereafter contrive to constrain opportunities for de-amalgamation. Even Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, the most infamous of top-down reformers, had been hostile to forced amalgamation when in opposition (Chen, 2002).

Certainly, opposition parties have often been instrumental in leveraging popular opposition to government amalgamation proposals – as with the Newman Liberal (QLD) and Foley Labor (NSW) opposition parties promising polls on de-amalgamation (Silmalis, 2017), and in Western Australia, where the then State Labor Opposition Leader tapped a current of popular sentiment by declaring: “We don't like your plan, we don't like being rode roughshod over and we expect local democracy” (McGowan, as cited in O'Connor, 2015). Yet, such isolated examples of major party opposition to municipal consolidation should be interpreted through the lens of political expediency rather than ideology (Grant and Drew, 2017: 364). Indeed, there exists a strong conviction, shared across the political spectrum, that Australia is an “over governed” nation (QLGRC 2007:49), “clearly overgoverned” (Nieuwenhuysen, 1998: 22), with too many councils and “too many...politicians at all three levels of government” (Hurford, 2004: 49). As former Labor

Party Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam (1971: 11) – a reformist who was keen to “modernise and rationalise our inherited structure” – once asserted:

“The State boundaries arranged at Whitehall in the middle of the last century and the local government boundaries devised in the State capitals early this century, have little relevance to today's needs. Ideally, our continent should have neither so few State governments nor so many local government units”.

Applying a typology developed by Hirschman (1991), Grant and Drew (2017: 372) label such rhetoric as the ‘futility of resistance thesis’ – a form of *discursive depoliticisation* that is commonly employed by proponents of amalgamation. In this regard, the centralist-efficiency case is held up as the common-sense and rational position, while localist appeals are disparaged as atavistic, anti-modern and infeasible: the “fear of change”, according to South Australia’s Local Government Boundary Reform Board (1998: 58), is considered an insufficient rationale for opposing amalgamation. It is often levelled, for example, that “the present system of local government formed in the nineteenth century is inadequate for the challenges of the twenty-first century” (May, 2003: 79). “Beyond antiquity and ‘accidents of capricious history’”, another example contends, “there seems no valid or logical reason why so many local governments exist, [and] why they exist in such small and variable sizes” (Soul and Dollery, 1999: 38–39)²⁹.

Despite the attempts to delegitimise divergent perspectives, amalgamation has continued to prove bitterly unpopular among affected populations. Among those communities which have been granted a poll on the question of amalgamation/de-amalgamation, substantial majorities are regularly found against amalgamation/for de-amalgamation (see Appendix 3.1³⁰ for a comprehensive list of such polls). The results in favour of de-amalgamation in Queensland are of particular note because they were achieved despite government projections of substantially higher ongoing rates, and a government stipulation that the seceding councils (and thus rate-payers) would also be liable for the entire cost of the poll and of the de-amalgamation process – with projected bills running from almost \$7 million to over \$13.5 million (de Souza et al., 2015: 1414). While the efficiency rhetoric surrounding amalgamation might suggest that citizens’ overriding concern is that of financial self-interest, these ratepayers demonstrated that there may be something intrinsic to small, more proximate local government that is worth paying extra for.

²⁹ Ironically, this rhetorical tactic itself has ancient derivation (e.g. Mill, 1861: 267), much Toulmin Smith’s (1857: 4) chagrin.

³⁰ While an attempt was made to catalogue all known poll results from a range of data sources, any such list will invariably be incomplete.

It remains true, nevertheless, that this opposition to amalgamation may be rooted less in a general adherence to the abstract principle of liberty than in the more immediate and tangible concerns of the affected localities. Marshall (1998: 653) argues, for example, that despite the often vocal grass-roots opposition in affected localities, amongst the general population there remains a general lack of interest in the topic of amalgamation. A survey by Robbins (1978: 84) of South Australian citizens supports this view, with the finding that only 37% expressed regret at the hypothetical disappearance of their council, with 50% registering as “not bothered”. Nevertheless, there is also evidence to suggest that opposition has grown more pervasive and principled now the realities of life in large municipalities (and the shortcomings in amalgamation proponents’ promises) have become more plainly evident. In other words, hypothetical responses are beginning to align more closely with actual poll results. For example, in a survey by Ryan et al. (2015) (n≈2000) in which participants were asked whether they believed circumstances would improve on four metrics after a hypothetical amalgamation, over half believed that rates would rise, 40% predicted services would deteriorate (only around 20% thought the situation would improve on both these fronts), over half thought that representation by councillors would be worse, and over a third considered that sense of community would deteriorate (compared with around 10% who thought matters would improve on these fronts).

Whether the result of principle or pragmatism, the opposition to amalgamation has been sufficient to produce serious political consequences. In particular, almost all governments that have pursued amalgamation have faced severe recrimination at subsequent state elections (Grant and Drew, 2017: 361). Typically, the crux of citizen opposition to amalgamation relates to the perceived negative effects of larger municipalities on local democracy. Most often, this is couched in terms of a loss of representation – and the concomitant loss of voice and influence – that is feared to result from fewer, more distant, and less ‘local’ elected representatives. Such concerns have formed the basis of much of the community feedback received by commissions investigating options for municipal consolidation (NSW Local Government Review Panel, 2013: 73; Queensland Local Government Reform Commission, 2007: 49; Western Australia Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel, 2012: 125). In short, there remains a strong expectation that councils should represent, serve and be identified with a localised geographic community (Hallebone et al., 2000; Ryan et al., 2015; Sanders, 2013).

Despite this citizen concern, the localist view of local government as a forum for local voice and local choice “has been almost entirely ignored in the reform process” (Dollery and Grant, 2010: 2). “Matters of diluted political representation... and loss of local identity”, Grant and Drew (2017: 359–360) add, “are generally neglected or trivialised in the material of amalgamation

proponents". Indeed, in a review of amalgamation processes in nine countries, including Australia, Callanan et al. (2014) found that the efficiency rationale was dominant in all cases, while nowhere was a desire to ameliorate democracy or bolster participation a driving factor in the reform process. In the end, as Collins (1985: 152) saliently remarks:

"[S]o completely has this [Benthamite] philosophy captured Australia's public mind that the sporadic appearance of different political ideas, whether of the left or of the right, is better understood as a reaction against this hegemony than as the motion of independent forces. Accordingly, the moral posture of these protests is more typically dissent than defiance, while the characteristic response of the dominant ideology is disdain rather than debate".

Minimising local democracy

Much of the side-lining of democratic considerations may be traced to the instrumental, service-focussed conception of local government that undergirds the reforms. The relevance of input legitimacy – i.e. "participation *by* the people" (Schmidt, 2013: 2 [italics in original]) – is downplayed in favour of an emphasis on local government's ability to satisfactorily fulfil its duties as a service provider (i.e., its output legitimacy) (Evans, 2014: 56; Gustavsen et al., 2014; Pierre et al., 2017; Quinlivan, 2017; Roos and Lidström, 2014). Increased oversight, in turn, is the institutional response to the centralists' view that local democracy tends to produce pathological outcomes. Reflecting a prevailing neo-liberal distrust of political and bureaucratic actors (Hay, 2007), or as Robbins relates, a "common assumption among Australian academics and journalists... that local councils are havens, at best for incompetents, and at worst for the corrupt" (Robbins, 1978: 85), the local democratic process is trusted with neither the scope to reason about ends, nor even the capability to appraise means (Copus et al., 2017: 145; Sanderson, 1998)³¹. The legislated imposition in each state of increasingly prescriptive councillor codes of conduct, and their related tribunals, is demonstrative both of this lack of trust in councillors and lack of faith in the accountability function of local democracy (Marshall, 1998; Tucker, 1997)³². As Copus et al. (2017: 169) lament, "the very fact that it is based on the same electoral legitimacy as the centre can be reduced to a mere co-incidence".

³¹ This was demonstrated by the Western Australian Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel (2012: 68) when, in outlining the role of local government in metropolitan Perth, it failed even to mention democracy, representation, local voice or local choice; local government was clearly seen first and foremost as a service provider.

³² NSW LG Act (1993) s.440; Vic LG Act (1989) s.76C/s.95AA; QLD LG Act (2009) s.150D; WA LG Act (1995) s.5.103; SA LG Act (1999) s.63/s.110; Tas LG Act (1993) s.28T.

The result is that rather than attempt to diagnose and find means of addressing low rates of electoral participation at the local level (see Figure 3.1 for turnout figures in the three states where voting in council elections is not compulsory) such trends are wielded merely as evidence to justify not only the imposition of central government oversight (Newman, 2014: 106), but also to invalidate the democratic case against amalgamation (Western Australia Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel, 2012: 146).

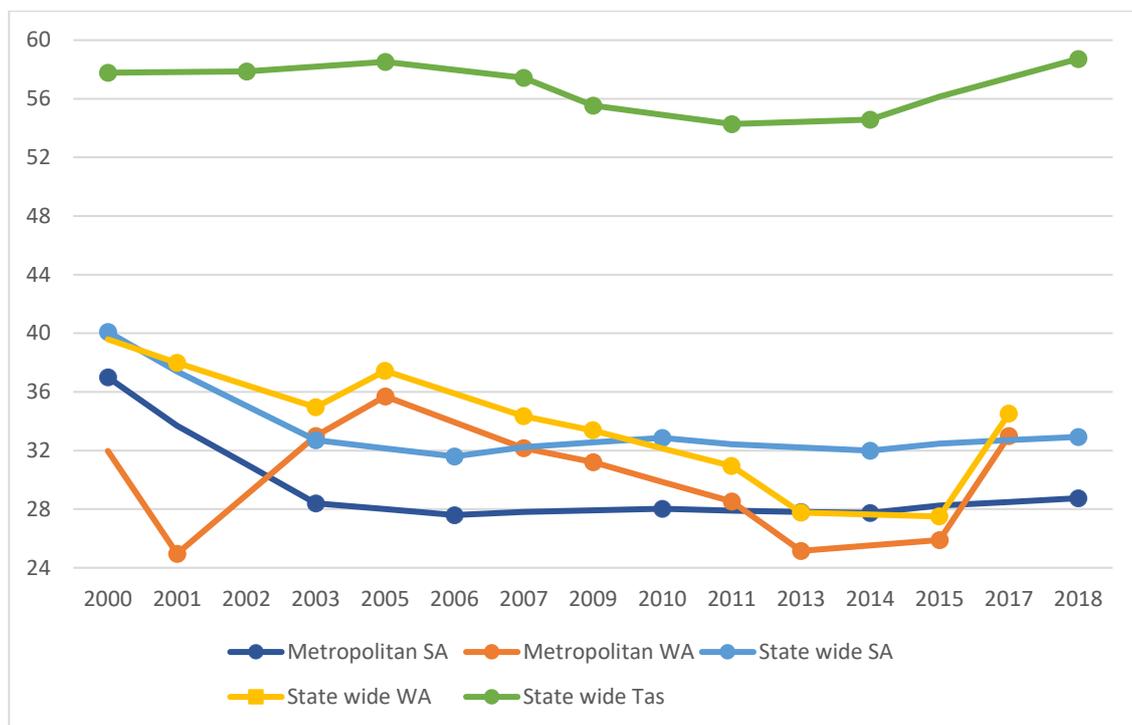


Figure 3.1. Local government voter turnout rate (%), SA, Tas and WA.

Note. Election years as per markers. WA turnout figures are for postal voting elections only. Data source: Electoral Commission of South Australia (2019a), Tasmanian Electoral Commission (2019a), Western Australian Electoral Commission (2019).

To the extent that local democracy is valued at all by proponents of amalgamation, it is valued in minimalist terms – terms which marginalise the role of participation in the democratic process. As noted in the previous chapter, minimalist democracy sees citizen participation as purely instrumental – a means of elite selection. With politics seen as “something best left to the professionals” (Stoker, 2006: 153), ideas of local democracy as a training ground for civic culture, a means of self-development, or a venue for local voice and choice are rarely seriously countenanced. As such, any decrease in participation that might result from amalgamation is regarded largely as inconsequential. Indeed, it may be beneficial, for if less participation means less partisanship and parochialism, local politicians and administrators will be set free to act more strategically and to distribute services in accordance with a more ‘objective’, needs-based approach.

When it comes to the participatory act of officeholding, however, the intentions of reformists are far from agnostic. Indeed, amalgamation has almost always entailed the explicit aim of reducing the overall number of councillor positions. As earlier noted, there is a prudential basis for this: i.e., to save money on councillor remuneration. However, the reduction in councillor numbers is also regarded by amalgamation proponents as a means of ensuring ‘better quality candidates’ are elected into local office, on the assumption that, with proportionally fewer seats available, there will be a larger pool of high calibre candidates competing for each seat (Mill, 1861; Rysavy and Bernard, 2013; Victorian Electoral Commission, 2017). The use of amalgamation as a mechanism for overcoming the amateur nature of “layman government” (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002: 51) was evident, for example, in the report of the Queensland Local Government Reform Commission (2007: 13), a key recommendation of which was to “reduce the number of councillors in Queensland from 1,250 to 526, a reduction of 724, to emphasise the need for stronger strategic leadership to local government in Queensland”. The NSW Local Government Review Panel felt similarly when it saw amalgamation as a means of ensuring “a pool of talented councillor candidates” (2013: 76).

Primarily as a result of amalgamation, together with concomitant legislated caps on the number of councillor seats per council (Hearfield and Dollery, 2009), there has indeed been a precipitous decline in the number of local councillor positions since the beginning of the 1990s. Numbers have fallen, for example, by 70% in the state of Victoria (from 2,196 to 647), by over half in Queensland (from 1,336 to 579) and by over a third in South Australia (from 1,102 to 689) and Tasmania (from 460 to 263)³³. The result has been the ballooning of the average representation ratio, which currently sits, nationally, at 5,202 citizens per representative. While this figure locates Australians among the least represented citizens in the developed world (Kiss, 2003; Wilson, 1998), it actually understates the dearth of representation (and indeed, the dearth of officeholding opportunities) for most residents of metropolitan Australia – particularly those who live in larger municipalities. As shown in Figure 3.2 – where each point on the graph represents one of Australia’s capital city metropolitan municipalities – not only does a municipality’s representation ratio (the number of enrolled electors per elected representative) increase linearly with population size, but it is quite common for a municipality’s representation ratio to exceed 10,000:1. The City of Brisbane – Australia’s most populous municipality at 1,184,752 residents (falling beyond the boundaries of the graph), has a representation ratio of 43,880:1.

³³ Data sourced from a combination of state electoral commission reports, local government association reports and the work of Kiss (2003). Precise dates are: 1993-2016 (Vic); 1991-2016 (QLD); 1991-2018 (SA); 1992-2018 (Tas).

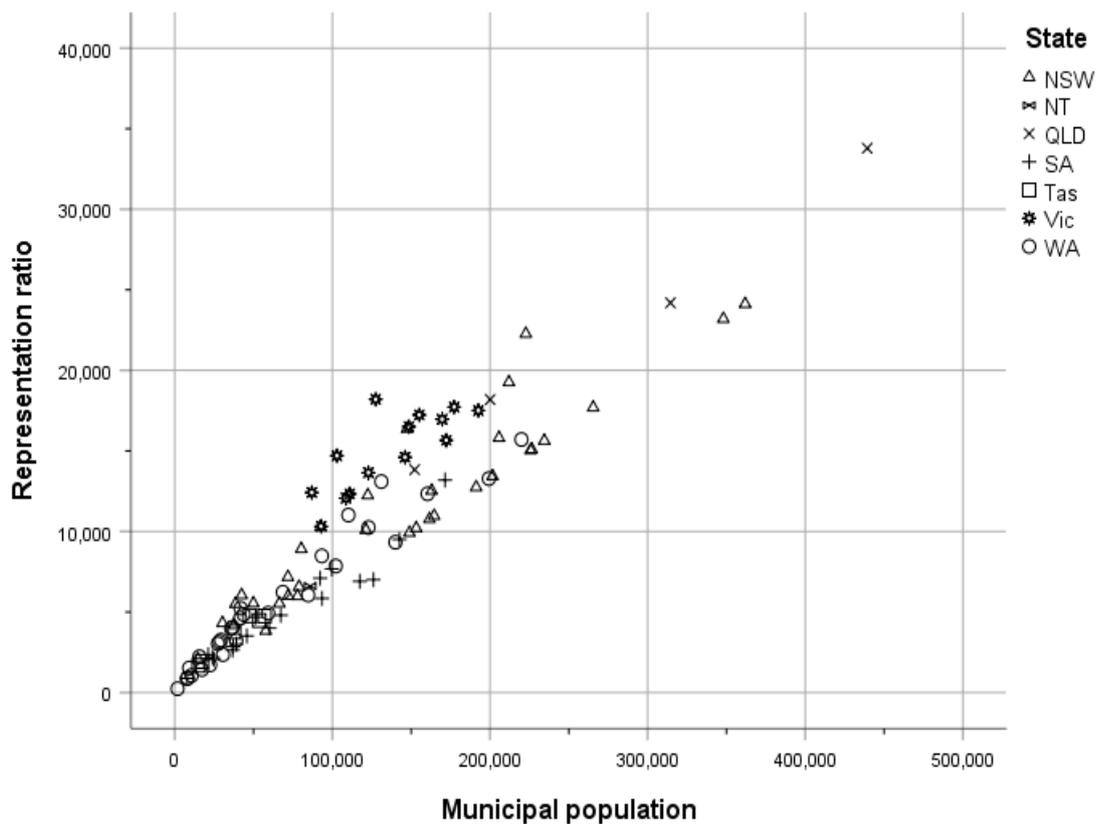


Figure 3.2. Representation ratio by municipality size in urban Australia.

Note. Data sourced from electoral reports and the ABS (2020c), and accurate as of the latest local government election in each state: 2018 (SA, Tas); 2017 (WA); 2016 (NSW, Vic, Qld).

With political representatives rendered less proximate and accessible to the citizenry, state governments have also legislated to re-cast the role of the councillor, in order to manage the expectations of citizens, and councillors themselves, about the nature of their representative function. Rather than act as parochial voices for their constituents, as per the archetypal ‘delegate’ model of representation, councillors are now expected to act as impartial overseers of council strategy and operations, as per the ‘corporate’ or ‘trustee’ model (Burdess and O’Toole, 2004). They are, in other words, expected to act as “company directors” (Kiss, 2003: 102) operating in the interests of the municipality as a whole (Burdess and O’Toole, 2004; Hearfield and Dollery, 2009; Monro, 2014; Tan et al., 2016).

Party-political drivers of amalgamation?

It is quite possible that the side-lining of democratic concerns may simply reflect a sincere conviction in the merits of minimalist democracy viz-a-viz participatory democracy. As Hay (2007) encourages us to consider, while governments may implement policies of *governmental depoliticisation* (and in this case, delocalisation), they generally do so with a genuine belief that it is the right thing to do. If, as Hay (2007) observes, neo-liberal ideology has internalised a public

choice theoretic conception of political actors as rationally self-serving, then municipal rationalisation can be interpreted merely as an earnest attempt to suppress the perceived self-interested, partisan and parochial inclinations of small-scale democracy.

Yet, there is also reason to posit a political motivation behind the impetus to push forward with amalgamation in the face of bitter public opposition and weak economic credentials (Abelson, 2016; Chen, 2002: 6; Grant and Drew, 2017: 33; Self, 1997; Soul and Dollery, 1999: 38; Vince, 1997). Self (1997: 299–300) notes, for example, that rather than creating more powerful councils able to stand up to central government, amalgamation may make it easier for central governments to impose their will. With “fewer local councils to deal with” (Self, 1997: 300), there are certainly fewer platforms for dissenting voices – particularly dissenting voices that can stake a claim to popular authority. Abelson (2016: 35) and Vince (1997: 153) make similar points when contending that amalgamation programmes are at least in part driven by governments’ desire to create ‘more malleable’ local institutions, through which state-based policies and programmes are able to be more effectively coordinated. Amalgamation may conceivably constrain dissent and render local government more malleable in two primary ways: first, by untangling the local government-community nexus and thus its claim to the popular/parochial support that is integral to its input legitimacy; and second, by creating the conditions favourable for major party incursion into local politics at the expense of periphery or non-aligned voices.

Local government has long been identified with ‘community’. Indeed, as Copus (2017: 1) emphasises, the reasonable assumption is that local government will be *local*, with local in this sense reasonably assumed to be “connected to, based in or reflective of, identifiable geographical communities of place”. Certainly, representative organisations for the Australian local government sector accept and promote the claim that local governments are “the voice of their communities” (ALGA 2012:3), with an important role as ‘advocates’ for the interests of their communities (Local Government Professionals SA, 2015; Romensky, 2017). This is a role, indeed, which Sharpe (1970) considers integral to local government’s normative justification, not least as it ensures residents a counterbalance to the lobby groups that represent industry and capital.

Yet, while the idea of ‘community’ has long proven to be both “vague and problematic” (Kiss, 2003: 107), it has become increasingly so over recent decades as governments have sought to inject dissonance into the received idea of community, muddying the concept and thus enabling it be recast for their own purposes. This is most clearly seen in the burgeoning use of the term ‘community of interest’. Kiss (2003: 109) identifies, for example, how the community of interest phraseology is used by amalgamation proponents in an attempt to leverage the traditional and

popular idea that local government is coterminous with 'community', while at the same time redefining the meaning of community to suit the argument for amalgamation. Such word craft is clearly seen in the following excerpt from the Western Australian Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel's report (2012: 102), which recommended large-scale amalgamation across Perth:

"Community of interest is not something that is unique to small-sized local governments. Communities of interest exist at different scales in a hierarchical, nested or overlapping manner. Some communities of interest are not geographical at all, and may be created by other common factors. The Panel's view is that communities in the Perth metropolitan area are more alike than they are different, and while the community of interest rationale should play some role in boundary determination, it is not an argument for retention of the local structure".

Using the 'community of interest' device, governments have sought to dispel any notion that local government should be identified with a single local geographic community. Communities of interest, as demarcated from on high, are invariably drawn to be larger than municipal boundaries – they are indeed "divided by council boundaries" (Western Australia Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel, 2012: 98), with the implication that such boundaries are hindrances to realising a wider community of interest³⁴. This view was shared by Queensland's commission (2007: 40–41), which sought actively to dispel any pretence that local government, in that state, should be coterminous with a geographic community:

"The Commission notes the passion and sense of place many Queenslanders feel for their particular community. However, the Commission has separated the issue of identification with a particular locality, from that of a broader regional community of interest... The Commission considers that identification with 'place' or area specific communities already exists within the current local government arrangements, and that changes to these boundaries will not extinguish the ability for communities to identify with the particular locality into the future" (Queensland Local Government Reform Commission, 2007: 41).

³⁴ This is in stark contrast to the findings of a citizen survey conducted during the 1970s in South Australia, which sought to discern how citizens perceived their community's extent in relation to their municipality (Robbins, 1978). Estimating the number of people in their community, almost half of respondents (n=286) cited numbers less than 5,000. Only 7% suggested figures over 20,000. At a time when local government areas were already much smaller than they are today, only just over a third of respondents thought their local government boundaries coincided with their conception of community. Robbins (1978: 84) stated, "In general terms then, the existing local authority population marks the highest acceptable level of community size, and for most people is too high".

For Copus et al. (2017: 168), such a reformulation and rescaling of the ‘community’ which local government is supposed to serve – certainly more *Gesellschaft* than *Gemeinschaft* – represents an attempt to sever any remnant feeling of local attachment, identity and parochialism, which can operate as a fount of “political opposition within localities” and thus a hurdle to government’s centralising ambitions. As Copus et al. (2017: 9) argue, “it is almost as though there is a deliberate policy to remove councils from place, people, culture, history, and traditions... as councils continue the journey to being simple providers or overseers of public services and not politically representative and governing institutions”. It is almost as though, in other words, amalgamation is an attempt not just to delocalise local government, but to expedite its depoliticisation.

In addition to constricting parochialism and dissent, the rescaling of local government may also benefit central government to the extent that it compromises the sector’s input legitimacy – which it may do if amalgamation has the effect of depressing rates of political participation. With low voter turnout, specifically, local government’s claim to have a popular mandate will inevitably suffer, leaving the sector constrained in its ambitions to bargain on behalf of its constituent communities (Kiss, 2003). For state governments who are keen to position themselves as the sole foci of popular authority, low rates of local participation may thus be salutary. The tentative nature of local government’s claim to popular authority is demonstrated explicitly in the words of the Victorian Minister for Planning and Local Government , speaking several years after amalgamations in that state:

“I am sometimes bemused when I meet with councillors who preface their comments by saying: ‘The community objects to this, or the community demands that’. What precisely are they referring to? At best, their legitimacy derives from that small part of Victoria which elects them... when it comes to ‘legitimacy’ to represent the community, there is no doubt that the State Parliament reflects more accurately the will of the Victorian community than do any number of councillors” (Maclellan, 1997, as cited in Kiss, 2003: 10).

Finally, besides voting, political incentives for amalgamation may also lie in the effect that it has on the composition of the elected council – specifically, by making it more difficult and costly for amateur, independent candidates to contest as candidates (Black, 1972; Conroy, 2011; Economou, 2010; Sanders, 2013). As Bogdanor (2006) observed prior to the English amalgamations of the 1970s, party politics tends to be more heavily present in larger municipalities – where the expertise and campaign resources of a party machine tend to prevail – compared to smaller ones – where it is more feasible for independent candidates to canvass support. While Australia has traditionally been devoid of party politics in local government

(Painter, 1974), if large municipalities result in political party domination of local politics – as has been evidenced in Brisbane, Australia’s largest municipality (Stockwell, 1995) and Auckland, New Zealand’s largest municipality (Webster et al., 2019) – then Grant and Drew’s (2017: 361) conjecture that amalgamation may be “an opportunity to gerrymander local government political representation” (or in other words, to control who is elected and what is said in local politics) may have sobering merit. Indeed, some evidence for this is discernible in the aforementioned survey of Ryan et al. (2015: 383), where it was found that respondents who voted for independents and minor parties felt they had more to lose as a result of amalgamation, in terms of levels of representation, compared with partisans of the major parties³⁵.

Conclusion

Providing context to the local government reforms of the past three decades, which resulted in a thirty-five percent decrease in the number of municipalities across Australia, this chapter commenced by examining the relative influence of centralist and localist political philosophies on the path-dependent development of Australian local government. While Australian local government has always been predominately conceived in the centralist mould, as an efficient instrumentality of the state, it was not until the closing decade of the twentieth century that concerted and systematic reform was pursued to align the institution more comprehensively with this conception. As detailed, the consolidation, or rationalisation, of Australia’s municipalities during this period occurred within a wider framework of reforms seeking to enhance the efficiency of the local government sector. In these reforms, relatively little regard was afforded to the democratic role of local government, nor to the potential implications that such delocalisation of local politics would have on democratic culture.

As noted, the principle of liberty and the value of a participatory democracy have been largely absent from the amalgamation debate. Even where concerns regarding the potential consequences for local democracy are acknowledged³⁶, they almost³⁷ invariably fail to have any

³⁵ To posit that political parties are self-interested in their pursuit of amalgamation is not to deny that political parties may also offer benefits to the democratic process. Asquith (2012), for example, highlights the role of political parties in strategy development, as well as in candidate selection and training. As will be explored in Chapter 5, it is also commonly contended that the campaigning efforts of political parties can serve to educate and mobilise electors.

³⁶ As when the NSW Local Government Review Panel (2013: 59), for example, accepted that it is “[p]recisely because local government is *local*, the quality of its political leadership and governance practices comes under close scrutiny from its constituents”.

³⁷ One exception is the first Tasmanian review board hesitating to recommend more extensive amalgamation because “the resulting structure would be unable to be seen to be local in nature” (Kiss, 2003: 107).

bearing upon calculations of optimal municipality size; they fail, in other words, to temper the recommendation for larger municipalities. Certainly, a normative commitment to minimalist democracy as well as underlying political motives may explain much of this lack of concern for amalgamation's democratic effects. However, one additional factor may also have a part to play: the dearth of empirical evidence.

As Pratchett (2004: 365) states, "centralisation is a natural tendency when there are no strong arguments being advanced to the contrary". Thus, it is important to observe that despite amalgamation being often characterised in scholarly literature as a trade-off between efficiency and democracy, there has been very little in the way of actual empirical evidence available to verify or interrogate this assumption.

As will be demonstrated in Part II, until the turn of the millennium, there was scant evidence available on the relationship between municipality size and political participation, and even less on the relationship between size and democratic attitudes. While the evidence-base has begun to accumulate, particularly internationally, gaps remain in the empirical broadsheet. This study is an attempt to address some of these gaps. To this end, the next two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, set about developing a conceptual framework for the purposes of examining a causal relationship between municipality size and citizens' sense of political alienation in the Australian context. The empirical study, including research methods and findings, is then presented in Part III.

PART II. Concepts, Theories and Hypotheses

Chapter 4. The nature of our discontent: concepts, causes and consequences of political alienation

“But notwithstanding the extension of the franchise and the expansion on individual rights and entitlements in recent decades, there is a widespread sense that, individually and collectively, our control over the forces that govern our lives is receding rather than increasing. This sense is deepened by what appear simultaneously as the power and the powerlessness of the nation-state”.

(Sandel, 1984: 92)

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Francis Fukuyama famously heralded the triumph of liberalism. For the author of ‘The End of History...’, the institutions of modernity – being the (largely utilitarian) forms of social and political order ushered in by the Enlightenment – herald the apogee of human civilisation. Writing at the outset of the 1990s, there was certainly a mood of confident, morally assertive, ascendancy for the (neo-) liberal order – not just internationally, but locally as well. For this was the decade when centralists would finally break the shackles of hesitancy, and launch resoundingly into their long aspired project of municipal consolidation. The end of history was not in doubt: it was large local government.

But in many respects, Fukuyama’s saccharine interpretation stands in lonely isolation. For, from the 1960s until today, a not insignificant ensemble of political scientists has been voicing anxious concern for the health of the democratic nation-state, and the civic culture and liberal institutions which undergird it. Part II of this thesis attempts to do two things. Starting with this chapter, Chapter 4, the concepts of political alienation and political participation are explored in order to gain greater insight into the nature and the consequences of the pathology that is said to be ailing Western democracies such as Australia. After précising of some of the most prominent contemporary explanations for political alienation, concrete definitions for these concepts (political alienation and political participation) are developed to enable their measurement in the context of Australian local government. In addition, the conceptual literature is drawn upon to theorise the expected relationships between attitudes and behaviours, their likely direction and intensity. The following chapter, Chapter 5, then explores the theoretical basis for the assumed relationship between political alienation and municipality size. That chapter continues by examining the extant empirical literature bearing on this relationship, in order to discern trends and identify gaps in the research. Finally, a conceptual framework, including research questions

and hypotheses – drawing upon the learnings of both chapters – is presented to guide the ensuing empirical investigation.

Explanations for political alienation

The concept of alienation can be traced most prominently to the ideas of Karl Marx, who contended that, in part as a function of the enclosure of the commons – and particularly the division of labour that fuelled the industrial revolution, workers had become commodified and objectified in a system of wage labour (Marx, 1959; Musto, 2010; Seeman, 1959). In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (which remained unpublished until 1932), Marx (1959) categorised four aspects of alienation in the capitalist system. In the first aspect, the worker is alienated from the products of their labour, insofar as their exertion (their essence, their “life”) is embodied in products which are systematically deprived and estranged from them (29). Second, the worker is alienated from the act of production, which “is not his own”, and is undertaken purely as a means to the end of survival (“it is”, in effect, “forced labor”), rather than for its intrinsic, self-affirming value (30). Third, by having their work and thus themselves relegated to a mere means, with no control over the object of their labours, workers are alienated from their ‘species-being’, or their essential nature as conscious, creative beings. And finally, Marx identified that, as a consequence of the foregoing, workers – commodified and atomised in a competitive labour market – will experience estrangement from one another (“estrangement of man from man”) (32). Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concept of alienation continued to occupy a central place in sociological thought, with Marx’s ideas adapted and extended into other social spheres. It was applied in the work of Weber, for example, in his observation of the increasing rationalisation and dehumanisation of social relations (in line with analogue processes in the economic realm), and by Durkheim, who wielded the notion of ‘*anomie*’ to describe the situation in which social norms and values that regulate individual behaviour and facilitate social cohesion have broken down (including as a result of the division of labour and the decline of religion) leaving individuals rudderless (Musto, 2010; Seeman, 1959).

By the middle of the twentieth century, the concept of alienation began to make its way into the lexicon of political science, as a growing cadre of scholars detected declining levels of citizen participation and engagement in public affairs, and rising levels of distrust and disillusionment with the political process (Mason et al., 1985). Many works have been published since this time which attempt to both chart the trend of citizen disenchantment (across various countries), and to explain the political object and origins of such sentiments. Central to most such diagnoses of

political alienation has been a concern with the diminishing role for citizen participation within the minimalist style of nation-state democracy – wherein public life is narrowed to “the soulless aggregation of interests” (Mansbridge, 1983: 301), and where “good citizenship requires simply choosing among competing teams of politicians at the ballot box, as one might choose among competing brands of toothpaste” (Putnam, 2000: 336).

Among contemporary democratic theorists, two dominant – though certainly not mutually exclusive – streams can be discerned to explain this purported “democratic malaise” (Wood and Flinders, 2014: 151). The first stream can be broadly stated as emphasising a disillusionment with the *content or process* of politics, while the second emphasises a sense of powerlessness attributed to the increasing *scale* of politics³⁸.

The focus on content and process has been perhaps most systematically and famously addressed in recent times through the separate works of Colin Hay and Pippa Norris. In his path-finding analysis connecting the processes of depoliticisation with alienation (or ‘anti-politics’) (Fawcett et al., 2017), Hay (2007) argues that the removal of much of the policy content from politics, and the elimination of any meaningful choice among political platforms and policy alternatives, has disincentivised citizens from engaging and participating in the democratic process. Driven, according to Hay (2007), by a public choice theoretic conception of political actors as self-serving and the public sector as inefficient, an increasingly large domain of decision making discretion has shifted out of the reach of politicians and into the sphere of the market and technocratic, non-political authorities “in a manner almost entirely inaccessible to public political scrutiny, contestation and debate” (Hay, 2007: 122). Hay also points to the minimalist mode of democracy, where the tendency for party policy platforms to converge towards the median voter – eliminating any meaningful policy differentiation – has disincentivised citizen engagement and led electors to “disengage in increasing numbers from the façade of electoral competition” (Hay, 2007: 122).

This concern with the alienating effect of minimalist democracy is shared by Norris. Via her ‘critical citizens thesis’, Norris (1999b) employs empirical evidence to suggest that the disengagement and alienation felt by an increasing number of citizens around the world represents less a repudiation of democratic ideals or a dearth of civic values/efficacy than a

³⁸ These themes by no means cover all extant explanations. For example, Putnam (2000), who believes that people’s interest in public and political affairs is fostered via involvement in associational life, attributes political disengagement to societal, economic and technological changes that have eroded the ties of community (2000: 284).

dissatisfaction with the performance of “the core institutions of representative government” (Norris, 1999a: 269). Norris argues that critical and discerning citizens are increasingly finding the existing representative and agonistic structures of representative government, as invented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “to be wanting as we approach the end of the millennium” (Norris, 1999b: 3). These citizens, according to Norris (1999b), desire to do politics differently. In her thesis, Norris thus enunciates many of the concerns held by ‘deliberative democrats’ and provides evidence to support their commitment to ‘democratic innovations’ – that is, novel mechanisms of citizen engagement that enable a more deliberative, reasoned and less adversarial approach to collective decision making.

Those who emphasise the role of scale as an explanation for political alienation – including those broadly adhering to the dual banners of participatory democracy and communitarianism – certainly would not deny the concerns with content and process³⁹. Indeed, these scholars remain heavily critical of minimalist democracy. Barber (1984: 24), for example, a leading voice for the cause of participatory democracy, laments democratic minimalism’s “politics of bargaining and exchange”. Barber notes that while the delegation of politics to professional representatives may have “purchased efficiency without sacrificing accountability”, “it did so at an enormous cost to participation and to citizenship” (1984: xiv). Yet it is not merely democratic minimalism that Barber eschews; it is the scale at which it is carried out. For him, “scale today imperils the [nation-] state” (Barber, 2013: 23). Similarly, Stoker echoes concern that the professionalisation of politics is turning citizens into passive, dissatisfied and cynical “observers of the decision making of others” (Stoker, 2006: 8), but hastens to add that citizens’ attitudes towards politics vary depending upon the governance scale in question, with more trusting and respectful attitudes felt in regard to local political actors compared to more “distant” politicians (Stoker, 2009: 84). Alienation, therefore, in Stoker’s (2006: 154) account, is related to the trend of delocalisation and the accumulated transfer of governmental roles and functions away from the localities and towards the centre, and away from “amateurs” and towards professionals. Where Hay (2007) suggests that depoliticisation has diminished the incentive to participate, Stoker (2006) adds that delocalisation has raised the costs and barriers of participation, with politics on a larger scale being more abstract, complicated, time-consuming, and ultimately less amenable to the lay citizenry.

³⁹ By contrast, many of those who focus on the content and process of politics, including deliberative democrats, are generally sceptical of the idea of localism, out of a concern with divisive parochialism, and a concern that local politics cannot address the wider cross-cutting issues of modern society (Macedo et al., 2005; Smith, 2009).

If all of these accounts express a manner of concern with the depoliticising and delocalising trend that appears to have infected liberal democracies, Macintyre (1981/2007), Sandel (1997), and the ‘communitarian’⁴⁰ theorists who have followed them, issue an even more fundamental rebuke of the very essence of modern liberalism. To Macintyre, the discontent of us moderns is that we live lives unguided by a *telos* – of the norms, roles, identities, and aspirations that are fostered when we see ourselves as part of a community. Whether social-liberal or neo-liberal, the ethic underpinning it is that of an atomistic individualism. Where the polis was conceived as a community in which citizens “in company pursue *the* human good”, the modern state, by contrast, provides merely “the arena in which each individual seeks his or her own private good” (Macintyre, 2007: 172 [italics in original]). As a result, for Sandel (1997: 2073), we feel “less and less in control of the forces that govern us”, and we harbour a distinct suspicion that “the moral fabric of community is unravelling around us”.

This situation can be linked to the “demise of the [civic] republican public philosophy and the rise of procedural liberalism” (Sandel, 1997: 2075), which is itself predicated upon the rational, value-neutral ethic of the Enlightenment. In particular, utilitarianism, as one of the most influential and consequential Enlightenment doctrines, “left its mark upon a variety of social roles and institutions” (Macintyre, 2007: 65). The mark it left on local government has been made clear – this was the overthrow of the kind of Parish community that Toulmin Smith fought to retain by the Benthamite institutions favoured by the rational and logical Chadwick. As Chapter 2 documented, “[t]he old world of the parish republic ended abruptly in the 1830s” (Goldie, 2001: 183). The consequences of this process linger to this day, embodied in the institutional role and structure of local government in Australia, not merely in terms of the erosion, and continued erosion of local autonomy (a process which can be encapsulated within Hay’s depoliticisation theory of alienation), but also in terms of the enlarged and delocalised municipal units which, despite their burgeoning size, nonetheless continue to bear the epitaph *local* government.

As noted in the thesis introduction, this study is situated most neatly within the second stream of studies, focussing on the link between alienation and scale – and in particular, the effect of municipality size. However, before proceeding to investigate the potential alienating consequences of municipality size – the theories, evidence, and hypotheses – it is first necessary to be more precise and deliberate about what exactly political alienation is and the specific

⁴⁰ While these philosophers are commonly considered under the umbrella of ‘communitarianism’, they do not self-identify as such (Bell, 2016; Dagger, 2004).

attitudes it encompasses. Without a clear, operative definition, the effect of size on 'alienation' cannot be meaningfully theorised or validly measured.

What does it mean to be politically alienated?

As Aberbach (1969: 86) states, "Alienation is both one of the most popular and vague concepts used by contemporary social scientists". While almost everyone, it seems, agrees that the democracies of the developed world are succumbing to the scourge of political alienation, there is less agreement on what exactly constitutes a politically alienated citizen. The headline figures for alienation are often participation rates; indeed, lack of participation and alienation are often considered synonymously (Hay, 2007; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). Certainly, non-participation is an important indicator of alienation, for, someone who (willingly) participates regularly through formal political modes can hardly be said to be alienated. On the other hand, the failure to participate does not necessarily entail alienation – the citizen may be content with the political status-quo (Gamson, 1968: 46), or they may choose to participate through non-conventional political modes (Norris, 1999b).

It is clear, then, that the attitudes – not just the behaviours – of non-participants need to be considered when diagnosing political alienation (Aberbach, 1969). But what attitudes constitute a sense of political alienation and how do these bear on behaviour? Many synonyms or qualifiers of the phrase 'political alienation' have been used by scholars in their attempts to convey the attitudes of non-participants. "Dissatisfaction" (Stoker, 2006: 8), for instance, or "disengagement" (Hay, 2007: 61; Stoker, 2006: 33), "disenchantment" (Hay, 2007: 1; Norris, 1999b: 5; Stoker, 2006: 33), "disaffection" (Stoker, 2006: 14), "disdain" (Hay, 2007: 1), "discontent" (Gamson, 1968: 39; Sandel, 1997: 2073), "estrangement" (Aberbach, 1969: 86; Citrin, 1977: 382; Finifter, 1970: 389), "cynicism" (Norris, 1999b: 5; Stoker, 2006: 14) "malaise" (Dahl, 1967: 967; Norris, 1999b: 5) and "angst" (Norris, 1999b: 5).

While such terms give a general sense of the pathology, if we are to analyse the causes and potential remedies of political alienation it is important to be precise and deliberate in the use of the term. As Finifter (1970: 391) argues, "it would seem imperative that future discussions of attitudinal support for political systems specify the sense in which 'support' or 'alienation' is being used...".

Defining political alienation

As Mason et al. (1985) recount, enquiries into the concept of political alienation have tracked along two complementary (though never fully harmonised) scholarly traditions. The first approach can be traced to Seeman's (1959) typology of (social) alienation, which drew together the various strains of sociological thought on the topic, including principally the Marxian concern with the alienated worker and Durkheim's concept of anomie (or normlessness). Seeman's typology was introduced to political scientists through the work of Finifter (1970), who expressed concern with the personal and systemic implications of rising levels of citizen discontent with politics. Drawing upon Seeman's (1959) typology, Finifter hypothesised four dimensions of *political* alienation – that is, those alienated attitudes which conceivably have a political-institutional referent/object – though after a factor analysis based on 26 survey items, only two dimensions were confirmed. The first, which Finifter (1970: 390) labelled as *powerlessness*, relates to “an individual's feeling that he [*sic*] cannot affect the actions of the government”. The second dimension of political alienation, which Finifter (1970) labelled as *perceived political normlessness*, taps a concern with the responsiveness and trustworthiness of the political system and actors therein. While Seeman and Finifter's approach to the dimensionalisation of alienation remains of interest for its systematic approach to the development of an empirical theory of political attitudes (Stoker and Evans, 2014; Yin and Lucas, 1973), it has not, on the whole, proven particularly influential in the empirical literature (Mason et al., 1985: 114).

The second – and more widely followed – approach to the study of political alienation developed from a concern about “authority, influence, and control” (Mason et al., 1985: 113), led by the work of Almond and Verba (1963), Easton (1965) and Gamson (1968). Mirroring the previous approach, which sought to identify the attitudinal indicators of poorly performing systems, this approach was interested in determining the political attitudes that lend legitimacy and “support” (Easton, 1965: 153) to well-functioning systems. At a time when democratic institutions were proliferating in new, independent nation-states, this tradition was interested in understanding (by analysing established democracies) how civic attitudes and behaviours develop, affect, and buttress these institutions. While not always admonishing the shift towards more elitist and minimalist forms of democracy (Almond and Verba, 1963), this line of research nonetheless stressed the value of incorporating – recapturing – civic republican ideas of the active and engaged citizen, at least insofar as a strong civic culture lends legitimacy to the political system. This strain of work identified, in particular, the concepts of subjective competence (or political efficacy) (Almond and Verba, 1963) and political trust/diffuse support (Easton, 1965; Gamson, 1968) as integral attitudinal indicators of a strong civic culture.

While the two traditions come at the enigma of alienation from different angles, each share in common a view that alienation is an attitude with both an inward and outward orientation (Mason et al., 1985; Yin and Lucas, 1973). The inward component, labelled as ‘powerlessness’ by Finifter (1970) and ‘subjective competence’ by Almond and Verba (1963), refers to people’s perception of their own competence or ability to influence political outcomes. The outward component – aligning to ‘normlessness’ in Finifter’s (1970) formulation – relates to perceptions of the responsiveness or trust of political systems and actors (Mason et al., 1985; Yin and Lucas, 1973). As Gamson (1968: 42) states, “Political alienation includes both an efficacy (or input) dimension and a trust (or output) dimension”⁴¹.

Influential though some of these early deductive attempts to define alienation have been, the contemporary approach to conceptualising and measuring political attitudes is less the result of theoretical examination than of empirical iteration – replication and reformulation, over time and across research communities. The source of most indicators and measures of political attitudes has been the American National Election Study (ANES), founded in 1952 by the University of Michigan (Campbell et al., 1954). As Mason et al. (1985: 114–115) observe, however, “most NES measures were developed prior to the publication of the major theoretical discussions of political alienation”. While items have been added over time, historical measures have often remained for the purpose of continuity, endowing them with continued legitimacy in the literature (Mason et al., 1985: 115). There has been a continuous effort among scholars to align ANES scales with theoretical constructs (both new and existing), parsing the component factors and evaluating their construct validity (Balch, 1974; Mason et al., 1985). To this end, the research community has been most successful in relation to the conceptualisation and measurement of the inward orientation of alienation, which is now widely accepted under the moniker of *internal political efficacy (IPE)* (Craig et al., 1990; Morrell, 2003; Niemi et al., 1991) – traditionally defined as:

- “beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics” (Niemi et al., 1991: 1407).

On the other hand, while much progress has been made in relation to the outward component of alienation, theory has not quite kept pace with the “ever increasing differentiation” (Denters and Geurts, 1993: 445) in concepts – from political trust and external political efficacy (EPE), to their derivatives cynicism and responsiveness. From a reading of the literature, it is evident that the distinction between these concepts is often subtle and blurred, depending heavily upon the

⁴¹ Yin and Lucas (1973: 330) similarly state: “There is growing evidence that political alienation has two separable dimensions: distrust of government and sense of political powerlessness”.

referent and the subject (Citrin, 1977; Denters and Geurts, 1993; Mason et al., 1985). Certainly, as both are indicators of one's perception of the outside political environment, both trust and EPE are conceptually very similar and correlate strongly (Balch, 1974; Craig et al., 1990; Esaiasson et al., 2015; Niemi et al., 1991; Pollock, 1983)⁴².

Nevertheless, a pivotal distinction between the two concepts has emerged. Specifically, as Craig and Maggiotto (1981), Craig et al. (1990) and Pollock (1983) contend, political trust relates to one's perception of the receptiveness of political actors to popular demands (incumbent responsiveness), while EPE relates to the perceived responsiveness of the political system (regime responsiveness) – including the “fairness of political procedures” (Craig et al., 1990: 306). More concisely, EPE has come to be defined as:

- “beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands” (Niemi et al., 1991: 1408).

Applying this distinction, it would appear that EPE is a more appropriate measure of political alienation than is trust, given, as Citrin et al. (1975: 4) contend, “political alienation... refers to a relatively enduring orientation rather than to transient feelings of dissatisfaction”. By contrast, trust's applicability as an indicator of alienation is less obvious. As Donovan et al. (2011: 168–169) remark, “Low trust and cynicism among a few people or among many people for a short period of time is to be expected and may even be healthy as a means of promoting change”. Empirically, EPE also appears to do a better job than trust in predicting whether someone participates (Aberbach, 1969; Balch, 1974; Craig, 1980; Niemi et al., 1991; Pollock, 1983; Southwell, 2008). Indeed, a lack of trust in political figures may be just as likely to incite participation “in order to oust the current administration” as it is to lead to apathetic resignation (Southwell, 2012: 73).

This paper, thus, applies a bi-dimensional approach to political alienation, defining it in terms of internal and external political efficacy. This is explicitly *political* alienation, rather than a more general, social alienation, encompassed, for example, in the idea of anomie, which may have a diffuse variety of causes. It is necessarily narrow, being a set of attitudes that require a specific referent (such as local government), such that changes in the referent (such as municipal amalgamation) may affect measurable changes in the attitudes. Further, it reflects both the inward and outward dimensions of alienation as theorised by scholars in both traditions of alienation theory. And, finally, as will be elaborated upon in the next chapter, application of these

⁴² Indeed, Citrin (1977: 391) has contended that “the apparent distinction between them appears to rest largely on differences in how they were operationally defined”.

concepts enables this study to sit within, and draw upon, the rich body of conceptual-empirical literature that has, over time, been dedicated to defining and measuring these specific attitudinal variables.

Implications of widespread political inefficacy – for the individual and for the system

While Chapter 2 was dedicated to a discussion of the normative value of local democracy and political engagement, writ large, it is necessary here – now that the concepts have been clarified – to consider more precisely the normative value of IPE and EPE as political attitudes. In particular, in order to determine whether and why these attitudes are worthy of being fostered among a democratic citizenry, it is necessary to specify the role that these attitudes play, at the individual and system level, in support of a democratic culture.

To this end, what should first be noted is the centrality of the concept of political efficacy to the theory of participatory democracy – both as a participatory determinant and as a psychological attribute that is integral to personal development. For participatory democrats, political efficacy – and in particular, IPE⁴³, is essential to the realisation of the empowered and competent citizen (Balch, 1974: 3); to “individual self-actualization” (Finkel, 1985: 892). According to Pateman (1970: 43), “the justification for a democratic system in the participatory theory of democracy rests primarily on the human results that accrue from the participatory process”. Seen in this manner, IPE is a close analogue of the more general trait of ‘self-efficacy’ – “an individual’s self-confidence in their own beliefs, knowledge, or experiences” (Oh and Lim, 2017: 5) – which has more recently become influential in the field of psychology/social cognitive theory (Beaumont, 2011; Oh and Lim, 2017: 5).

For participatory democrats, the effect of IPE on participation is reciprocal – IPE is required for participation, and participation in turn confers a greater sense of one’s capabilities in the political realm (Balch, 1974; Finkel, 1985, 1987; Pateman, 1970). As Pateman (2012: 10) insists, “individuals learn to participate by participating”. Participation confers more than just IPE, moreover – it also “has an integrative effect...[which] aids the acceptance of collective decisions” (Pateman, 1970: 43). In other words, participation can operate to bolster feelings of EPE (Balch,

⁴³ While participatory democrats have often utilised the unidimensional ‘political efficacy’ terminology, in the context in which it is applied, it is clear that it is utilised with the internal dimension in mind (Finkel, 1985: 892).

1974; Finkel, 1985), as participants gain an understanding of the political process and develop an appreciation or sense of empathy for the diverse demands placed upon it.

Yet, as was made clear in Part I, however, not everyone is a participatory democrat. To a large extent, the degree to which one will be concerned over low or falling levels of participation and political efficacy in a polity will depend upon the normative conception of democracy to which one subscribes. Indeed, as Citrin (1977) notes, a lack of political power or influence may not necessarily even present itself as a matter of concern to the politically inefficacious. Far from resenting their powerlessness, many who are politically inefficacious may instead believe that the average citizen should be kept far from the reins of power. In a minimalist democracy, Citrin (1977: 390) envisions, “the more people devalue the ability to comprehend or influence the political process, the less likely it should be that feelings of powerlessness will be combined with an unfavourable view of...government”.

Nevertheless, simply because some of those who experience powerlessness may not view their circumstance as personally bothersome does not mean that their powerlessness does not have adverse consequences for political outcomes and, indeed, for the democratic endeavour at large. Even in the minimalist conception of democracy, a democratic regime cannot be sustained on good will alone. Active participation – even if it is limited to the minimal act of voting – is necessary in order to generate political competition and provoke the threat of election loss – as Almond and Verba (1989: 139) acknowledge:

“...if government officials do not necessarily respond to active influence attempts, they are more likely to respond to them than to a passive citizenry that makes no demands. If the ordinary citizen, on the other hand, perceives that government policy is far outside his sphere of influence, he [*sic*] is unlikely to attempt to influence that policy, and government officials are unlikely to worry about the potential pressure that can be brought to bear on them”⁴⁴.

Almond and Verba’s (1989) point on influence is a crucial one in a discussion on the implications of alienation/inefficacy, because differentials in political efficacy are likely to manifest not merely in differentials in participation but in differentials in political influence. As Almond and Verba (1989) suggest above, and as Verba and Nie (1972) subsequently confirmed empirically, political representatives are more likely to be responsive to the concerns and the preferences of those

⁴⁴ As Vetter (2002: 5) states, similarly, “a politically competent citizenry forces the political actors to respond more directly to the interests of the people, even if no direct pressure is exerted on them”.

who participate than those who do not. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993: 241) state this clearly: “When many citizens write letters to congress, they are more representative of the population than when fewer people write. Likewise, when many citizens turn out to vote, they are more representative of the electorate than when fewer people vote”.

Yet, given the overwhelming evidence of the negative relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and political efficacy, and the implication that citizens of low SES status consequently participate less than more advantaged citizens (Campbell et al., 1954; Finifter and Abramson, 1975; Verba and Nie, 1972), further declines in turnout are likely to exacerbate not merely the differential in political efficacy (given the reciprocal importance of participation for fostering efficacy), but also the differential in influence. In this case, “there is a very real possibility that elected officials and the policies they enact will tend to serve only a small segment of the population” (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003: 646).

On the other hand, evidence suggests that efforts to bolster a citizenry’s sense of political efficacy have the potential to yield greater benefit for the least advantaged, thus overcoming some of the initial participation and influence differential. Campbell et al.’s (1954: 194) analysis, for example, found evidence to suggest that “the effect of differing levels of political efficacy [on participation] is not as great for the more socially advantaged citizenry as it is for the less socially advantaged”. Similar findings have been made by Finkel (1985: 906) and also by Pollock (1983: 406), who suggested that “for individuals who are already motivated to participate (by virtue of higher education), the level of external political efficacy is a less important mobilizing influence than for individuals with less prior motivation”. The implication of these findings is that while alienation (in the form of low IPE and EPE) may exacerbate socio-economic disparities in political influence, efforts to increase the citizenry’s feelings of political efficacy – whether in absolute terms, by bolstering individuals’ self-efficacy, or in relative terms, by reducing task complexity and institutional responsiveness – have the potential to reduce such disparities (Beaumont, 2011; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011).

As well as possessing the potency to achieve preferred outcomes, Almond and Verba stress that the politically efficacious citizen is “more likely to express adherence to the values associated with a democratic system” (1989: 206) and “is also likely to be the more satisfied and loyal citizen” (1989: 207). Such ‘diffuse support’ is important for a well-functioning democracy because it “forms a reservoir of favourable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effect of which they see as damaging to their wants”

(Easton, 1965: 273)⁴⁵. Without the acceptance – if not allegiance – “of a majority of its citizens” (Miller, 1974: 951), the success of, and satisfaction with, the products of government (i.e. output legitimacy) is likely to be compromised through both reduced elite responsiveness and a lack of multi-stakeholder cooperation in the delivery of collective goods. In such a climate, governments would find it increasingly difficult to “make binding political decisions”, or “commit resources to attain collective goals” (Miller, 1974: 971)⁴⁶. Where participation narrows to become the arena of only the most interested cohorts, politics will become more partisan, “more shrill” (Putnam, 2000: 342), and bipartisan agreement will be more difficult to achieve: “When most people skip the meeting”, Putnam (2000: 342) avers, “those who are left tend to be more extreme”. It is in this mood that Stoker (2006: 46) frets, “What could be severely damaging to democracy as a set of procedures for making collective decisions in society is if people perceive that the formal system of politics is no longer worth engaging with”.

Where political inequality and an erosion of system support may be an insidious consequence of sustained low levels of political efficacy, these implications are merely the early warning signs of what may come. The illness sets in when sustained low levels of political efficacy lead to hostility (Craig, 1980). The risk here is that where democracies have a weak civic culture, with low levels of collective political efficacy, they are liable to degenerate into less democratic forms of governance, or more abruptly, to succumb to populist, dictatorial leaders offering not simply to reform, but to subvert due-process and smash the status quo (Aberbach, 1969; Balch, 1974; Dahl, 2015; Norris, 1999a; Stoker, 2006). As Norris (1999a: 268) states, “a disillusioned public will not function as a check on authoritarianism”. Arguing that high levels of political efficacy are essential for democratic political regimes, Balch (1974: 2) finds, for example, that those who have internalised the norm of political efficacy are less likely to engage in regime-challenging acts and are “less likely to support demagogic (i.e., regime-challenging) leaders”.

Political efficacy as a participatory determinant

As an indicator of “enduring political values and attitudes”, political efficacy (Campbell et al., 1954: 187) – has become “one of the most important attitudinal dimensions of a democratic culture” (Vetter, 2002: 5), and “one of the most theoretically important and frequently used”

⁴⁵ It should be noted that where political efficacy is viewed solely as “a norm which supports a democratic political regime” (Balch, 1974), such as it may be in a minimalist democracy, there is the risk that a regime will seek to bolster the norm, such as by offering certain regulated avenues for participation, simply as a means to co-opt the public and forestall the build-up of regime-challenging sentiment (Balch, 1974: 3; Finkel, 1985: 893).

⁴⁶ See also Gamson (1968: 43).

indicators of general political attitudes (Niemi et al., 1991: 1407). For the reasons already outlined, political efficacy, and its internal/external dimensions, has long been utilised as a specific dimension or indicator of alienation (Aberbach, 1969; Dermody et al., 2010; Finifter, 1970; Macke, 1979; Mason et al., 1985; Southwell, 2012; Stoker and Evans, 2014; Yin and Lucas, 1973). It has also been used on its own as a key attitudinal variable in studies concerned with levels of political engagement at both the national and local level (Almond and Verba, 1963; Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Finifter and Abramson, 1975; Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz, 2016; Larsen, 2002; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011; Soul, 1999; Verba and Nie, 1972; Vetter, 2002).

However, when it comes to the relevance of political efficacy, “the main focus of inquiry”, as Balch (1974: 2) asserts, “has not been sense of political efficacy itself, but its ability to help explain variation in political participation”. Indeed, since its conceptualisation in the 1950s, political efficacy has come to be embraced across political science and related disciplines, as “one of the most important psychological determinants of political participation” (Vetter, 2002: 5). In short, a high sense of political efficacy “has been considered a prerequisite for widespread political participation” (Balch, 1974: 2).

Empirical studies have consistently found political efficacy to be positively related to participation, whether measured as a unidimensional construct (Campbell et al., 1954; Finifter, 1970) or separately, as IPE and EPE (Aberbach, 1969; Abramson and Aldrich, 1982; Finkel, 1985; Fox and Lawless, 2011; Niemi et al., 1991; Pollock, 1983). On balance, however⁴⁷, IPE has proven a stronger and more reliable predictor of participation than has EPE (Balch, 1974; Clarke and Acock, 1989; Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991; Oh and Lim, 2017; Southwell, 2012). Likely, this is because IPE reflects one’s own relatively stable personality traits – “thus it should not fluctuate markedly in reaction to ongoing political events”, whereas EPE “concerns perceptions of government responsiveness that should be quite sensitive to such events” (Clarke and Acock, 1989: 553).

IPE appears to lift one’s propensity to participate in any and all modes of participation, though the effect has been found to be strongest for “high-initiative political participation”, and of relatively less consequence for “low-initiative political participation” (Shingles, 1981: 81). Reichert (2018: 475) has found, similarly, that IPE is a stronger predictor of participation in modes that require greater forethought and commitment. The level of initiative that is required in undertaking a political act formed an important element of Verba and Nie’s (1972) model of the

⁴⁷ And subject to how the indicators are operationalised (measured) (Craig, 1980: 195).

socio-economic determinants of participation. In a hierarchy of task difficulty, Verba and Nie (1972: 52/87) regarded voting as requiring the least amount of initiative and thus IPE, and regarded citizen-initiated contacts of political representatives to be a high initiative activity requiring a high level of IPE, given the need to choose “the occasion to participate, as well as the subject matter and the official to contact” (1972: 52).

There is evidence, on the other hand, that the effect of EPE can invert depending upon the mode. In particular, it has been shown that while citizens with low EPE will generally abstain from ‘conventional’ political activity⁴⁸ (i.e. a positive relationship) (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982; Balch, 1974; Pollock, 1983), a low sense of EPE may actually lead to *increased* participation in unconventional activity (i.e. a negative relationship), such as support for, and propensity to engage in, protest behaviour. This idea originates in the work of Gamson (1968: 48)⁴⁹, and has been confirmed with evidence from Balch (1974), Pollock (1983), and Shingles (1981) – the rationale being that where citizens believe that change is not possible via conventional modes of politics, some may resort to unconventional options (Craig, 1980).

As Pollock (1983) notes, much of this work has utilised voting as the sole indicator of conventional activity. When considering conventional participation in a broader sense, however, to include a wider variety of formal acts, Pollock (1983) finds that even among conventional modes, levels of participation can be differentially related to EPE. Specifically, while in general, those with high levels of EPE will tend to participate more in all modes, there are instances when this positive relationship may be attenuated. Voting, being predicated on a belief that the system works and thus that voting matters, is typically an allegiant act; one will generally only bother to vote if they have high levels of EPE. On the other hand, some conventional modes – typically those in public view, such as in Pollock’s (1983) case, campaigning for a candidate or writing letters to the editor – also offer opportunities for dissent, which some low-EPE individuals may utilise to express dissatisfaction or to publicly air grievances. Thus, the relationship between EPE and such public forms of participation is likely to be more mixed.

⁴⁸ A study by Abramson and Aldrich (1982: 512), for example, has demonstrated that fully one-half of the decline in turnout in US Presidential elections (i.e. 5.6 percentage points of a total decline of 10.3 percentage points) during the years from 1960 to 1980 can be attributed to the decline in feelings of EPE among the electorate.

⁴⁹ While Gamson uses the ‘political trust’ terminology, Craig (1980: 192) emphasises that Gamson’s definition (encompassing ‘diffuse’, rather than ‘specific’ support) is actually closer to EPE.

Defining political participation

Given that political efficacy – IPE and EPE – is expected to have differential effects upon different modes of participation – it is important to specify what precisely is meant by ‘political participation’. Political participation is evidently not a unidimensional construct – as Norris (1999b) and Sharp (2012: 103) have stressed, low rates of participation in some modes may be accompanied by high rates of participation in other modes. Moreover, as participation is not unidimensional, nor should each mode be assumed to be normatively equivalent, for it is likely to be the case that the benefit that is conferred by participation, for the individual and for the system, may differ depending upon the mode. Indeed, while participation has been generally discussed in positive terms, widespread participation in some modes may actually be indicative of a poorly functioning democratic system.

As Hay (2007: 88) emphasises, overly restrictive conceptions of ‘the political’ may lead us “falsely to attribute apathy and disinterest to... nonparticipants”; while too wide a conception may “render almost all social interaction political, with the effect that worrying trends in levels of formal political participation may be overlooked” (Hay, 2007). Nevertheless, despite the evident importance of delineating modes of participation, political science has so far failed to settle upon a clear and consistent typology. Most commonly, there has been a tendency to focus on a more restrictive, ‘formal’ conception of political participation, setting it apart from informal, or associational involvement, commonly referred to as ‘civic’ participation (Putnam, 2000; Sharp, 2012; Stadelmann-Steffen and Freitag, 2011; Tavares and Carr, 2013). Yet, the application of these terms has lacked consistency, with the scope of acts that comprise these modes being left to each authors’ interpretation (Tavares and Carr, 2013). Oliver (2000) and Kelleher and Lowery (2004), for example, categorise the simple act of voting as, respectively, civic participation and political participation. Gendźwił and Swianiewicz (2016) classify contact between citizens and elected representatives as civic participation, despite this being an act closely associated with electoral politics. As Yang (2012: 448) observes, “the same term might mean different things among different authors”.

This lack of definitional clarity presents a problem for researchers because the determinants of participation in one mode may not hold for all other modes. Thankfully, recent work on the development of a typology of political participation has been progressing within the discipline of public administration, and prominently in the work of Yang (2012). Specifically, in a survey of the literature on citizen participation, Yang (2012) identifies three “relatively separate participatory terrains or arenas” (Yang, 2012: 450) – ‘electoral participation’, ‘administrative participation’ and

'civic participation'. According to this typology, electoral participation refers to involvement via 'traditional' modes, such as voting, running for/serving in public office, contacting elected officials, and campaigning for candidates⁵⁰. Administrative participation, on the other hand, is citizen participation in programme/service planning, development and implementation (Yang, 2012; Yang and Callahan, 2005), or, as Oh and Lim (2017: 4) define it, "the variety of government programs designed to input citizens' views into public service delivery or administrative management processes" (what in Australian parlance is generally referred to as (practitioner-led) 'community engagement' (Christensen and McQuestin, 2019)). Finally, civic participation is participation in voluntary organisations or associational activities – or, as defined by Nishishiba, Banyan and Morgan (2012: 48), "the relationship between citizens and voluntary associations in civic society as well as the relationship between voluntary associations and the legally constituted governing institutions".

In Yang's (2012) typology, 'electoral' is not intended in its colloquial, narrow sense to mean simply the act of voting or campaigning (as used by Frandsen (2002) and Rose (2002)). Instead, it is used broadly, to refer to all activities associated with electoral politics. On the other hand, while administrative participation is identified as conceptually distinct, an administrative conception, as Yang (2012: 450) states, "is not to argue that politics and administration can be separated; rather it is to separate electoral participation from nonelectoral participation". Whereas political scientists are generally cognisant of the distinction between civic and electoral participation, the introduction of the concept of administrative participation represents a fundamental advance for the discipline, given that "most studies in political science have not made a clear distinction between participation in administrative and political [electoral] systems" (Oh and Lim, 2017: 2).

In proposing these distinctions, Yang (2012) acknowledges that more work is needed to establish construct validity, including to determine whether they have a different set of antecedents and consequences (Yang, 2012: 450). As such, Yang (2012) does not provide an exhaustive definition or list of political acts that fall under each mode – acknowledging that "[m]uch is still to be done towards this end" (Yang, 2012: 450). Nonetheless, as it is, this typology appears to be particularly promising and well-suited to application in studies concerned with local democracy, where all three forms of participation are common in practice and thus need to be distinguished.

⁵⁰ The article from Yang and Callahan (2005) was also utilised for explication of the participatory acts underlying the three-mode typology.

This study focusses exclusively on the mode of ‘electoral participation’ and, in particular, the acts of:

- candidacy (nominating/standing for local election as councillor or mayor),
- contacting (citizen-initiated contacting of local elected representatives),
- meeting attendance (attendance of council meetings), and
- voting (in local elections).

The rationale for limiting the scope in such a manner is both methodological and normative. Methodologically, the focus on electoral participation has three bases. First, these particular acts are specifically and archetypically “local in orientation” (Oliver, 2000: 364)⁵¹. Second, because political efficacy is by definition (both in concept and measurement) experienced relative to formal governmental institutions, it cannot be theoretically supposed to influence civic participation. Third, unlike electoral forms of participation which are by nature similar across all municipalities (Oliver, 2000), rates of administrative participation are not readily comparable across jurisdictions because of their inconsistent application and inherently mutable character. Administrative participation is highly dependent upon the reach of the initiative, the skills of the consultant, the resources invested in the initiative, and the degree of authority delegated to the initiative – all factors which would inevitably confound any attempt to discern a size-effect. Certainly, while electoral participation is an “instantiation of a political right” (Hay, 2007: 72), guaranteed under constitutional law, administrative participation opportunities are offered at the incumbent’s pleasure (Pateman, 2012). As Andrews et al. (2019: 3) explain:

“Without the statutory framework that makes voting in one place very similar to voting in another, different local governments will attach different degrees of priority to [administrative] citizen engagement at the same time as they adopt different techniques or methods for its realization”.

The normative basis for the focus on electoral participation follows from this final point. Specifically, when comparing electoral with administrative participation, it is necessary to be aware that the discretionary nature of the latter has the potential to give rise to power asymmetries between citizen and government which are far less evident in electoral modes. While, for example, administrative engagement enables participants to contribute their views, it only rarely confers upon them the power to make decisions (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2012; Michels and Graaf, 2010; Sintomer et al., 2008). Moreover, when understood as a participatory

⁵¹ Despite also being acts of electoral participation, political party activity, including membership and campaign involvement, are not studied here, because party politics does not play a substantive role in local politics within the particular research context under study here.

opportunity offered by governments to citizens, it is clear that administrative participation takes place on the government's terms, and within the spaces and frameworks set out by the government⁵². As a result, administrative forums rarely offer a space for political contestation (Gerard, 2014). In converting political problems into mere "issues of administrative delivery and efficiency" (Jayasuriya and Rodan, 2007: 788), they countenance little opportunity for "a struggle over normative goals" (Rodan, 2009: 442). As Gerard (2014) insightfully posits, by constraining the opportunities for political contestation, through limiting participation to particular modes, those with power are able to entrench the status quo. Indeed, taking this line further, Cooke and Kothari (2004: 3) warn that "tyranny is both a real and potential consequence" of administrative forms of participation, "counter-intuitive and contrary to its rhetoric of empowerment though this may be".

To make these criticisms of administrative participation is by no means to suggest that efforts to increase the variety of opportunities for citizen engagement in administrative decision making should be abandoned. The positives of administrative participation are not disputed here; administrative participation can be both beneficial to policy outcomes – aligning policy more tightly with citizen preferences (Yang, 2012) – and may help to build civic competencies and political efficacy (Michels and Graaf, 2010; Oh and Lim, 2017). Certainly, citizen participation in policy development and administrative decision making will remain an integral element of good governance now and into the future (Kane and Bishop, 2002). Instead, the intended message is that administrative participation should be "a complement to, rather than a substitution for, more traditional representative political processes" (Stoker, 2006, p. 202). At the end of the day, it is the elected representatives who retain the reins of power, and who are ultimately responsible for final decisions (Kiss, 2003; Stoker, 2006). While some may view the prospect of increased administrative participation as a means of offsetting the decline that is occurring in traditional politics – indeed, some view this shift in patterns of participation as a salutary advance towards a more deliberative form of democracy (Dalton, 1999; Smith, 2009) – it remains that participation in traditional, electoral politics matters.

⁵² Even if the citizen consultation process is undertaken with the purest possible intent – which, in liberal democracies, it usually is (Kane and Bishop, 2002) – there is no guarantee that the participants will be representative of the wider community, or that they will participate on an equal footing (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Lundell et al., 2016; Yang and Callahan, 2005).

Conclusion

For over fifty years now, political scientists have been voicing anxious concern with the state of civic culture in democratic states. Growing levels of citizen disengagement, undergirded by feelings of malaise and discontent have led to an outpouring of scholarly work seeking to diagnose the problem, with popular accounts pointing either to disillusionment with the *content or process* of politics or to a sense of powerlessness attributed to the ever-increasing *scale* of politics.

This chapter has discussed how the political alienation terminology has come to be understood and conceptualised in political science. As a political attitude, it was noted that political alienation is generally conceived as having both an inward and outward orientation. Reflecting this, this study, applies a bi-dimensional approach to political alienation, conceptualising the inward orientation in terms of *internal political efficacy* – defined as “beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics” (Niemi et al., 1991: 1407) – and the outward orientation as *external political efficacy* – “beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands” (Niemi et al., 1991: 1408).

As emphasised in this chapter, a lack of political efficacy can have normative implications for democratic culture. As a political attitude, it is seen by some as integral to personal self-development and feelings of empowerment, while others emphasise the importance of high levels of political efficacy for regime support and a healthy commitment to democratic values. Political efficacy's role as a participatory determinant is seen, moreover, as perhaps its most consequential function, as an ability to participate effectively can endow individuals and groups of individuals with substantive influence over political decisions. Thus, while individuals with low levels of both IPE and EPE may have relatively less political power, efforts to bolster a sense of efficacy may also operate to bridge these power differentials.

To examine political efficacy's role as a participatory determinant, this chapter provided a precis of the empirical literature on the relationship between it and political participation. In so doing, it was found that while IPE and EPE are generally reported as being positively related with political participation, there is evidence that both IPE and EPE affect different acts of conventional participation differently, with IPE's positive effect stronger for more difficult acts of participation and EPE's stronger for more allegiant and private acts.

Within the literature, however, political participation has a very wide definitional scope. For both normative and methodological reasons, this study focusses exclusively on those acts

encompassed by Yang's (2012) definition of 'electoral participation'. Specifically, these are acts associated with local electoral politics, including candidacy (standing for local election), contacting local elected representatives, meeting attendance, and voting in local elections.

The conceptualisation of political alienation, political efficacy, and participation – as well as the discussion on inter-relationships – are drawn upon in the next chapter, which seeks to understand how municipality size is likely to bear upon these attitudes and behaviours. That chapter proceeds to hypothesise a conceptual framework which links municipality size with political participation via the mediating effect of IPE and EPE. The subsequent chapter, Chapter 6, then sets out the methods utilised in order to test this conceptual framework, including detailing how the concepts developed in this chapter are operationalised as measures for the purposes of empirical investigation.

Chapter 5. The powerlessness of the inhuman scale? The effect of municipality size on political alienation

“Now what is strangely missing from the discussion of the optimum size of cities is the voice of the political scientist. The question is, of course, broader than the problem of what size of city may be optimal for a democratic political life. But political life is not trivial. Surely political criteria have a place among the criteria for the optimum size of cities; and among these political criteria surely one of the most important is whether a city is beyond the threshold for widespread participation. The whole question needs more study than it has had”.

(Dahl, 1967: 967)

It has long been asserted that democracy thrives in smaller municipalities. Whether localist or centralist, from nineteenth century England to twenty-first century Australia, the general assumption has been that as municipality size increases, its participatory nature declines (Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Denters et al., 2014; Dollery, 2010; Robbins, 1978; Toulmin Smith, 1851). Yet, despite being a long-held axiom of political science, the assumed participatory primacy of smaller municipalities has been subject to surprisingly little scrutiny. By the turn of the twentieth century, there had been little systematic enquiry into the theoretical bases of the ‘small-is-beautiful’ assumption, while empirical studies into the effect of size on democracy remained “strikingly scarce” (Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011: 238).

Certainly, political science’s failure to interrogate the question of size has a normative explanation. As Dahl (1967: 953) insists, “a question of this sort often lies dormant for decades or even centuries, not because it has been solved but because it seems irrelevant”. The triumph of the nation-state, prefaced by the prevailing conviction that a minimalist democracy can be scaled up without bounds (Dahl, 1967), has until very recently seen the question of size treated as an irrelevancy – as a question “that history seems to have shoved into the attic” (Dahl, 1967: 953). This lack of attention has mellowed opposition – particularly scholarly opposition – to the policy of amalgamation on normative grounds, and has ensured that the crux of the debate is confined to its economic implications. Thus, while it may be an axiom that democracy, participation, and civic culture thrive in smaller places, under the democratic-minimalist orthodoxy the point is moot. In short, the participatory implications of size have been considered of little relevance because participation itself is considered of little relevance.

From the 1970s onwards, this orthodoxy was beginning to change. Set against a backdrop of the civil rights movement, women's movements and a "new concern with representativeness" (Schachter, 2012: 4), the normative role of local democracy found renewed interest among many democratic theorists. It was in this decade that Carol Pateman (1970) released her seminal work on 'participatory democracy'. Pateman's vision, which drew heavily upon a reading of the civic republican tradition of democracy, was about "democratizing democracy" (2012: 10). "[T]he argument", as Pateman (2012: 10) stressed,

"is about changes that will make our own social and political life more democratic, that will provide opportunities for individuals to participate in decision-making in their everyday lives as well as in the wider political system".

Pateman (1970) and subsequent writers of the participatory ilk (notably Barber, 1984; Gould, 1988; Mansbridge, 1983; Stoker, 2006), emphasised the importance of widespread participation in local settings as a corrective to minimalist democracy. Both Barber (2003: 152) and Stoker (2006: 154), for example, have advocated for a re-localisation of democracy, espousing the proximity, familiarity, and relative simplicity of the local level. Local politics, Barber (2013: 13) argues, "are persuasive rather than peremptory, and their governors are neighbors exercising responsibility rather than remote rulers wielding brute force". To this end, Barber (1984: 267) proposes a network of deliberative neighbourhood assemblies as the educative foundation for his 'strong democracy' – "the moment has come", he declares, "for cities...to rescue democracy again" (Barber, 2013: 23). For Stoker (2006: 177), a fundamental shift in the balance of governance is necessary, "one that allows more scope for local decision making and local communities", with power, functions and resources devolved "away from central control and towards front-line managers, local democratic structures, local institutions and local communities" (Evans et al., 2013: 21). Stoker (2006: 177) believes "that involving people in the hard, rationing choices of politics in a shared sense of citizenship can deliver a more mature and sustainable democracy". Stoker's case for a "new localism" (2006: 176) rests on the idea that effective governance requires a degree of "trust, empathy and social capital", which "top-down/government simply lacks the strengths of social relations to deliver".

However, despite this renewed interest the democratic potential of local government, the issue of size has remained curiously peripheral. The local-ness of local government has merely been assumed by most proponents of participatory democracy. Yet, in a context of ever-increasing municipality size, it remains necessary to ask: can a *not so local* local government still elicit an efficacious and participatory citizenry?

This chapter examines how this question has, until now, been answered by the theoretical and empirical literature. The chapter proceeds as follows. First, an examination of prominent empirical models of participation is undertaken to identify the individual-level factors which are thought to inform people's sense of political efficacy and drive them to participate in politics. Following this, consideration is afforded to how the political, institutional, and social contexts of small and large municipalities are likely to differ, and how these contextual differences are likely to bear upon people's participatory attitudes and behaviours. Then, the extant empirical evidence from Australia and abroad is explored, by way of a systematic review, to determine whether any discernible trends appear as to the relationship between municipality size, political efficacy, and political ('electoral') participation, and to identify any gaps in this research base. Finally, the chapter will conclude by setting out a conceptual framework that draws upon Chapter 4's explication of key concepts and inter-relationships, and the present chapter's review of theoretical and empirical literature, to posit hypotheses on the relationship between municipality size, political efficacy and political participation. By identifying the variables which need to be measured and the relationships which need to be analysed, the conceptual framework provides a path to answering the study's key research questions.

Municipality size and political alienation – from assumption to hypothesis

The question of what drives people to participate in politics is one of the most enigmatic of political science. Throughout the twentieth century, participation theorists have dedicated significant time to developing a range of empirically rigorous theoretical models of participation. Notably among these, the rational voter model (Downs, 1957), the resources model (Brady et al., 1995), the social capital thesis (Putnam, 2000), and the mobilisation model (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995), together with socio-psychological explanations, have significantly advanced our understanding of *why* (e.g. costs vs benefits), *who* (e.g. those with the requisite time, money, civic skills, social networks and interest) and *when* people participate (e.g. upon recruitment).

Despite their divergences, these prominent theories share a particular focus on individual-level determinants of participation – what Hay (2007) terms the 'demand side' of the participation equation. They help us, specifically, to comprehend the decision-making process that individuals carry out (consciously or subconsciously) when deciding whether to participate. The theories, for example, identify those personal attributes – "personal resources, interests, preferences, identifications, and beliefs" (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 5) – that inform one's ability and inclination (their 'demand') to participate.

But political attitudes and behaviour can never be set apart from context. One's sense of internal political efficacy (IPE) and external political efficacy (EPE), for example, are not fixed attributes; instead, they are experienced in relation to a particular institutional referent. For this reason, scholars such as Hay (2007), Oliver (2000) and Rose (2002) argue that demand-side theories are incomplete without also appreciating how the 'supply-side' of politics – including the structure, performance and receptiveness of political actors and institutions – bears upon people's abilities, inclinations and ultimately their 'demand' to participate. Thus, to understand the effect of municipality size on political efficacy and political participation, what is required, according to Oliver (2000: 362), is for "the individual determinants of participation... [to] be identified, and hypotheses... formulated on whether they differ between large and small places". This section, thus, will first address the individual determinants of participation, before then considering how these determinants are likely to differ among small and large municipalities.

Individual-level determinants of efficacy and participation

As Verba et al. (1995: 273), authors of one of the most influential empirical theories of political participation, themselves acknowledge, "[n]o explanation of political activity will ever be complete". Certainly, each of the participation models examined in this section, selected based on their prominence in the literature and their relevance to local politics, exhibit some degree of error in predictive power and some limitation in scope – with certain theories concentrating more intently on the question of who participates, while others are concerned more with the question of why and when. Such limitations are understandable of course – as Verba et al. (1995: 273) continue: "As with any attempt to explain human behavior, there are too many individual social [*sic*] and psychological characteristics, too many stimuli external to the individual, too many experiences, too many accidental events to permit us ever to explain fully the ways citizens take part in politics". Nevertheless, by considering insights from a range of theories, it is expected that a broad understanding of the various factors that inform political attitudes and behaviours can be attained.

Why do people participate?

Despite being perhaps the most fundamental question for participation theory, the *why* is in many ways the least well understood. The most influential approach to addressing this question has been through application of the Downsian (1957) rational voter model. Deriving from the neoclassical economic theory of rational choice, the rational voter model posits that political participation (principally voting) is an instrumental act, and that citizens engage in a rational decision-making process to determine whether and how they will participate politically

(Frandsen, 2002). A rational decision-making process involves weighing up the costs against the potential benefits of participation (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968).

Downs' (1957) model focusses strongly on costs, recognising two types – information-gathering costs and voting costs. Given that an individual's influence over the election, and therefore potential for affecting an outcome, is usually very low, both information-gathering and voting costs need to be low in order for a rational voter not to abstain (this explains, for example, why many people rely upon media and electoral campaigns to become informed) (Downs, 1957). On the benefits side of the ledger, participation may be driven by a consideration of the perceived importance of the issue at play, and therefore the level of benefit that would be derived from attaining that outcome, combined with an assessment of the likelihood of successfully affecting/influencing the outcome. As Abramson and Aldrich (1982: 511) state, “[f]rom a rational-choice perspective, one would expect that beliefs that the government is responsive [i.e. EPE] would increase the subjective utility of voting”.

Nevertheless, subsequent authors consider that Downs' (1957) model did not sufficiently appreciate the issue of incentives. Given that an individual's vote is only very rarely decisive, a central paradox of the model has become its defining epitaph: the theory struggles to explain why people even participate at all (Bendor et al., 2011; Hay, 2007; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Whiteley and Seyd, 2005). With the rational benefits of participating often being next to nil, they are outweighed by the costs of participating, even if the costs are low, as in relation to voting (Bendor et al., 2011). Worries about increasing alienation aside, clearly people do vote, and in relatively large numbers; indeed, people also clearly engage in forms of participation that are much higher in cost than voting.

There have been a number of attempts to improve upon the rational voter model's accuracy in predicting real-world outcomes. Among these is the work of Riker and Ordeshook (1968), who arrived at the solution of adding selective incentives into the voter's utility function to recognise a range of intrinsic benefits of participation⁵³ – thus rebalancing the cost-benefit equation. This approach to addressing the rational voter paradox, while influential, has its critics, as Bendor et al. (2011: 4) remark:

⁵³ Including “the satisfaction from compliance with the ethic of voting”; “the satisfaction from affirming allegiance with the voting system”; “the satisfaction from affirming a partisan preference”; “the satisfaction of affirming one's efficacy in the political system” (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968: 28)

“as both rational choice modelers and their critics... have noted, one can “explain” virtually any behavior if one can freely make ad hoc assumptions about agents’ utility functions. The victory—the purported solution to the anomaly—then seems hollow”⁵⁴

Bendor et al. (2011), by contrast, support Simon’s (1955) theory of bounded rationality as an alternative to the blunt neo-classical take on rational voting. Whereas rational choice theory assumes that actors are not only fully rational, but that they have almost absolute knowledge of their preferences and the available alternatives, together with an ability to calculate the most beneficial ordering of preferences, bounded rationality suggests that rational behaviour is moderated by one’s cognitive abilities and perceptions, knowledge, available information, and by the complexity of the decision (Simon, 1955, 1997). As Simon explains,

“Broadly stated, the task is to replace the global rationality of economic man with a kind of rational behaviour that is compatible with the access to information and the computational capacities that are actually possessed by organisms, including man, in the kinds of environments in which such organisms exist” (Simon, 1955: 99).

Bounded rationality introduces the concept of satisficing (as opposed to optimising), to denote that, devoid of complete information and perfect rationality, people utilise heuristics to decide upon a satisfactory choice (Simon, 1997). As Bendor et al. (2011: 18) explain, “[b]ecause most voters are political amateurs, hypothesising that they use adaptive heuristics such as satisficing is quite plausible... bounded rationality is a relation between a decision maker’s mental abilities and the complexity of the problem she or he faces”. In this manner, bounded rationality takes seriously the implications of task-complexity. Decisions to participate are influenced not simply by one’s sense of their own competency, but also by the complexity of the institutional context within which participation takes place, the mode of engagement and the objectives sought. One’s sense of IPE, in this view, is not a fixed value, but is instead evaluated relative to the specific task and context at hand. As Bendor et al. (2011: 18 italics in original) emphasise,

“bounded rationality is a *relation* between a decision maker’s mental abilities and the complexity of the problem she or he faces. It is *not* a claim about the brilliance or stupidity of human beings, independent of their task environments”.

It follows thus, as Bendor et al. (2011: 19) reason, that “[r]unning effective campaigns in large jurisdictions is a hard problem”. Indeed, as Dahl and Tufte (1973: 45) contend, in large

⁵⁴ Similarly, Brady et al. (1995: 290) state: “If the range of self-interested benefits is, as it must be, expanded to encompass such psychic benefits as the satisfaction of doing one’s civic duty, then the theory becomes much less potent”.

jurisdictions even voting can be rendered difficult, where “to determine his [*sic*] chances of making a significant impact on the outcome... even well-informed citizens must operate according to very rough assumptions”.

Who participates?

The work of Sidney Verba and colleagues has, in the half-century since the release of the seminal *Participation in America* (1972), been amongst the most influential and empirically rigorous explanations for why some people participate in politics and others do not. In particular, their work has sought to identify why those of high socio-economic status not only participate in greater number, but through this participation, exert an unequal degree of influence and power.

The ‘resources model’ reflects the team’s efforts to expand, and “move beyond” (Brady et al., 1995: 271) this classic SES model, by examining the resources that form the causal link between SES and participation, and identifying how these resources are differentially related both backward to SES and forward to various modes of participation (Brady et al., 1995). Positing that one’s available time, money, and set of civic skills has a preponderant effect on one’s predilection to participate, the resource model explains “not only why some individuals are more active and others less but also why certain kinds of people engage in particular kinds of political activity” (Brady et al., 1995: 271). The assumption is that surplus time and an adequate stock of civic skills are required in order for an individual to actively participate, while surplus money is required in order for an individual to donate (Brady et al., 1995).

Like the rational voter model, the resources model also focusses on the costs of participation, however, in this model the costs of participation are the resources – time, money, civic skills – that one can bring to bear. As different modes of participation benefit to varying degrees from each resource (for example, campaign volunteering requires time, but little money, whereas donating requires only money), the resources model adds a great deal of subtlety to the blunt rational voter cost-benefit calculus. As Verba et al. (1995: 284) state, “By moving beyond an exclusive focus on benefits and paying serious attention to the costs in the participation calculus, a resource explanation of participation makes rational actor theory more predictive of the amount and source of participation”.

The resources model focuses most strongly on the acquisition and application of civic skills, including those communications and organisational skills that facilitate effective participation. Beyond enabling effective use of time or money, a stock of civic skills confers the necessary degree of IPE that is required before someone will even venture to participate. As the authors

state, “[c]itizens who can speak or write well or who are comfortable organizing and taking part in meetings are likely to be more effective when they get involved in politics” (Brady et al., 1995: 273). The model emphasises that citizens attain their civic skills largely through their involvement in family, school, work, voluntary associations, and religious groups (Brady et al., 1995). It is, the authors posit, through these civic (non-political) channels that people develop their capacities and confidence at tasks such as meeting organisation, letter writing and public speaking – skills which in turn contribute to a higher sense of IPE in the political sphere. In emphasising the role of civic (non-political) participation to the development of a political culture, Verba and colleagues’ model shares strong similarities with Putnam’s (2000) social capital thesis. However, whereas the latter focusses upon the networks between people that foster shared civic norms, trust and reciprocity (social capital), Verba and colleagues focus on the human capital (skills) that such experiences endow (Rubenson, 2000).

Despite its merits, the resource model has been criticised as lacking a benefit/incentive-side explanation of participation (Rubenson, 2000; Whiteley and Seyd, 2005)⁵⁵, and for its failure to explain the long-run trend of alienation (Macedo et al., 2005; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Whiteley and Seyd, 2005). As Whiteley and Seyd (2005: 39) observe, “If socio-economic status is such an important determinant of political participation, then societies that are gradually becoming more middle class and better educated over time should experience increased rates of participation. However, there is no evidence of increased political participation in these countries”⁵⁶.

Perhaps a better explanation for the incentive-side of the participation equation are social psychological models of participation and citizenship, which as Stevenson et al. (2015: 1) state, “all share a concern in trying to understand citizenship from the perspective of the citizen; all conceptualise citizenship as an active and reflective process occurring between members of a community; and all highlight the irreducibly social and collective nature of the experience and practice of citizenship in everyday life”. In contrast with both the rational voter and the resources models, which focus most strongly on costs, the social psychological literature makes it clear that the process of participation endows the participator with considerable psychological benefits –

⁵⁵ While Rubenson (2000) and Whiteley & Seyd (2005) made these criticisms of the authors’ more holistic civic voluntarism model (of which the resources model forms a part), it was clear that the authors were focusing most specifically on the resources component of that model.

⁵⁶ To this line of argument, some might contend that the aggregate increase in levels of education has in fact operated to slow rising levels of alienation. Abramson and Aldrich (1982: 512) state, for example: “The main effect of rising educational levels has been to slow down both the decline of “external” efficacy and the decline of turnout”.

including a sense of citizenship and identity, a sense of meaning, and social capital – beyond indeed any substantive political benefit that might arise as a result of the participation (Stevenson et al., 2015).

Social psychological models focus on the effect that social and group norms have on citizens' political attitudes and behaviours (Whiteley and Seyd, 2005). For example, a strong sense of community, attachment and identity can increase cooperative participation towards achieving common goals, while on the other hand, stigmatisation of specific identities or communities can pose psychological barriers to participation (Frandsen, 2002; Stevenson et al., 2015). Attitudes towards authorities also affect participation. For example, citizens (and groups of citizens) are more willing to cooperate with authorities' engagement efforts if they have faith in the fairness and sincerity of the engagement process (i.e. high EPE), while on the other hand, negative perceptions of authorities (low EPE) will deter participation (Stevenson et al., 2015).

When do people participate?

Interest in the role of mobilisation in driving participation has its origins in the work of Verba and Nie (1972: 231), where the authors hypothesised that in the lively, urbanised environment of the city, citizens would be mobilised to participate through their daily interactions and communications. In their more recent work, the authors added to this idea by demonstrating that in addition to fostering participants' civic skills, civic organisations and associations also function as a site for political recruitment (Verba et al., 1995: 396)⁵⁷. As the authors (1995: 3) assert, “[t]hose who have both the motivation and the capacity to become active are more likely to do so if they are asked”.

Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) have taken these ideas further by exploring how political parties utilise social networks to mobilise support. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) contend that while resources and social-psychological factors are important for making participation possible, they do not make participation probable. As the authors state,

⁵⁷ Because those of high socio-economic status are more likely to have access to, and to join, such organisations, mobilisation is positively linked with SES and thus political inequality (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Whiteley and Seyd, 2005). Yet while this may be the case in actuality it need not be the case in perpetuity – as Verba and Nie (1972: 208) have found: “organizations remain an important ‘potential’ source for reducing the participation gap between the socially advantaged and disadvantaged. As our data show, the latter gain more in their political participation through organizations than do the more advantaged groups. If rates of membership among the disadvantaged were to increase, the net effect would be to reduce the political-participation disparity”.

“Political participation is the product of strategic interactions of citizens and leaders. Few people spontaneously take an active part in public affairs. Rather, they participate when politicians, political parties, interest groups and activists persuade them to get involved” (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 228).

Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) stress that political actors are strategic about when they time their mobilisation efforts, in order to coincide with occasions “when issues are salient, when distractions are few, when resolutions are imminent, when decisions are closely contested, and when decisions makers depend on the evaluations of the public” (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 36). With efficiency and penetration high in mind, political parties utilise social networks and associations as a means of widely and effectively spreading their messages. In so doing, political leaders are targeting those who are already predisposed to participate, and thus more likely to hear and heed their call to action (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 32).

Whereas other models of participation assume that citizens absorb the costs involved with becoming informed about politics and elections, Rosenstone and Hanson (1993) reason that citizens, being rationally ignorant (given the high costs and low incentives of isolated action), generally do not spontaneously initiate their own information gathering, but are instead informed and mobilised by political leaders, party officials and activists who have a vested interest in gaining supporters for their cause (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 21). Thus, the mobilisation model goes some way to addressing the rational voter paradox, by demonstrating how political mobilisation can substantially lower the actual costs of participating (1993: 27). In addition, being a member of a larger group as opposed to an isolated voice can also confer advantages on the benefit side, by enabling the participant to feel more confident that their efforts will be, in aggregate, politically effective (i.e. they will feel more politically efficacious) (1993: 32).

Despite the mobilisation model’s alluring ability to chart national turnout in line with mass movements (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993), it appears to be less able to explain why some people continue to take part in politics despite depoliticisation and despite not always being asked. In differentiating between citizens on the one hand and political actors on the other, the theory also seems to suffer from a chicken and egg problem. Specifically, because it views citizens as the objects of political actors, rather than as potential political actors themselves, it does not explain how the political actors themselves moved from once being mere citizens to becoming political actors. In short, who mobilised the mobilisers? As Whiteley and Seyd (2005: 51) contend, because of these and other shortfalls, “the mobilization model cannot provide a complete theory of participation”. Nonetheless, when the logic and insights of the mobilisation model are drawn

together with those of the resources model and the rational voter model, a rich, broadly comprehensive and empirically rigorous understanding of the individual-level determinants of political participation is revealed.

The effect of municipality size on efficacy and participation

How do the political, institutional, and social contexts of small and large municipalities differ, and what effects do these differences have on those individual-level factors that determine participatory attitudes and behaviours? Despite the age-old belief in the democratic advantage of small municipalities, deeper interrogation reveals a less than clear picture of the benefits of scale. As Denters et al. (2014: 12) note, there exists “a variety of theoretically plausible claims and counter-claims regarding the effect of size”. Within the literature, two opposing schools of thought have emerged on the municipality size–participation nexus. While *small-is-beautiful* and *large-is-lively*⁵⁸ are both premised on the idea that institutional context – and specifically, municipality size – has an important bearing upon participatory attitudes and behaviour, each side reaches “strikingly contradictory conclusions” (Oliver, 2000: 362) about how the different contexts of small and large municipalities should affect levels of political efficacy and, in turn, rates of political participation.

The *small-is-beautiful* school posits that citizens of small municipalities will feel a higher level of political efficacy and will consequently participate to a greater degree in local politics. In contrast, the *large-is-lively* school argues that participation should increase in line with population size, on the basis that the greater importance and scope of political matters will incite increased party-political mobilisation. Between these two contrasts lies the default position, that municipality size has no effect on participatory attitudes and behaviours, and that any perceived effect is rather the result of spurious factors, such as socio-economic status (Denters et al., 2014). Indeed, for some, size’s irrelevance is compounded by the diffusion of distance-levelling online communication technologies, including e-democracy (Saglie and Vabo, 2009).

Small-is-beautiful

Political efficacy plays a central role in small-is-beautiful arguments. *Small-is-beautiful* posits that municipality size will be negatively related to citizens’ sense of IPE and EPE, and that both forms of efficacy will be positively related to participation. That is, those in smaller municipalities will

⁵⁸ This division has been characterised in different ways – including Denters et al.’s (2014) ‘Lilliput’ and ‘Brobdingnag’ – however, I use the small-is-beautiful/large-is-lively nomenclature coined by Kelleher and Lowery (2004).

feel more efficacious and, as a result, will participate at higher rates than those in larger municipalities.

Despite the relatedness of the concepts, and the identical direction of the hypothesised relationships, the conceptual rationale for each form of efficacy's mediating influence is quite distinct. Compared with EPE, for example, IPE is much more inward-looking, concerned with one's own abilities. Certainly, as a personal resource fostered through education, IPE has long been acknowledged as an individual-level determinant of participation (Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba and Nie, 1972). All else being equal, those with a higher level of education and greater stock of civic skills are likely to feel more efficacious, and therefore to participate at greater rates (Brady et al., 1995; Finifter and Abramson, 1975).

Yet, as the very foundation of the small-is-beautiful position, proponents of small municipalities argue that all is not equal. Instead of being perceived in absolute terms, IPE is, by its nature, responsive to context – it is an attitude experienced relative to an institutional referent. Fundamentally, small-is-beautiful advocates contend that political issues in smaller municipalities will be more proximate, of more immediate concern, less abstract in scope, and thus more amenable to 'amateurs' (Allan, 2003; Kelleher and Lowery, 2009; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011)⁵⁹. The more limited range of issues up for discussion and the reduced issue complexity is thought to lower the resource costs of participation, enabling citizens at lower ends of the education and civic skill distribution to feel a greater sense of IPE than they otherwise might. This idea draws from the resource model of participation – which asserts that those with more time, money and civic skills participate at greater rates (Brady et al., 1995) – but adds to it the relativistic insight of bounded rationality, as Bendor et al. (2011: 19) state:

“Of course, all else equal, we expect a specialist to out-perform an amateur...But 'all else equal' includes problem difficulty. If the task facing a professional is much harder than that facing an amateur, the former might be just as cognitively constrained as the latter”.

The complexity of the political process is also thought to be lower in smaller municipalities, such that participation is less daunting and outcomes seemingly more achievable. For example, in a

⁵⁹ The cognitive limitations of humans when faced with abstract political issues actually forms a key part of Schumpeter's (1994) argument in favour of a minimal conception of democracy (and against participatory models of democracy). Nevertheless, Schumpeter (1994: 260) does still acknowledge the benefits of a smaller scale in this regard: “In the realm of public affairs there are sectors that are more within the reach of the citizen's mind than others. This is true, first, of local affairs... The manufacturer, grocer or workman need not step out of his world to have a rationally defensible view (that may of course be right or wrong) on street cleaning or town halls”.

tight-knit community, citizens are more likely to know who to contact, thus reducing knowledge acquisition costs (Heinisch et al., 2018), and enabling networks and pressure groups to form – and to gain influence – more easily (Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011; Verba and Nie, 1972). To explain this, Lassen and Serritzlew (2011) use the example of a citizen attempting to organise a protest movement:

“[O]rganizing protests among citizens affiliated with a certain municipal institution would be fairly easy in a small municipality and could quickly involve quite a large proportion of the electorate. Simple messages on specific problems concerning this particular institution are likely to be heard. However, such strategies would often be inadequate in a large municipality. Protests from users of one particular institution do not carry much weight, and, to be effective, citizens need to organize much broader, principled protests. This requires the citizen to be capable of formulating an abstract political problem... the political process may well be more complex and difficult for many citizens to understand in larger jurisdictions” (Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011: 244).

The example of protesting could well be applied to other, task-complex forms of participation. Bogdanor (2006), for example, makes the point that it is more difficult for independent candidates to build a profile and to canvass support in large councils. Bullock (1990: 542) agrees, stating, “Only in the smallest political units is it feasible for candidates to actually contact a significant share of the electorate in person”. By contrast, successful candidacy in larger municipalities⁶⁰ requires either large personal wealth (in order to fund an expensive mass-media advertising campaign) or the backing and resources of a political party (Bogdanor, 2006; Bullock, 1990).

While conceptually distinct, the arguments positing a negative relationship between size and EPE follow logically from those arguments above. Specifically, as citizens feel a greater ability to participate in, and influence local politics, they feel that the authorities will be more likely to respond to their participatory attempts. Scholars posit two lines of reasoning in this regard. First, with the weight of an individual’s vote and voice being greater in smaller municipalities, citizens will have and will feel a greater degree of influence over local affairs (Dagger, 1981; Dahl, 1967; Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Frandsen, 2002; Kelleher and Lowery, 2009; Morlan, 1984; Tavares and Carr, 2013). This, as Dahl and Tufte (1973: 43) explain, is perhaps the most often-cited assumption in favour of smaller municipalities: “the commonsense assumption of Rousseau and many other

⁶⁰ Bogdanor (2006) finds that the cut-off point beyond which independent representatives are generally overcome by party representatives is a ward (constituency) size of approximately 3,000 persons.

advocates of smallness argues that as the number of citizens increases, any particular citizen's share in power, influence, or decision making necessarily declines".

While some proponents of small-is-beautiful offer a Downsian (Downs, 1957) calculation of objective influence (Carr and Tavares, 2014; Rodrigues and Meza, 2018)⁶¹, scholars also emphasise the subjective, bounded nature of this judgement; citizens don't calculate their influence, they satisfice based on their subjective sense of political efficacy, which itself is an intuition of the true situation – as Dagger (1981: 722–723) explains:

"As the population of a city grows, then, its inhabitants often come to feel, and perhaps to be, more and more remote from its political life. This is true in a mathematical as well as a psychological sense. Everyone in metropolis knows that he or she is only one among hundreds of thousands, or even millions, and it is difficult, in light of this knowledge, to attach much significance to one's participation in civic affairs. This consideration apparently discourages people from engaging in even the less demanding varieties of political action, such as voting".

A second line of reasoning concentrates on the expectation that governance and administration in smaller municipalities will be more transparent, agile and responsive (Allan, 2003; Denters et al., 2014). Denters et al. (2014: 18), for example, note that the denser organisational structures of larger municipalities can generate the perception that public officials are less responsive to citizen demands – "with respect to the capacity and willingness of local government personnel to heed public demands, the political economy approach argues that increasing the scale of government necessarily implies a growing reliance on hierarchy and bureaucratic organizational structures". By contrast, as Allan (2003) argues, smaller councils allow better access to elected councillors and senior administrators, as smaller councils have flatter, less hierarchical bureaucracies that can respond more nimbly to resident concerns: "The smaller the council the more control and hence responsibility citizens feel for its operations" (Allan, 2003, p. 80)⁶².

Large-is-lively

As earlier mentioned, the arguments of the small-is-beautiful school, while perhaps the most prominent within academic, popular, and even political lore (despite, of course, rarely being

⁶¹ This view is consistent with Olsen's (1965) insight that the free-rider problem would be less acute in smaller groups, as there is a higher possibility that benefits to that individual would exceed the costs of participating.

⁶² On the other hand, others argue that bureaucracy offers increased efficiency and effectiveness, as well as a higher degree of specialisation and professionalisation in the workforce, potentially instilling confidence in the rate paying citizenry (Denters et al., 2014).

heeded in practice), have not gone uncontested. Indeed, a competing set of arguments, combined here under the *large-is-lively* nomenclature, raises the possibility that size may actually have an opposite (positive) effect upon political efficacy and thus participation. In contrast with the *small-is-beautiful* arguments, *large-is-lively* downplays the role of issue and process complexity, instead invoking the mobilisation model of participation to argue that politics in larger municipalities will be, in a word, livelier.

Two assumptions underpin the position that participation will be higher in larger municipalities. First, the wider scope of responsibilities and the more significant policy matters dealt with in larger municipalities are said to better align with the fundamental political concerns and interests of most citizens (Denters et al., 2014; Kelleher and Lowery, 2004; Morlan, 1984; Newton, 1976). As Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz (2016: 762) explain, “since larger local governments have the capacity to deliver more functions, which are crucial for the everyday life of citizens, the level of interest in local politics may be higher in larger jurisdictions”. Second, as size increases, and as the citizenry becomes more heterogenous, social and political cleavages deepen, thus amplifying policy contention (Kelleher and Lowery, 2004; Oliver, 1999). This, it is often argued, is manifested in a greater number of candidates contesting each election, providing greater choice for voters and ensuring a competitive electoral marketplace (Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz, 2016; Rysavy and Bernard, 2013). By contrast, as Dahl and Tufte (1973: 44) suggest, “the smaller it is, the more politically one-sided or homogenous it is likely to be”. Taken together, the increased importance of the political issues and the greater diversity of political preferences should generate higher levels of interest and competition in local politics.

The supposition that participation would be higher in such a context is supported on two theoretical bases. First, according to Downsian (1957) logic, it is more rational to vote where the outcome (benefit) is perceived to be of greater importance, and, likewise, it is more rational to vote in more competitive, closely fought elections – because when a political contest is close, an individual can more reasonably expect to influence that outcome (Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Hay, 2007). By contrast, small municipalities leave citizens with “little reason to become politically engaged” (Kelleher and Lowery, 2004: 726), whether because the issues at stake are not sufficiently important to act as an incentive for participation, because their homogenous parochial policy interests enjoy consensus and are already protected by their entrenched representatives (Kelleher and Lowery, 2004), or because their parochial interests are in such a minority that participation is unlikely to be effective (Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz, 2016; Oliver, 1999).

In addition to the rational voter model, large-is-lively assumptions are also supported by the mobilisation model of participation, on the basis that as the stakes of the political game increase, the incentive for political actors to mobilise supporters also increases (Kelleher and Lowery, 2004; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). Dahl and Tufte (1973) and Morlan (1984) emphasise, for example, that the increased involvement of political parties in larger municipalities leads to campaign-driven mobilisation of voters – a factor that plays a much less prominent role in small municipalities, which generally lack the same level of interest from political parties (Newton, 1976). The activities of a campaign machine, together with a higher level of media coverage, is expected to lower information transaction costs for the voting public, building both their interest in the political contest and their understanding of the political issues (Heinisch et al., 2018). It has also been contended that larger municipalities will have a greater number and diversity of social and political organisations, which should increase opportunities for citizens to be included in networks of recruitment (Denters et al., 2014; Newton, 1976)⁶³.

While large-is-lively affords less prominence to task complexity, political efficacy may still play an important role in mediating the positive size-participation relationship. With regard to IPE, the greater flow of information generated around political issues, and the support that comes with political mobilisation, should ensure that citizens feel more informed and competent in their attempts to participate⁶⁴. With regard to EPE, more closely fought elections may lead citizens to feel that the political process will be more responsive to their attempts to participate, while the greater scope of issues dealt with by the council chamber should enable the delivery of policy and services that are more responsive to citizens' expectations. EPE may also be enhanced where citizens see themselves, and gauge their influence, as a member of a larger political movement rather than as an isolated individual.

Empirical evidence on the effect of municipality size

The arguments of the small-is-beautiful and large-is-lively camps provide a wealth of plausible and theoretically-informed assumptions as to the likely effect of size on political efficacy and participation. Yet, rather than enlighten us as to the effect of size, the various claims and counterclaims demonstrate that size's effect may be transmitted via a complex array of

⁶³ This assumption is countered by small-is-beautiful proponents, who instead believe that the heterogeneity of larger municipalities should be detrimental for participation as it dissolves the social-psychological bonds that foster civic norms in smaller municipalities (Mansbridge, 1983; Oliver, 2000).

⁶⁴ As evidence of the potential for group-solidarity/support to raise levels of IPE, Shingles (1981: 84) finds that poor Black populations have a substantially higher sense of IPE than poor white populations, and that 'Black consciousness' accounts for all of this difference.

mechanisms, each potentially influencing political attitudes and behaviours in countervailing ways. “Where theory leaves us completely stranded”, Dahl and Tufte (1973: 44) once averred, “we can be rescued only by data”. This section examines the extant empirical evidence bearing on the relationship between municipality size and political efficacy/political participation. The findings assist in the formulation of hypotheses for the present study and enable the identification of empirical gaps which this study could seek to address.

To examine how extant empirical evidence bears upon the relationship between municipality size, political efficacy and participation, a two-part systematic literature review has been undertaken, compiling evidence on the effect of municipality size on political efficacy, and on the effect municipality size on various forms of local political participation. A detailed table of findings is provided in Appendix 5.1, which notes the geographic context of each study, variables/measures employed, direction of any relationship found, and an overview of the data collection and statistical methodologies utilised. Most studies conducted forms of regression analysis on cross-sectional data to explore the relationship between the independent (municipality size) and dependent variables at a point in time. Several studies, by contrast, employed a quasi-experimental approach analysing data obtained before and after amalgamation to examine the relative effects of a change in population size, comparing this with a non-merged control group. Finally, a number of studies are included which used descriptive (rather than inferential) statistics to discern bi-variate trends.

Systematic review procedure

Three databases – Web of Science, EBSCO Political Science Complete and Google Scholar – were scanned for publications that provide empirical findings on the relationship between municipality size and political efficacy and municipality size and political participation. The literature search was conducted in May 2018. In constructing the search parameters and inclusion criteria, it was essential to ensure that the variables utilised in each study were comparable. This task was relatively straight-forward for the independent variable, ‘municipality population size’⁶⁵. Defining the dependent variables required a little more consideration.

In relation to political efficacy, it was necessary to ensure that the systematic review identified measures in a consistent manner. For this purpose, Niemi et al.’s (1991) scales for IPE and EPE

⁶⁵ This was applied broadly to include sub-national tiers of governance at the local level. Two articles (Finifter and Abramson, 1975; Vetter, 2002), which appeared in the database searches, were excluded from this review as their independent variables related to community size/type, rather than municipality size.

were used as a reference point (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). Where measures deviated from these scales, I classified them as ‘IPE’ or ‘EPE’ on face validity. Given that some papers focussing on trust or responsiveness may also measure EPE, ‘trust’ and ‘responsiveness’ were included in the search parameters – however such articles were only included in the systematic review where the measure was explicitly related to regime responsiveness, and where the responsiveness measure was reported on independently (i.e., not part of a trust index).

Table 5.1. Niemi, Craig and Mattei’s (1991) IPE scale

- Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. (COMPLEX)
 - I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country. (UNDERSTAND)
 - I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics. (SELFQUAL)
 - I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people. (PUBOFF)
 - I think that I am as well-informed about politics and government as most people. (INFORMED)
-

Table 5.2. Niemi, Craig and Mattei’s (1991) EPE scale

- People like me don't have any say about what the government does (NOSAY)
 - I don't think public officials care much what people like me think (NOCARE)
 - How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think? (ELECRESP)
 - Over the years, how much attention do you feel the government pays to what the people think when it decides what to do? (GOVRESP)
-

To identify (English-language) studies bearing on the size-political efficacy relationship, a combination of the following terms was used in the title-word search for Web of Science and Political Science Complete: local, city, municipal(ity), size, small, large, consolidation, amalgamation, political, efficacy, competence, responsiveness, trust. The search string for Google Scholar, searching within documents, was constructed of targeted phrases: local government size, municipality size, municipal mergers, local government amalgamation, political efficacy, political competence, political trust. After reviewing the 352 search results, nine publications were considered to have satisfied the inclusion criteria. These nine publications reported findings for 21 separate ‘tests’⁶⁶ of the municipality size–political efficacy relationship.

⁶⁶ Following from van Houwelingen (2017) and Cancelli and Geys (2016: 265): “A *study* (article, working paper, chapter, or book) will often include more than one coefficient estimate for the same variable, due to the use of distinct model specifications or samples. Each reported coefficient estimate for a given variable of interest is referred to as a *test*” [italics in original].

In relation to political participation, the scope of activity was determined to be limited to those participatory acts which would fall broadly within Yang's (2012) definition of electoral participation – i.e. acts associated with electoral politics. The literature search was exploratory in the sense that specific acts within this rubric were not explicitly defined (beyond voting) – this enables the review to identify the types of activities most commonly studied and those that have been comparatively neglected. The review does, however, explicitly exclude acts that would fall under the rubric of civic and administrative participation (e.g., club membership, volunteering and involvement in community consultation exercises) for reasons noted in the previous chapter⁶⁷.

A combination of the following words was used in the title word search for Web of Science and Political Science Complete: local, city, municipal(ity), size, small, large, consolidation, amalgamation, participation, turnout, elect(ion), democracy. Google Scholar searches included the following terms: voter turnout, political participation, size of local government, municipality size, municipal mergers. With the initial search returning no studies concerning the effect of size on candidacy, a follow-up search was performed through Web of Science, specifically adding the terms candidate and candidacy (this returned a single relevant article⁶⁸). In addition to the database searches, several studies containing evidence of the municipality size-political participation relationship were included by way of a snowball technique⁶⁹. In all, the literature search delivered 24 relevant studies, reporting on 69 separate tests of the municipality size-political (electoral) participation relationship.

Summary findings

Despite Dahl's (1967) appeal for increased efforts on the part of political scientists to furnish evidence on the question of municipality size, by the end of the century little progress had been made (Denters et al., 2014: 6; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011: 238). Over the past two decades since, however, much has changed. Inspired by Oliver's (2000) seminal article which furnished evidence in favour of small municipalities, and more recently by the collaborative efforts of the European Size and Democracy Project (Denters et al., 2014; Goldsmith and Rose, 2002), there has been a

⁶⁷ Contacting non-elected local officials (e.g. civic servants) would reasonably be classified as 'administrative participation'; however, because the subject of the contact was not precisely specified in many studies, contact between both elected and non-elected officials is included in the systematic review.

⁶⁸ Voda et al. (2017).

⁶⁹ Adding Abelson (1981) and Robbins (1978), as well as four articles identified in van Houwelingen's (2017) meta-analysis (Caren, 2007; Holbrook and Weinschenk, 2014; Kelleher and Lowery, 2004; Kesselman, 1966).

remarkable growth in empirical literature. All but one of the political efficacy studies, and all but four of the participation studies are from this century.

In marked contrast to the highly contested theoretical debate, the results from these empirical studies appear, overwhelmingly, to suggest that citizens of smaller municipalities feel a greater sense of IPE and EPE, and that they participate to a greater extent in municipal politics than do citizens of larger municipalities.

As presented in Table 5.3, the systematic review for size and political efficacy returned nine studies, reporting on 21 separate tests of the municipality size-political efficacy relationship. Across the 21 tests, 19 are negative and statistically significant; the remaining two are non-significant findings. The relationship between municipality size and 'electoral' participation was considered in a total of 24 studies, comprising 69 separate tests in relation to five participatory acts: voting, candidacy, contacting, meeting attendance, and party involvement. The result here is also overwhelmingly in favour of small-is-beautiful: fifty-two out of the 69 tests show a negative relationship between municipality size and participation. When considering only those tests where the level of statistical significance was provided, 28 are negative and significant, while 14 are non-significant. No statistically significant positive relationships were found.

A number of findings were also derived from studies that did not utilise inferential statistics. These results also indicate a general tendency for participation to decline as municipal population increases: 24 showed a negative relationship, two suggested the absence of a relationship, and only one indicated a marginally positive relationship. However, while these studies add insight from a broader range of contexts, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as they only consider a bivariate relationship (do not control for confounding variables), and do not test for statistical significance.

Table 5.3. Systematic literature review, summary findings

Dependent variable	Negative	Positive	Non-significant/ No relationship
Internal political efficacy	6	-	-
External political efficacy	13	-	2
Political efficacy total	19	-	2
Voting in municipal elections	27	1	10
Candidacy	1		
Contacting – local elected officials	7	-	1
Contacting – local civil servants	4	-	-
Contacting – unspecified	5	-	1
Meeting/assembly attendance	4	-	3
Political party involvement	3	-	1
Other (index of meeting and contacting)	1	-	-
Participation total	52 ^a	1 ^b	16 ^c

^aIncludes 24 results without a significance test.

^bIncludes 1 result without a significance test.

^cIncludes 2 results without a significance test.

In order to give full consideration to the evidence that exists in the Australian context, including its scope, its limitations and any peculiarities in comparison with the international literature, detailed analysis of the systematic review is presented in two parts – first with the international evidence and second with the Australian evidence.

International evidence

Driven by a strong north-European based research community, interest in political efficacy as a local political attitude has grown substantially in recent years. Of the 21 separate tests of the municipality size–political efficacy relationship, 19 are conducted in a European context. Of the international tests of the municipality size-political efficacy relationship, six focus on IPE and 14 focus on EPE. Given the particular importance of IPE in participatory democratic theory, in small-is-beautiful accounts, and more generally as an indicator of civic culture and alienation, the dearth of empirical investigation is particularly striking. Despite a standardised IPE scale having been developed in the early 1990s (Niemi et al., 1991), it has only been operationalised on two occasions as a dependent variable in a study on municipality size (Denters et al., 2014; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011).

As Morrell (2003) has found, there remains a diversity of measures for both IPE and EPE. There is still evidence of political efficacy being operationalised as a unidimensional measure and of IPE and EPE measures being used interchangeably (Lapointe et al., 2018; Soul, 1999). Yet, there is also evidence of some convergence. As well as the two studies which utilised Niemi et al.'s (1991) IPE scale, the traditional ANES measures for EPE (NOSAY and NOCARE) are adopted or adapted by four papers (Denters, 2002; Hansen, 2013; Huang and Deng, 2017; Larsen, 2002) – although there remains some variety in the phraseology (the specific questions used in each study to measure political efficacy are provided in the detailed table of results at Appendix 5.1).

International evidence on the effect of size on IPE is unanimous: all six tests found a statistically significant, negative relationship. In relation to EPE, the outcome was very similar: of the 14 tests that have been carried out, 13 were negative and statistically significant, with the remainder being a non-significant result. The effect sizes appear quite substantial in several of the results, moreover. For example, in a survey of citizens in the Netherlands, Denters (2002) finds a greater than 20 percentage point decline in EPE from those in the smallest (sub 10,000 pop.) municipalities to those in the largest (over 100,000 pop.). There is also evidence to suggest that the size-effect is strongest among smaller municipalities, with efficacy declining in an exponential rather than linear manner (Denters, 2002: 800). This makes sense, given, as Larsen (2002: 321) explains, “a difference of e.g. 10,000 inhabitants is much more significant for municipalities of 5,000 and 15,000 inhabitants than for municipalities of 120,000 and 130,000 inhabitants”. This exponential effect is seen most clearly in those studies that adopted a ‘quasi-experimental’ methodology, whereby the relative change in levels of political efficacy before and after municipal amalgamations is compared, utilising non-merged municipalities as a control group (Lapointe et al., 2018; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011). Lassen and Serritzlew (2011), for example, found that citizens experiencing the maximum change in population size (72,500 pop.) declined almost a quartile down the empirical distribution of IPE – an effect that is greater even than the difference between holding a Master’s degree relative to having completed lower secondary school. This finding is replicated in relation to EPE, with Hansen (2013) finding that citizens of the smaller municipalities involved in a merger experience the greatest drop in EPE, while those who are resident of the larger party to a merger experience only negligible change.

Europe was also the epicentre of research into the effect of municipality size on participation, though there is also wider variation in research contexts – with substantial evidence also coming from the United States, as well as isolated studies from other regions of the world. The focus of much of this work is on the effect of size on voting, with voting seen broadly as a proxy for political participation and a primary indicator of democratic health more generally (Holbrook and

Weinschenk, 2014; Kelleher and Lowery, 2004; Rodrigues and Meza, 2018; Zeedan, 2017). A total of 37 international tests examined the relationship between municipality size and voter-turnout, 26 (or 70%) exhibiting a negative relationship and 11 finding no evidence of a relationship. However, when considering only those analyses that provided a significance test, this differential falls considerably: nine results (53%) are negative and statistically significant (at least at the .05 level), while eight are non-significant. By contrast, twenty-nine tests were conducted examining the relationship between municipality size and candidacy, contacting, meeting attendance or political party activity. Of these, 23 (79.3%) show a negative relationship and six reveal no relationship. Of those with a significance test, 19 (76%) are negative and statistically significant and six are non-significant.

Based on this breakdown, the negative relationship between size and voting appears slightly less reliable than that of the relationship between size and more intense forms of participation. Such a finding would appear to be consistent with the hypothesis that the size–participation relationship is mediated by IPE. Specifically, given that voting is regarded as the least demanding form of political activity, requiring only a low level of IPE (Brady et al., 1995; Pollock, 1983), one would expect that voting would be less sensitive to changes in size than would more intense forms of participation. Evidence that size affects modes differentially is found in studies that explored the relationship between multiple acts. Oliver (2000), for example, found a significant relationship with contacting and meeting attendance, but not with voting. Denters et al. (2014) found a negative relationship with contacting in four out of the four countries studied, a negative relationship for political party involvement in three out of the four countries, but in relation to voting, found a negative relationship only once out of the four. This finding suggests the need to reassess the practice of using voter-turnout as a proxy measure of political participation, as doing so may understate the size-effect.

This is not to suggest that the effect of size on voting is trivial, however. Indeed, it is often, though not always (Denters et al., 2014), found to be quite substantial. For example, Morlan (1984) and Frandsen (2002) find consistent evidence of 15 to 30 percentage point declines from the smallest to the largest municipalities in several European countries, while Cameron and Milne (2013) found a similar decline across the municipalities of South Africa. Examining the effects of municipal mergers in Israel, Zeedan (2017), found that a 10,000 person increase in population is associated with a decrease in voter-turnout of up to 90%. Size-effects on the other forms of participation can be similarly large. For example, Ladner (2002) found that attendance at Swiss assemblies falls from around 30% in municipalities with populations below 250, to under 5% for municipalities over 10,000. Such findings demonstrate the singular importance of the size

variable, the effect of which is “often greater than differences between high school and college graduates, homeowners and renters, or single and married people” (Oliver, 2000: 371).

As was found in relation to political efficacy, there is considerable evidence of an exponential decrease in the effect of size as population increases. This was most obvious in two of the ‘quasi-experiments’, where the smaller partner to a merger experienced the greatest decrease in voter-turnout post-merger (Koch and Rochat, 2017; Lapointe et al., 2018). The tendency for participation rates to plateau at around 50,000 population is also evident in Cameron and Milne (2013: 17), Ladner (2002: 814, 823), Rose (2002: 837), van Houwelingen (2017: 420), and Zeedan (2017: 723). This may suggest that at such population sizes, levels of political efficacy become so low that they cease to incentivise participation to the same extent. Given that regression coefficients can sometimes disguise substantial nonlinearity (Rose, 2002: 836), this finding enables some non-significant results to be examined in a new light. For example, Oliver’s (2000) non-significant regression model for voting nonetheless exhibits a sharp decline in turnout as population moves from 5,000 to 50,000, even if it does not remain linear thereafter. Similarly, given both Caren (2007) and Holbrook and Weinschenk’s (2014) studies only included turnout data from the largest US cities (none with a population below 140,000), their non-significant results are perhaps not unexpected.

Finally, it is useful to consider which control variables were utilised in the international studies. Appropriately, given the positive relationship between political efficacy and socio-economic indicators (Campbell et al., 1954; Finifter and Abramson, 1975), most studies control for such factors as affluence, age, education level and occupation status. These studies are thus reasonably able to demonstrate that the negative relationship is the direct result of the size variable, and not simply due to the socio-economic composition of the local population. Other commonly applied control variables include population density, gender and length of time lived in the municipality. The latter is particularly relevant for a study which posits political efficacy as a mediator between size and participation, given the assumption that one’s sense of political efficacy is not absolute, but rather is affected by one’s experiences living within a particular municipal context. Indeed, Lapointe et al. (2018: 514) suggest this very reason to explain their finding that the decline in voter turnout after an amalgamation happens not immediately but over the course of a number of election cycles.

Australian evidence

Through the decade of the 1990s, much of the academic interest in amalgamation in Australia was dedicated to scrutinising its economic implications. The popular unease regarding the democratic implications of amalgamation (as discussed in Chapter 3) did not translate into empirical output. From the turn of the century, however, this was beginning to change, albeit in a piecemeal and incremental fashion. Reflecting the popular concern with a ‘loss of representation’ (Ryan et al., 2015) – the “distancing [of] elected representatives from their constituents” (Dollery, 2003: 83) – the issue of declining councillor-to-citizen ratios has dominated the democratic side of the amalgamation discussion in Australia (Allan, 2003; Aulich, 1999; Burdess and O’Toole, 2004; Dollery and Grant, 2010; Hearfield and Dollery, 2009; Kiss, 2003; Monro, 2014). Early on in this period, empirical investigation focussed on the impact of amalgamation on the quality of local representation (Hallebone et al., 2000; Soul and Dollery, 2002). A qualitative study by Hallebone et al. (2000), for example, sought to comprehend the human consequences of local government amalgamation and structural reform. Visiting two rural Victorian communities several years after the round of mass-amalgamations in that state, the researchers discerned a shift in residents’ outlook – “from feelings of self-satisfaction to feelings of apathy, despair, and isolation” (Hallebone et al., 2000: 220). Participants lamented that amalgamation had, in both cases, seen the closure of shire offices. Loss of community representation and voice was also deeply felt, with the 12 local government councillors that had previously served each town whittled down to a single representative.

In more recent times, this concern with representativeness has shifted from the effect of amalgamation on citizens’ access to officeholders, to the effect upon candidates and officeholders themselves. In particular, studies in this area have focussed on how amalgamation raises barriers of entry into local politics, thus affecting the descriptive representation in the council chamber. One such study, by Conroy (2011), examined the effect of amalgamation on women’s representation in Australian local government. Observing electoral data which tended to show lower female representation post-amalgamation in several states, Conroy (2011) undertook a qualitative study of women mayors in post-amalgamated municipalities. Interviewees stated increased workloads and less flexibility in terms of work hours (particularly given family and business commitments), higher campaigning costs (due to logistics and competition), and greater geographic distances – in addition to systemic cultural barriers – as reasons why women chose not to stand for re-election in Queensland’s amalgamated councils (Conroy, 2011: 172). A study by Sanders (2013) offered a very similar account to that of Conroy (2011) with regard to the disinclination of Indigenous Australians to re-contest local elections

after amalgamations in the Northern Territory during the 2000s. With the council chambers of new regional 'super shires' located in major towns (some of which were located in neighbouring municipalities), Sanders (2013: 482) reports that many remote councillors "had to travel to these meetings overnight, rather than just turning up at the local settlement office on a particular day each month". In many communities, there was a feeling of a loss of local self-government, a sense that local discretion and voice had been diluted, and a perception that the shires were merely "another arm of super-ordinate government, rather than a government of local making" (Sanders, 2013: 483).

In relation to the specific dimensions of local democracy under study here – the effect of municipality size on rates of political participation and citizens' sense of political efficacy – the Australian evidence base is quite limited. Only three studies were captured under the rubric of the systematic review, and none of these are from this century. The first of these is the study of Robbins (1978), who conducted a random mail survey of citizens on the South Australian electoral roll (n=286). Conducting a trend analysis on unweighted descriptive statistics – that is, without conducting inferential statistics and controlling for confounding variables – Robbins (1978) finds a general decline in voter turnout from small (<1,000) to large (>50,000) municipalities, as well as a decline in respondents' predilection to contact both elected and non-elected local officials. Although these results should be interpreted with caution, it is noted that the decline was most prominent in relation to contact between citizens and councillors, with rates falling from 75% to 15.7%, while the drop in voter turnout was less severe – falling from 75% to 62.9%.

The second Australian study captured by the systematic review is that of Abelson (1981), who provided evidence on contact between citizens and their elected representatives in municipalities across the Sydney Metropolitan Area. Abelson's (1981) study is unique compared with other survey-based studies in that its subjects are the representatives rather than the citizens; data were collected via a questionnaire sent to aldermen and councillors across the metropolitan area, resulting in 115 replies from representatives of a range of municipality sizes. Abelson's (1981) survey concentrated on three types of contacting: telephone calls and letters between constituents and representatives, and household visits from representatives. The study's results provided strong evidence in favour of smaller municipalities. While the effect of population size on each type of contact varies, all three types of contact are higher in smaller municipalities. Controlling for median household income, occupation, residency length, and LGA population density, Abelson (1981: 138) estimated that households in municipalities of 40,000 people "make some 66 percent more telephone calls and send 25 percent more letters to their representatives,

and they receive over 100 percent more visits from their representatives than do households in areas with 120,000 persons”.

The final Australian study is that of Soul (1999, 2000)⁷⁰, which focusses on the effect of municipality size on EPE – which stands, until now, as the only such study from an Australian context. Soul’s study draws upon mail-out survey responses of 601 citizens in four New South Wales (NSW) municipalities – two urban, two regional; two small and two large – deemed representative of NSW municipalities. To measure political efficacy, Soul posed a series of 23 Likert-scaled questions⁷¹ combined into five factors. Prima facie, these questions appear to mostly tap the external dimension of political efficacy. In the ensuing regression analyses, the relationship between (external) political efficacy and municipality size, controlling for income, education, and occupation, is found to be non-significant.

Soul’s (1999, 2000) non-significant finding for the size-EPE relationship runs counter to the weight of international findings, where statistically significant negative relationships were found in 13 out of 14 tests. This presents an interesting case for further research – to determine whether this result reflects a more general Australian-distinctiveness in relation to the size-EPE relationship. On the other hand, the lack of a significant size-EPE relationship may also have methodological explanation – beyond the small sample of municipalities used in Soul’s (Soul, 1999, 2000) study, the sample was also limited to 'inward movers' – i.e. “250 of the most recent additions to the ratepayer rolls” in each of the four municipalities (Soul and Dollery, 2002: 65). As political efficacy is experienced *relative* to the governance structures of a municipality – which is why international studies control for the length of time lived in a municipality – inward movers may not have lived in the area long enough to internalise these structures into their subjective experience. In any case, Soul’s findings raise important questions for the municipality size debate in Australia, which would benefit from further study.

⁷⁰ See also Soul and Dollery (2002).

⁷¹ Soul’s (2000: 281–285) questions include: “Do you agree that councils always respond if community dissatisfaction is strongly expressed?”; “To what extent do you believe that you and your community ‘can’t fight city hall?’”; “To what extent do you believe that local politicians are responsive to the local community?”; “Do you believe that your active political involvement in council will be very effective?”; “How would you describe the extent to which you are informed on local government affairs?”; “To what extent do you believe that your local council is unconcerned about the ‘average person?’”; “To what extent do you feel that you have very little say about what happens within local council?”; “To what extent do you feel satisfied with the quality of the people who stand for office in your local government area?”; “Do you feel satisfied your council representative has achieved good outcomes for you?”.

Discussion

Given the convincing arguments and theoretical underpinnings of both small-is-beautiful and large-is-lively, the one-sided findings reported in this systematic review are rather surprising. It appears to be universally the case, across a range of political and electoral systems, that citizens of smaller municipalities feel a greater sense of both IPE and EPE, and that they also participate to a greater degree in local politics. Across all 90 separate tests reviewed here, none exhibited a statistically significant positive relationship.

The effect of size appears to be strongest in the smallest municipalities, while its negative effect on efficacy and participation appears to level-off at population sizes above approximately 50,000. While size has a negative effect on all forms of electoral participation included in this review – voting, candidacy, contacting local officials, meeting attendance and political party activity, there is some evidence to suggest that size has a stronger and more reliable influence on the more intensive forms of participation. Despite this, much of the present literature has tended to overlook size's potential differential effects, instead often positing voter turnout as a proxy for participation more generally. As noted, this practice may have underestimated the importance of size as a predictor of more intensive forms of participation. Related to this issue, while most studies provided a theoretical discussion that included consideration of possible participatory determinants, there was rarely an attempt to consider how these determinants (and thus size) may affect different modes of participation differently⁷². Nor has there been, with the exception of Denters et al. (2014) and Gendźwił and Swianiewicz (2016), an attempt to explicitly identify the causal mechanisms linking municipality size to participation, by way of a mediation analysis. These shortcomings are important, as failure to consider causal mechanisms when selecting a particular mode/act of participation to study can lead to unrealistic expectations regarding the benefits of small municipalities, whether this be in relation to voting, or as noted in the previous chapter, involvement in civic forms of participation (which, for example, are unlikely to be related to feelings of *political* efficacy).

Beyond this conceptual lacuna, the systematic review also revealed a number of empirical gaps. Specifically, there has been no quantitative study into the effect of amalgamation or municipality size on rates of local participation in Australia since Abelson's work in 1981 – a full decade before the 1990s reforms substantially altered the size and structure of Australian local governing units. There appears to have been no Australian study, at all, which has analysed the effect of

⁷²Denters et al. (2014) and Rose (2002) are notable exceptions.

municipality size on voting, meeting attendance or candidacy using quantitative, inferential statistics (indeed, candidacy appears to have been subject to only one study internationally). There also has not been an Australian study into the effect of municipality size on citizens' sense of IPE, and no study into the effect on EPE for the past two decades. Each of these research gaps will be addressed in the present study.

Conceptual framework

Drawing upon Chapter 4's explication of key concepts and inter-relationships, and the present chapter's review of theoretical and empirical literature on the effect of municipality size, this concluding section proposes a conceptual framework to guide the empirical study that is to be set out in Part III. The conceptual framework identifies the variables which need to be measured and the relationships to be analysed in order to answer the study's overarching research question:

Are citizens of smaller municipalities less politically alienated than citizens of larger municipalities?

The framework (see Figure 5.1) presents the study's key constructs as variables in a causal model, drawing on the literature from Chapters 4 and 5 to posit hypothesised relationships between variables. To structure and operationalise the analysis, two research sub-questions are posed, each with accompanying hypotheses to be tested.

Sub-question 1 asks: Do citizens of smaller municipalities have a higher sense of (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy than citizens of larger municipalities?

The assumption of a negative relationship between municipality size and both IPE and EPE is central to the small-is-beautiful school of arguments. Size is expected to negatively impact upon citizens' sense of IPE due to the perceived lower issue and task-complexity of the political process, whereby participants not only feel more confident in their own knowledge and capabilities in relation to the issue/task at hand, but they also feel more capable of exerting an influence over decisions and outcomes (Allan, 2003; Kelleher and Lowery, 2009; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011). Similarly, feelings of EPE are expected to be higher among citizens of smaller municipalities. In particular, with the weight of an individual's vote and voice being greater in smaller municipalities, it is thought that citizens will feel a greater degree of influence over local affairs (Dagger, 1981; Dahl, 1967; Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Frandsen, 2002; Kelleher and Lowery, 2009;

Morlan, 1984; Tavares and Carr, 2013). In addition, EPE should be enhanced in smaller municipalities, due to the perception of a more transparent, agile and receptive governance and administrative apparatus (Allan, 2003; Denters et al., 2014). While the large-is-lively school does pose counter arguments to suggest that IPE and EPE will be positively related to municipality size, the empirical evidence, as revealed in the systematic review, appears to overwhelmingly support the small-is-beautiful account in relation to the effect of size on both dimensions of political efficacy. Thus, drawing on the above, the following two hypotheses are posed in relation to sub-question 1:

H1. Citizens of smaller municipalities possess higher levels of internal political efficacy (i.e., there is a negative relationship between municipality size and citizens' sense of IPE).

H2. Citizens of smaller municipalities possess higher levels of external political efficacy (i.e., there is a negative relationship between municipality size and citizens' sense of EPE).

Sub-question 2: Do citizens of smaller municipalities (a) participate to a greater extent in local political affairs, and (b) is this due to the mediating effects of political efficacy?

While political efficacy is important as a civic attitude in its own right, perhaps its most important role is as a participatory determinant (Almond and Verba, 1963; Balch, 1974; Niemi et al., 1991; Vetter, 2002). According to the theory of participatory democracy, high levels of participation at the local level are essential to ensuring political equality, input legitimacy and the fostering of a democratic culture (Pateman, 1970; Teorell, 2006). As was made clear in this chapter, empirical theories of participation can be wielded (by small-is-beautiful/large-is-lively advocates) to draw starkly different conclusions about the hypothesised effect of municipality size on participation. Nevertheless, the systematic literature review did find consistent evidence in favour the small-is-beautiful school of thought, that size has a negative effect upon people's predilection to participate. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

H3. Citizens of smaller municipalities participate to a greater extent in local electoral politics than citizens of larger municipalities (i.e., there is a negative relationship between municipality size and rates of political participation).

Given the prominence of political efficacy as a participatory determinant in small-is-beautiful accounts, it is also expected that the negative effect of municipality size on participation is transmitted largely through the mediating influence of IPE and EPE. Specifically, citizens of smaller

municipalities are (1) expected to feel a higher sense of IPE and EPE, and as such, they are (2) expected to participate more. The rationale for the first step in this causal chain has already been outlined in relation to sub question 1, above. The rationale for the second step derives from the theoretical and empirical literature discussed in Chapter 4, where it was established that both IPE and EPE are likely to have a positive relationship with all forms of ‘conventional’ participation (and all acts under study here would fall under this rubric) (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982; Balch, 1974; Pollock, 1983). Thus, it is hypothesised that:

H4. Internal and external political efficacy mediate the negative relationship between municipality size and political participation.

While the overall relationship between size and participation for all modes is expected to be negative, the systematic literature review in the present chapter, did nonetheless identify the likelihood that size affects different modes of participation slightly differently. In general, however, the ‘municipality-size’ literature did not elaborate on why this might be; while most studies identified possible participatory determinants/mediators, they generally didn’t follow through to evaluate how these determinants may have contributed to any size-effect differentials that were found (with the notable exceptions of Denters et al. (2014) and Rose (2002)).

Nevertheless, with reference to the discussion on the relationship between political efficacy and participation in Chapter 4, if the negative effect of municipality size is mediated by IPE, then there is reason to expect that municipality size will have a differential effect depending upon the task difficulty of the specific participatory act. Specifically, it is expected that IPE will be more strongly (positively) related with the difficult, high initiative act of candidacy – considered “the supreme form of political participation, because of high demands on citizens' resources and motivations” (Voda et al., 2017: 25–26) – while only weakly (though still positively) related to the simple act of voting, which “does not require much effort” (Reichert, 2018: 460). Contacting and meeting attendance, with moderately high task difficulty (Verba and Nie, 1972: 52), would be expected to fall somewhere between these extremes. In other words, while those with high IPE are expected to be much more likely to run for office than those with low IPE, the difference between the two groups is likely to be lower in relation to the act of voting. The effect of size should compound this difference, because the task difficulty of an act such as candidacy is likely to vary substantially depending upon municipality size, while the task difficulty of voting is likely to vary by a lesser extent (Bendor et al., 2011; Dahl and Tufte, 1973).

H4a. Due to the mediating effect of internal political efficacy, the negative effect of municipality size should be stronger for more difficult modes of participation.

To the extent that municipality size is mediated by EPE on the other hand, there is reason to expect that the negative effect municipality size on participation will differ in strength depending upon the private/public nature of the act. The discussion in Chapter 4 suggested, specifically, that while those with high levels of EPE typically participate more in all conventional modes, the positive relationship tends to be stronger between private acts than between those acts that are carried on in public view (Pollock, 1983). The assumption to be drawn is that whereas those with low EPE would perceive little benefit engaging in private acts (and will thus abstain), some of those with low EPE may view public acts in a similar manner to the ‘non-conventional’ act of protesting – as an opportunity to air grievances or challenge the status quo (Balch, 1974; Gamson, 1968; Pollock, 1983; Shingles, 1981). Following this logic, therefore, it is expected that to the extent that EPE mediates the size–participation relationship, the relationship between size and the more private acts of voting and contacting is likely to be stronger than the relationship between size and the more publicly oriented acts of meeting attendance and candidacy.

H4b. Due to the mediating effect of external political efficacy, the negative effect of municipality size should be stronger for private rather than public modes of participation.

Should this last assumption prove correct, it would add an interesting caveat to the conventional/unconventional participation distinction, demonstrating that where avenues are made available for the public and unmoderated airing and redress of citizen concerns (such as through these archetypically local channels), those with low EPE may not need to resort to unconventional or antagonistic channels⁷³.

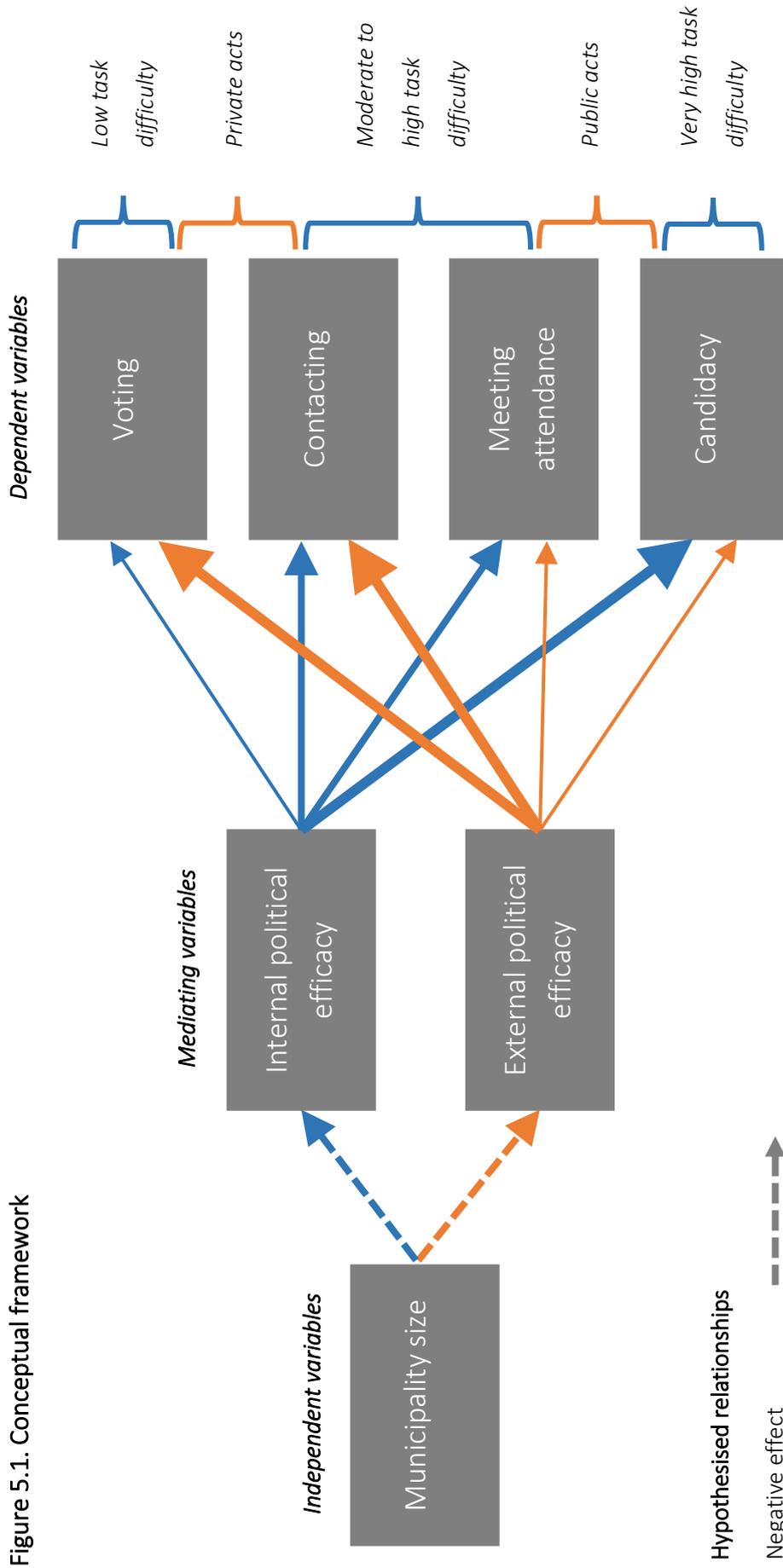
When combined into a causal model, the four+two hypotheses suggest that municipality size will have a negative effect upon both IPE and EPE, and that in turn, both IPE and EPE will have a (differentially strong) positive effect upon all modes of political participation. As a result, the overall municipality size–participation relationship is expected to be negative – that is, citizens of

⁷³ The contention that EPE may be differentially related to acts of participation depending upon their private or public orientation has not, to the author’s knowledge, been specifically hypothesised elsewhere (though, as noted, it is evident in Pollock’s (1983) findings). As a rubric, it may thus prove useful for future researchers, though it would benefit from further theoretical and empirical explication – particularly for its utility beyond the electoral mode of political participation. Whistleblowing, for instance, strikes as one act that may be strongly negatively related to EPE, despite its private nature.

smaller municipalities, having a higher sense of political efficacy, are likely to participate *more* in local politics.

This model is illustrated in Figure 5.1. The research hypotheses are incorporated within the model as arrows, illustrating the hypothesised direction and strength of each relationship. The next chapter details the research methods – including research context, sampling strategy, measures, and data collection procedures – that are adopted to test the hypothesised relationships presented in the conceptual framework.

Figure 5.1. Conceptual framework



PART III. Research Methods and Findings

Chapter 6. Research methodology

"Given the almost explosive growth of empirical social science research over the latter half of the twentieth century, it seems paradoxical – indeed bordering on the unbelievable – to posit that inquiries into the possible effects of municipal size on the democratic quality of local government have been hampered by a paucity of appropriate data".

(Denters et al., 2014: 25)

This study applies a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between municipality size and political alienation, measured in terms of political efficacy and four modes of political participation. Data on citizen attitudes and behaviours are gathered by way of a street-intercept survey, undertaken late in 2018 across metropolitan Adelaide and Perth, Australia. These primary data are supplemented by electoral and demographic data sourced from state and local government repositories.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. First, the *Research design* section sets out the approach taken to address the research questions, detailing the research setting and sampling strategy. The second section, *Data collection*, details the steps taken to gather the data for the study, including questionnaire design, development of measures, and survey administration procedures. The chapter concludes with reflections from the field.

Research design

As presented at the end of the previous chapter, the aim of this study is to examine whether citizens of larger municipalities are more politically alienated than citizens of smaller ones. The overarching research question guiding the study asks,

Are citizens of smaller municipalities less politically alienated than citizens of larger municipalities?

As set out in the previous chapter, the study conceives of alienation in both its attitudinal (political efficacy) and behavioural (political participation) manifestations. Two research sub-questions and six hypotheses have been formulated to guide the study. As illustrated in the conceptual framework, these hypotheses link together a causal model, whereby the negative effect of municipality size on local participation is hypothesised to be mediated by political efficacy. Size is expected to negatively affect citizens' sense of IPE and EPE, which in turn should positively affect

(to varying extents) their likelihood of participating via voting, running for election, contacting local representatives, and attending local meetings. In other words, citizens of *smaller* municipalities should have *higher* levels of political efficacy, and as a result, should participate to a greater extent.

To test these hypotheses, the study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. Drawing upon a relatively large survey-based sample, comprised of respondents from municipalities of varying sizes, multivariate data analysis techniques are applied to discern whether differences in levels of IPE/EPE and rates of participation can be attributed, statistically, to the size of municipality in which respondents reside. Acknowledging that individuals are grouped (or nested) within municipalities, the study is thus conducted at two-levels of analysis, with data collected at the individual level utilised to make inferences at the municipality level. Data at the individual level are collected by way of a citizen survey, carried out via the ‘street-intercept’ method. Participants’ survey responses supply the bulk of the data for the statistical analyses, including subjective self-assessed levels of IPE/EPE, and self-reported accounts of participants’ recent involvement in participatory acts. These data are complemented by aggregated, secondary-source electoral and demographic data for the purposes of triangulation and statistical control.

Research setting

The metropolitan areas⁷⁴ of Adelaide, in the state of South Australia (SA), and Perth, in Western Australia (WA), have been selected as the geographic focus of this study. The selection of study context rested on three criteria: maximisation of variance in the independent (size) variable, non-compulsory voting at the local level, and institutional and contextual comparability.

Being a cross-sectional study, which compares the attitudes and behaviours of citizens of differently-sized municipalities at a point in time, it is vital that the sample incorporates municipalities of a wide range of sizes. The large variation in municipality sizes exhibited across the Adelaide and Perth metropolitan areas was thus a key factor in their selection as the study’s geographic focus. Indeed, having been almost unaffected by amalgamation, Perth – capital city of WA with a metropolitan population of 2 million – retains a highly fragmented municipal structure. The metropolitan area comprises 30 municipalities: four with populations below 10,000, ten below 30,000, eight with populations over 100,000, and the largest at 220,135.

⁷⁴ Metropolitan areas demarcated by respective state government electoral commissions (Electoral Commission of South Australia, 2015; Western Australian Electoral Commission, 2018).

Despite undergoing a comprehensive round of amalgamations in the late 1990s, Adelaide – capital city of the state of SA, with a metropolitan population of 1.3 million – also exhibits a relatively high degree of municipal fragmentation. With its 18 municipalities, Adelaide’s average municipal population is only slightly higher than that of Perth (69,918 cf. 65,212), comprising one municipality with a population less than 10,000, four which fall under 30,000, a further four with populations over 100,000, and the largest at 171,496.

Compared with Adelaide and Perth, past rounds of amalgamation in the eastern states of Australia have far more comprehensively eradicated smaller municipalities. Across the 33 municipalities of metropolitan Sydney (New South Wales), only one has a population less than 30,000 (at 14,898). As for Melbourne (Victoria), municipal consolidation in the 1990s has left it with minimal variance, and no municipality smaller than 91,413. Brisbane’s (Queensland) metropolitan area is dominated by the City of Brisbane, at a population of 1.25 million, with none of its four neighbouring municipalities having populations below 158,815⁷⁵.

As well as exhibiting a large variance in municipality sizes, SA and WA are also the only mainland states where voting is non-compulsory. This fact was also an important consideration in the decision to limit the study to these two states, as conducting the study in states where voting is compulsory would prohibit the use of voter turnout as a dependent variable. One other state, it is noted, also has a system of non-compulsory voting. Nevertheless, it was decided to exclude Tasmania from this study because its small capital city, Hobart, is fragmented into only six municipalities, with only a small variance in size amongst them – from 15,216 to 56,945.

Turning to the criterion of comparability, Lassen and Serritzlew (2011: 243) state, a “problem of comparability will arise if, for example, larger jurisdictions are subject to different institutional constraints, tasks of larger units are different or more complex in nature, or harder to understand because these factors alone could affect feelings of IPE” (and, for that matter, EPE and participation). The metropolitan municipalities of SA and WA were considered aptly comparable in this sense. For example, local government in both states operates as a unitary system, with all municipalities⁷⁶ within the state, irrespective of size, administered under the same legislative framework, affording all municipal bodies the same set of functions and powers⁷⁷. Despite local

⁷⁵ 2018 population data sourced from ABS (2020a).

⁷⁶ The designations ‘City’, ‘Town’ and ‘Shire’ are merely symbolic.

⁷⁷ Enshrined principally under the respective Local Government Acts. It is noted that the capital city municipalities of the City of Adelaide and the City of Perth are subject to an additional layer of legislation (City of Adelaide Act 1998 and City of Perth Act 2016) to reflect their elevated status and strategic

government being administered at the state rather than federal level, the legislative frameworks, functions and responsibilities for local government in the two states exhibit a strong degree of harmonisation (Aulich, 1999). The political ambit of the councillor bodies is identical, typified by the council-manager structure wherein the elected body exercises general authority over policy but is restricted from involvement in administration (Grant et al., 2011; Mouritzen and Svava, 2002: 56). In both states, council meetings are open to the public, and in both states, metropolitan municipal elections are conducted solely via postal vote⁷⁸. Finally, the political culture in both states is similar to the extent that political parties are, by tradition, not explicitly a factor in local government elections (e.g., candidates are listed on ballots by name only, without party affiliation) (Electoral Commission of South Australia, 2015; Western Australian Electoral Commission, 2018).

Based on the requirement of comparability, the decision was made to exclude non-metropolitan municipalities from the study. Whereas urban municipalities, irrespective of their population size, exist in a largely similar geographical, social, economic, and institutional context (where differences can at least often be readily identified and controlled), the differences between urban municipalities and rural municipalities, and among rural municipalities, are stark – as are, indeed, the differences even within individual rural municipalities. The number of variables bearing on a person’s decision to participate are potentially so numerous and context-specific that controlling for them all appears an almost intractable task. Distance, and therefore physical – not simply population – size plays a vital role in rural life; whether one lives within a town or on a farm, the size of the town, whether the town hosts the municipality’s civic institutions, whether the town is represented by a ward councillor, the quality of physical and community infrastructure (which can depend upon population density), whether there is a school nearby – all of these are elemental considerations which would necessitate a study unto themselves.

Intercept survey

As noted, participant recruitment is carried out using the street-intercept survey method. Long a staple in market research, use of the intercept survey method has – despite its reliance upon non-probability sampling procedures – grown steadily popular in the academy, including within the social sciences (Bruwer et al., 1996; Flint et al., 2016; Miller et al., 1997; Spooner and Flaherty,

importance. Nevertheless, the scope of their powers and functions remains largely identical to other councils.

⁷⁸ Postal voting applies throughout SA (Local Government (Elections) Act 1999, s.37). In WA, the voting method is determined by councils themselves, however all metropolitan councils use the postal method (Local Government Act 1995, s.4.61).

1993). As the name implies, the street-intercept survey (also known as the mall-intercept survey) involves the recruitment of survey participants by “stopping them (i.e. intercepting them) in a public place” (Butler, 2008: 448). Once the individual has been intercepted, the survey administrator invites them to participate in the research study and the participant then completes the questionnaire on the spot.

In comparison with traditional survey methods, such as mail and telephone-based surveys, which are increasingly bedevilled by low response rates, self-selection bias and consequent concerns with representativeness (Baker et al., 2013; Lehdonvirta et al., 2020; Stopher, 2012; Wang et al., 2014)⁷⁹, the intercept method offers the potential to achieve a relatively large and representative sample in a cost-efficient manner (Miller et al., 1997; Spooner and Flaherty, 1993). As Flint et al. (2016: 106), explains, “[f]or research efforts without resources for time-consuming and costly data gathering methods, or without an available sampling frame to identify potential participants, public intercept survey and interview methods can be quite helpful”.

The intercept survey has two virtues which make it particularly appropriate for a study of this kind. First, its especial advantage (particularly in comparison with internet-based surveys) is in allowing the researcher to reach geographically localised or hard to reach populations (Spooner and Flaherty, 1993). This virtue is particularly important given the need to survey citizens from municipalities of all sizes, including small municipalities which comprise only a fraction of the metropolitan population.

The second salient advantage of intercept surveys is that they are generally known to have relatively low self-selection bias (Spooner and Flaherty, 1993). That is, when compared with other survey methods, which are often strongly reliant upon participants’ own initiative to take part – whether through responding to a mailed, signposted, or over-the-phone request to participate, people are generally more likely to respond to on-the-spot, face-to-face requests to participate. In other words, there is less systematic difference between participants and non-participants. Minimising self-selection bias is particularly important in a study that seeks to examine people’s level of political engagement, not merely because self-selection bias leads to an unrepresentative sample, but because, more specifically, those who self-select to participate in surveys are often also more likely to be politically engaged (Arceneaux et al., 2010; Gerber and Green, 2005). As

⁷⁹ This is illustrated in a release by the Pew Research Center, where it is noted that between 1997 and 2012, the response rate for a typical telephone survey decreased from 36% to just 9% (Kohut et al., 2012). Similarly, the Australian Election Study (2019) has documented that the response rate to its voter survey has declined from 63% in 1987 to 23% in 2016.

Green and Schwam-Baird (2016: 161) state: “When one randomly assigns voters to receive phone calls – even calls about topics such as wearing seat belts or donating blood – those who answer the phone are much more likely to vote than those who do not”. Kohut et al. (2012: 2) find similarly:

“[telephone] survey participants tend to be significantly more engaged in civic activity than those who do not participate...For example, telephone surveys may overestimate such behaviours as church attendance, contacting elected officials, or attending campaign events” (Kohut et al., 2012: 2).

Sampling method

Being a study conducted at two levels of analysis, the sampling strategy must seek to maximise representativeness and variance at both levels. In order to achieve this, a two-stage approach to sampling was adopted. In the first instance, intercept sites were selected using a purposive method, aiming to ensure that citizens from the full gamut of municipality sizes had a chance of being included in the sample. Once on site, a convenience sampling strategy was adopted, which attempted to approximate random selection of participants – in other words, as Flint et al. (2016: 110) express, the sample includes “any adult who happened to be at a given park on a given day and time” – screening only for age (over 18 years) and state of residence (WA and SA).

In traditional mail and telephone surveys using probability sampling methods, participants are randomly selected from a sampling frame (based on, for example, a rate-roll of citizens). In such manner, each person within the sampling frame (which in this case would be the entire adult populations of metropolitan Adelaide and Perth) has a non-zero chance of being selected. On the other hand, non-probability methods, such as the purposive and convenience sampling utilised here, cannot guarantee that all persons within the sampling frame have an equal chance of being recruited. Not only are those who frequent public places more likely to be represented in the sample – this is unavoidable⁸⁰, but there is the very real possibility of sampling bias arising as a result of either (1) site selection or (2) participant selection once on site (Bruwer et al., 1996).

Thus, while the decline in traditional survey methods over the past decade has seen non-probability based surveys “enthusiastically embraced” by both social scientists and “high-quality, peer-reviewed journals” alike (Lehdonvirta et al., 2020: 2), their potential additional sources of

⁸⁰ While those present in the public realm are more likely to be represented in the sample compared with those who are not, there is no a priori reason to expect that such people would differ systematically from the general population in relation to their political attitudes and behaviours, and thus this is not expected to bias the sample to any meaningful degree.

bias means that researchers carry a higher burden “to describe the methods used to draw the sample, collect the data, and make inferences” (Baker et al., 2013: 2). Specifically, “[c]are must be taken to ensure that the full range of the target population is represented in the study” (Spooner and Flaherty, 1993: 195–196). While inferences to the general population typically rely upon the use of randomised probability samples, when conducted using rigorous and objective procedures, as Miller et al. (1997: 655) contends, non-probability samples such as those drawn from intercept surveys can offer a “feasible alternative to traditional population survey methods”, with higher response rates and a sample that is similarly representative of the target population (Miller et al., 1997; Spooner and Flaherty, 1993).

A biased sample, however, risks compromising both external validity – the ability to extrapolate from the sample to the general population, and internal validity – the level of confidence that a relationship between two variables is actually present, and is not instead caused by another, non-measured confounding variable (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). Most crucial for minimising sampling bias, is to ensure that the sample captures sufficient variance in the data at both levels of analysis to ensure that the full range of the target population is accounted for (Mercer et al., 2017; Spooner and Flaherty, 1993).

As the non-probability version of stratified sampling, purposive sampling aims to maximise variance along the independent variables of interest by over-sampling particular subpopulations (Shively, 2009; Solon et al., 2015). Without over-sampling, there would be a risk that the sample would not contain sufficient cases from a particular population group to achieve statistical power⁸¹. The use of such a strategy is particularly appropriate for this study, where it is expected that a purely random sample would not obtain an adequate number of responses from residents of smaller municipalities. Applying a purposive approach to site selection, the aim, then, was to visit sites in municipalities of all sizes. To aid in this effort, periodic review of the survey data was undertaken with respect to the number of responses per municipality, with repeat visits to underrepresented municipalities undertaken where necessary⁸². Given a target sample size of at

⁸¹ As a result, purposive sampling, like stratified sampling, produces a sample that does not precisely mirror the general population. If a study’s purpose is to report overall descriptive statistics for a population (such as in an opinion poll), the non-random nature of purposive sampling may present issues; however for a causal effect analysis, where the aim is to estimate relationships between variables, purposive sampling is both commonly utilised and methodologically/statistically justifiable (Mercer et al., 2017; Shively, 2009; Solon et al., 2015).

⁸² Such periodic analysis can only act as a guide – gauging the exact number of responses per municipality is not possible during the fieldwork stage, as it cannot be assumed that respondents correctly identify their municipality (the process of determining each participant’s home municipality involves post-hoc cross-referencing, as elaborated upon in the *Data collection* section).

least 384 participants – being sufficient to ensure at least a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error in a random sample (The Research Advisors, 2006) – the goal was to include participants from all municipalities and approximately 77 participants (or 20% of 384) per size quintile (approximately evenly split across Adelaide and Perth).

In addition to the primary independent variable of municipality size, it was also necessary to identify potential confounding variables, and ensure that they were also included in the sample with an adequate level of variance (Mercer et al., 2017). As Baker et al. (2013: 13–14) state, “[t]he challenge for non-probability methods is to identify any disturbing [aka confounding] variables and bring them under control, in sample selection, estimation, or both... The integrity of any nonprobability method depends on how well it solves this fundamental problem”. With socio-economic status and age, in particular, being regularly cited in theoretical and empirical work as important demographic determinants of participation (Brady et al., 1995; Finifter and Abramson, 1975), it was necessary to ensure that the sample contains sufficient variation in these variables to enable them to be ‘controlled’ at the statistical analysis stage. Purposive site selection has been integral to achieving this goal. Specifically, variation in the location and land use of sites was expected to increase the likelihood that the survey includes respondents of diverse ages and socio-economic status.

Inevitably, not all potential confounding variables can be identified, and not all can be readily measured. A risk with non-probability samples is that they may differ systematically from the target population in undetected ways that have a bearing upon the dependent variables (i.e. the problem of endogeneity) (Bruwer et al., 1996; Mercer et al., 2017). Such sampling error could occur in this case where, for example, participants are systematically more or less likely to be politically engaged than the general urban (SA/WA) population. Two strategies have been adopted to minimise this risk. The first relates to site selection. Specifically, while (as has been noted) there is no theoretical reason to expect that people presenting in the public realm would be systematically alike in relation to political attitudes and behaviours, this does not exclude the possibility that those who frequent *particular sites* may be alike in relevant ways. To address this possibility – following the example of Bruwer (1996), Flint et al. (2016) and Miller et al. (1997) – intercept surveys were conducted at a large number of sites, with different land use characteristics, in a wide variety of locations, on different days of the week and different times of the day (with similar types of sites chosen in each municipality size strata to ensure

comparability)⁸³. In adopting this approach, this study seeks to overcome one of the key deficiencies of many past intercept surveys – that is, they are confined to one location at one point in time. As Bruwer et al. (1996) and King et al. (2007; 2017) note, failure to diversify survey locations and times can severely restrict the kinds of people available to partake in the survey and increases the risk that participants will be systematically alike in ways which may bias the analyses. The second strategy relates to the manner in which participants are selected once on site. Notably, strategies to minimise on-site participant selection bias are integral to ensuring that the sample contains an approximately random cross-section of the target population, and thus does not systematically include or exclude certain types of people. Strategies adopted to minimise on-site participant selection bias are presented in the *Data collection* section.

Subjects and municipalities

A total of 537 valid⁸⁴ responses were obtained via the intercept survey, including 247 from SA and 290 from WA. Responses were approximately evenly split among women and men. Referring to Table 6.1, the ages of respondents very closely mirrors those of the general population, with those in the 35-44 age group slightly oversampled and those in the over-75 age group slightly under-sampled. In relation to education, the sample under-represents those who did not complete high school and over-represents university graduates, particularly postgraduates⁸⁵. Finally, in relation to employment, although definitional differences make comparisons less appropriate, it is clear that the sample broadly reflects the proportions in the general population, with full-time workers most strongly represented; most importantly, the sample contains participants from across the full spectrum of occupational status.

⁸³ It was also important to visit sites with varying proximity to the civic centre, as sites in close proximity may have systematically higher concentrations of people who frequent such facilities, and thus a systematically higher concentration of people who are engaged with their council.

⁸⁴ That is, responses from participants aged over 18, who live in a metropolitan municipality in the states of SA or WA.

⁸⁵ As noted in the previous section, given the purposive sampling strategy, it was expected that the sample would not mirror the population precisely in relation to the demographics of the target population. Most important is that all cohorts of the population are included in the sample. The use of statistical controls (including for education, occupation, and age) will account for any effect that these demographic variables have on the relationships of interest.

Table 6.1. Composition of sample (participants)

	Survey participants			General metropolitan population	
	SA	WA	Total	SA	WA
General...					
Individuals (n)	247	290	537	1,345,777	2,059,484
Gender (% female)	52.4%	54.7%	53.6%	50.8%	50.3%
Age...					
% 18-24	14.2%	14.5%	14.4%	13.1% ^a	12.8% ^a
% 25-34	17.9%	22.8%	20.6%	14.1%	15.7%
%35-44	22.4%	20.8%	21.5%	12.8%	13.9%
%45-54	17.5%	16.6%	17.0%	13.0%	13.0%
%55-64	14.6%	15.6%	15.1%	12%	11.0%
%65-74	8.9%	8.0%	8.4%	9.5%	8.1%
%75 or over	4.5%	1.7%	3.0%	7.8%	6.1%
Highest level of education...					
Did not complete high school	7.7%	6.2%	6.9%	41.5%	36.5%
Completed high school	20.3%	16.2%	18.1%	n/a	n/a
TAFE/Cert/Diploma/Apprentice	25.6%	19.0%	22%	28.1%	28.7%
Undergraduate	28.0%	34.1%	31.3%	14.8%	16.4%
Postgraduate	18.3%	24.5%	21.6%	4.4%	4.5%
Current employment...					
Not employed	8.1%	11.4%	9.9%	4.6%	5.2%
Casual	11.4%	10.0%	10.6%	n/a	n/a
Part-time	14.6%	16.2%	15.5%	19.9%	19.5%
Full-time	43.5%	48.3%	46.1%	32.1%	35.9%
Retired	15.9%	10.7%	13.1%	n/a	n/a
Full-time student	6.5%	3.4%	4.9%	n/a	n/a

Note. Comparison metropolitan figures sourced from ABS (2016, 2020b). All data 2018 except for education and employment figures, which are based on 2016 data (most recently available at time of writing). Education and employment percentages are based on total metropolitan population aged 15 years and over.

^aBased on 15-24 age group.

Referring to Table 6.2, all forty-eight municipalities from the Adelaide and Perth metropolitan areas are represented in the sample, at an average of 11.2 responses per municipality. As noted, the purposive sampling strategy sought to oversample certain populations in order to maximise variation along the independent variables. In relation to the size variable, the goal was to obtain approximately 77 responses in each of the two smallest size quintiles (represented by quintiles 1 and 2 in Table 6.2). Although the final figures are slightly under this target, they are more than

adequate for the purposes of statistical analysis. Demonstrating the success of the purposive strategy, participants from the smallest 20% of municipalities (n=73) represent 14% of the sample, despite only representing 4% of the metropolitan population.

Table 6.2. Composition of sample (municipalities)

Municipality size quintile (population range)	Responses	Responses per municipality			% of sample	% of metro popn.
		Low	High	Ave		
Quintile 1 (1,721 – 22,554)	73	2	13	7.3	14%	4%
Quintile 2 (24,018 – 36,750)	72	2	14	8	13%	9%
Quintile 3 (37,032 – 60,105)	94	1	18	9.4	18%	14%
Quintile 4 (67,253 – 112,165)	116	5	21	12.9	22%	25%
Quintile 5 (117,382 – 220,249)	182	9	36	18.2	34%	48%

Note. Each quintile represents 20 percent of the population distribution. For example, quintile 1 comprises the smallest 20 percent of municipalities, while quintile 5 comprises the largest 20 percent of municipalities. Refer to Appendix 6.1 for a detailed table of responses per municipality.

Data collection

Questionnaire

For quantitative studies, a questionnaire-based survey – whether administered in person, online, by mail or over the telephone – is by far the most common means of measuring citizens’ political attitudes and behaviour. As (Denters et al., 2014: 32) states,

“In so far as our key dependent variables refer to citizen orientations and citizen behaviour, conducting survey research is arguably the best – indeed, perhaps the only – way to gather data on such attributes. Survey research allows for the collection of data pertaining to the different measures of local democracy... for relatively large numbers of respondents living in both big and small municipalities”.

The questionnaire utilised in this study has been specifically designed to test the research hypotheses; it provides bulk of the data for the statistical analyses, including subjective self-assessed levels of IPE/EPE, a self-reported account of respondents’ involvement in each of the four participatory acts, and individual-level demographic data that can be used to gauge the sample’s representativeness and to enable statistical control of confounding variables. The survey data are supplemented by secondary source demographic and electoral data aggregated to the suburb and municipality levels; these data are used (1) for determining the population size of each municipality, (2) for triangulation analyses in relation to voter turnout and candidacy rates,

and (3) for the measurement and statistical control of ‘contextual’ variables (as discussed under the *Measures* section).

Questionnaire structure –composition, order, and length

When designing the questionnaire, attention was afforded to the various potential sources of random and systematic error, including response bias, which may contaminate the data. The key, according to methodologist such as Krosnick and Presser (2010) and Podsakoff et al. (2012) to minimising such error, is to take steps to ensure that participants respond optimally (i.e. as accurately as possible), and thus to reduce any inclination that respondents might have to satisfice (i.e. to answer less diligently/thoroughly). Satisficing can occur during the process of reading and comprehending the question’s meaning, in the recall/memory retrieval process, in the process of forming a judgement, and upon selecting a response option. For Krosnick and Presser (2010) and Podsakoff et al. (2012), the degree to which a participant responds optimally depends above all on two factors: task difficulty and motivation. To ensure that participants complete the questionnaire as optimally as possible, and thus reduce the potential for systematic response bias, questionnaire design should seek to minimise task difficulty and avoid compromising participants’ motivation.

As will be evident in the *Measures* section below, attention to these concerns has extended to the wording of each individual question and response option⁸⁶. However, question order and length also play a crucial role in minimising satisficing (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). To avoid fatigue and to minimise confusion, for example, Krosnick and Presser (2010) emphasise the importance of a coherent flow to aid recall and context-setting, which means that similar items should be grouped together in sets, with general questions setting the context for more specific questions.

Being intercepted in the public realm, it is also necessary to understand that participants had not been primed for completing a survey and recalling knowledge. It was therefore decided to place the demographic questions up front (with age and state of residence used as screening questions), given that these require minimal cognitive strain (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). This set of questions would also acclimatise participants to the survey mindset and the survey instrument (tablet), while enabling a rapport to be built up between participant and researcher (Krosnick and

⁸⁶ For example, by being cognisant of individuals’ desire for privacy in relation to sensitive matters, and of the potential for “social desirability response bias” (Krosnick and Presser, 2010: 285) – where a participant moderates their answer to accord with their perception of what is socially acceptable.

Presser, 2010). With participants acclimatised, the set of political efficacy questions followed. Given that these Likert scales probe subjective attitudes, requiring participants to engage in the task of self- and context-assessment, it was important that respondents complete each Likert scale with minimal fatigue, based on their initial conceptions un-conditioned by the preceding questions⁸⁷. The set of questions on electoral participation followed immediately after those on political efficacy. With participants now thinking about local government, while still maintaining high levels of motivation and patience, it is expected that they would be primed to recall their participatory experiences. As Lindell and Whitney (2001: 118) note, behavioural self-reports tend to require “relatively little cognitive processing”, while the use of dichotomous answer choices for this set was expected to further minimise task difficulty⁸⁸.

Given that the questionnaires were administered via the street-intercept method, overall survey length is also of central importance. An average survey completion time of five minutes was considered appropriate for this purpose (as noted below, this length was confirmed by participants in the pilot survey as being satisfactory). Should the survey extend beyond what participants deem reasonable, not only may the respondent become annoyed, bored and fatigued – leaving them liable to satisfice (Lindell and Whitney, 2001), but other people watching the interview from afar will be more likely to decline when I eventually invite them to participate. In the final survey, the marks of brevity are apparent by the limited number of questions, the concise phraseology, and in the regular use of dichotomous answer choices.

The final questionnaire is provided in full at Appendix 6.2.

Measures

Independent variable: municipal population (log)

Municipal population data are based on the 2018 Estimated Resident Population figures (i.e. the ‘official’ population figures), sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2020a). Following Carr and Tavares (2014), Denters et al. (2014), Larsen (2002), and Rose (2002), a natural log transformation is performed on the raw population data, to reflect the exponential, rather than linear, relationship between municipality size and political participation – where, as Larsen (2002: 321) states, “a difference of e.g. 10,000 inhabitants is much more significant for

⁸⁷ Which is important, given Krosnick and Pressers’ (2010: 293) observation that general items, being open to interpretation, are more susceptible to influence from specific questions than vice versa.

⁸⁸ The questionnaire contains a short, final set of questions not directly addressed in this study. These probe political knowledge and non-electoral participation.

municipalities of 5,000 and 15,000 inhabitants than for municipalities of 120,000 and 130,000 inhabitants". Additionally, log-transformation assists with upholding the assumption of normality (see next chapter for discussion on regression diagnostics), while avoiding the situation whereby the values of the largest municipalities exert inordinate leverage upon the regression parameters (Denters et al., 2014: 32).

Mediating variables: IPE and EPE

Since its conceptualisation by Campbell et al. (1954) and its measurement in the first American National Election Study (ANES) in 1952, political efficacy has become "one of the most theoretically important and frequently used" indicators of general political attitudes (Niemi et al., 1991: 1407). Yet, at the same time, "there has been considerable dissatisfaction with the manner in which [political] efficacy is measured" (Niemi et al., 1991: 1407). As noted in Part II, our understanding of the concept was significantly advanced by its bifurcation into the internal and external components in the 1970s (Balch, 1974), which led to a renewed focus on the development of standardised measures across the two domains (Morrell, 2003; Niemi et al., 1991). Researchers attempted for some time to fit the six original ANES items into two new scales, but met with little lasting success (Craig et al., 1990; Morrell, 2003).

A significant breakthrough, came, however, with the work of Craig, Niemi and colleagues on the formulation of new efficacy scales in conjunction with the 1987 ANES pilot study. Testing a battery of existing and newly formulated items encompassing the domains of political efficacy, responsiveness, and trust, with both regime and incumbent-based referents, Craig et al. (1990) sought to establish scales for a multi-dimensional conception of political efficacy. This work was particularly successful in developing a five item internal political efficacy (IPE) scale composed of four new items (UNDERSTAND, SELFQUAL, PUBOFF, INFORMED), with only one item (COMPLEX) remaining from the original ANES political efficacy scale (Niemi et al., 1991) (see Table 5.1 from Chapter 4). Follow-up analyses based on the items' performance in subsequent ANES surveys (Morrell, 2003; Niemi et al., 1991), has confirmed that the scale performs consistently as a reliable and valid measure of IPE.

Craig, Niemi and colleagues' IPE scale has gained considerable traction in the literature, with an analysis by Morrell (2003) recommending standardised measurement based on the index (although Morell recommends expunging COMPLEX for its poorer fit)⁸⁹, stating:

⁸⁹ While Craig, Niemi and colleagues (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991) also found COMPLEX to load less strongly on the IPE scale, with questionable external consistency (given only a weak correlation with

“It would appear that these four new items tap into citizens’ perceptions of their ability to effectively participate in politics and political discussion. If we want to increase our knowledge of internal efficacy, social scientists should endeavor to include them in future surveys and research” (Morrell, 2003: 601).

As documented in the systematic review from Chapter 5, Niemi et al.’s (1991) IPE scale has been adapted for use in local government settings in two previous European studies (Denters et al., 2014; Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011). In like manner, Niemi et al.’s (1991) IPE scale is borrowed for this study, with questions adapted to suit a local, Australian context. Specifically, references to national politics and government are replaced with local politics and local government, while the locally appropriate terms of ‘mayor’, ‘shire president’ and ‘council’ are applied as per the advice of Krosnick and Presser (2010) to use simple, unambiguous and familiar terminology.

Compared with IPE, efforts to arrive at a standardised measure of external political efficacy (EPE) have been less assured. As noted in Chapter 4, conceptualisation of EPE is has been marked by its close association with political trust. As these are both measures of one’s perception of the outside political environment, EPE and political trust are very similar and often correlate strongly (Craig et al., 1990; Esaiasson et al., 2015; Niemi et al., 1991; Pollock, 1983). However, a pivotal distinction between the two concepts has emerged. Specifically, as Craig and Maggiotto (1981), Craig et al. (1990) and Pollock (1983) contend, EPE relates to the perceived responsiveness of the political system (regime responsiveness) – including procedural fairness, while political trust relates to one’s perception of the receptiveness of political actors to popular demands (incumbent responsiveness). Acknowledging the link between EPE and regime-based responsiveness, Niemi et al (1991) – following the work of Craig et al. (1990) – proposed a new, four-item EPE scale, combining two items from the ANES responsiveness scale (ELECRES and GOVRES) with the traditional ANES political efficacy measures of NOSAY and NOCARE (See Table 5.2 from Chapter 4). This study adapts these four measures for the South Australian and Western Australian local government contexts. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, two of the items from this scale – NOSAY and NOCARE – have been used extensively in past literature, including in relation to local government. It is unclear whether the full four-item scale has been applied beyond Niemi’s (1991) original article. Thus, its use here will offer an opportunity to test the scale’s validity and reliability.

political participation), the team nevertheless recommend its retention in the scale for its negative wording – “as a counter to the effects of response set” – and for its link to the past (having formed part of the original political efficacy scale in 1952) (Craig et al., 1990: 296).

The IPE and EPE question sets, as included in the questionnaire, are presented in Table 6.3, below. Responses to each question are categorised along a 5-point Likert scale⁹⁰, ranging from 'Agree Strongly' (5) to 'Disagree Strongly' (1), with scoring reversed for negatively worded questions (the Likert scale for 'INFORMED' uses slightly different terminology – i.e., 'Highly informed' (5) to 'Strongly uninformed' (1)).

It is important to note that the set of questions presented here, as adapted from Niemi et al. (1991), are not necessarily the final measures of IPE and EPE as applied in the statistical analyses. Instead, answers to these sets of questions will need to undergo a process of confirmatory factor analysis (detailed in the following chapter), which will determine the final composition of the scales. As will be discussed, given that a scale is a composite measure – i.e. the application of several specific questions or indicators to measure a single abstract concept (Cramer, 2006; de Vaus, 2002) – each item must be found, statistically, to be a valid and reliable indicator of the same abstract concept. The confirmatory factor analysis process will confirm whether this is the case, opening the possibility for individual items to be dropped from the scales.

⁹⁰ The five-point Likert response scale is in keeping with the previous literature utilising these measures of PE. Moreover, as Krosnick and Presser (2010) detail, compared to longer and shorter response scales, 5-point scales provide a suitable balance between reliability and precision/validity.

Table 6.3. IPE and EPE question sets

Anticipated scale	Question
IPE	Sometimes local (council-level) politics seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. [COMPLEX]
"beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics"	I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues facing my council/local government. [UNDERSTAND]
(Niemi et al., 1991: 1407)	I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in local (council-level) politics. [SELFQUAL]
	I feel that I could do as good a job as a local councillor as most other people. [PUBOFF]
	How well would you say that you are informed about local politics in your council/local government area? [INFORMED]
EPE	People like me don't have any say about what council/local government does. [NOSAY]
"beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands"	I don't think mayors/shire presidents and local councillors care much what people like me think. [NOCARE]
(Niemi et al., 1991: 1408)	I feel that having elections makes mayors/shire presidents and councillors pay attention to what the people think. [ELECRESPI]
	Generally, I feel that my local council pays attention to people's views when it decides what to do. [GOVRESP]

Note. Questions adapted from Niemi et al. (1991).

Dependent variables: political participation

As discussed in Chapter 4, this study focusses exclusively on what Yang (2012) has termed, the 'electoral' mode of political participation. At the local level, 'electoral' participation encompasses four acts: voting, candidacy, contacting, and meeting attendance. Data for these variables derive primarily from the survey and are thus self-reported measures of participation (as will be noted, the effect of municipality size on voter turnout and candidacy will also be triangulated by using aggregated, secondary electoral data).

In developing the questions to measure respondents' participatory behaviour in these four arenas, this study has drawn upon a rich vein of past survey research. Articles included within the systematic review in Chapter 5 were utilised as a reference for the questions as they appear in the questionnaire⁹¹. However, the questions could not simply be adopted unchanged from past

⁹¹ Including Verba et al.'s (2002) American Citizen Participation Study, which was utilised by Oliver (2000).

studies; adaptation was necessary to suit the research context, in a manner similar to that undertaken for the political efficacy questions.

The final questions used in the survey are provided in Table 6.4. A dichotomous YES/NO answer choice was offered for all four questions. While it is possible – though arguably less natural, direct and valid – to pose the questions in such a way as to elicit more precise answers – such as the voting scale utilised by Oliver (2000: 372)⁹² – the dichotomous approach has the advantage of a lower level of task difficulty (Krosnick and Presser, 2010), greater objectivity, and a potentially reduced likelihood that participants will moderate their responses in an effort to “oblige the interviewer and/or avoid looking ignorant” (Luskin and Bullock, 2011: 549). A third option – ‘don’t know’/‘cannot remember’ – was not offered to participants, as such options can discourage people from taking the effort to recall a definitive response, and thus answer optimally (Krosnick and Presser, 2010; Mondak and Davis, 2001).

Table 6.4. Measures of political participation

Participatory act	Question
Voting	Were you living at your current address at the time of the last council elections? [If yes] Did you vote in those elections? [0=No; 1=Yes]
Candidacy	Were you living at your current address at the time of the last council elections? [If yes] Did you nominate/stand for election as either a councillor or mayor/shire president in those elections? [0=No; 1=Yes]
Contacting	In the past two years, have you initiated contact with a councillor or mayor/shire president of your local council to present your views on an issue? [0=No; 1=Yes]
Meeting attendance	In the past two years, have you attended an official meeting of council (including a general council meeting or a committee meeting)? [0=No; 1=Yes]

The questions utilised here probe respondents’ actual participatory activity, rather than merely their likelihood of participating in a hypothetical scenario. As a result, it becomes important to determine the amount of time within which respondents need to have undertaken a political activity in their current municipality. For voting and candidacy, participants were asked about their participation in the previous local election. For contacting and meeting attendance, this study applied the approach of Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz (2016), who used a two-year cut off

⁹² ‘In the past five years, how often have you voted in elections for local or city officials? (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always)’.

point. The principle of precision (Shively, 2009: 58) was central to this decision. A shorter period of one year would, it was feared, result in too few YES responses, while a longer period might result in an inordinately high number of YES responses, making it impossible to distinguish between those who participate regularly and those who participate less often.

Finally, it is important that participants' stated municipality and their responses regarding participation are in accordance. It is for this reason that the VOTE and CANDIDACY questions are conditional upon the respondent answering YES to living at their current address at the time of the last local elections. For all other questions, it is made clear with an introductory statement to this question set, that if the respondent has moved into their current municipality within the last two years, their answer should only apply to the period in which they were living at their current address.

For the purpose of testing **Hypothesis H3** – *Citizens of smaller municipalities participate to a greater extent in local politics than citizens of larger municipalities* – answers to the four participation questions are summed to create a simple count measure of 'overall participation' to indicate an individual's overall predilection to participate⁹³. This 'Overall Participation' variable reflects the number of different participatory acts an individual has engaged in over the period. On the five-item (0 to 4) measure, respondents' who have engaged in all acts over the specified period of time score four. These are, in Verba and Nie's (1972: 80) lexicon, 'complete activists', highly engaged in all arenas of local 'electoral' democracy. At the other end of the spectrum, those who score zero – 'the inactives' (Verba and Nie, 1972: 79) – have not participated in any of the acts over the period. Using this measure as a dependent variable will enable a determination as to whether citizens of smaller municipalities are generally more actively engaged than citizens of larger municipalities. Similar composite count variables are often used to measure overall levels of political participation (including by Brady et al., 1995; Gendźwił and Swianiewicz, 2016; Niemi et al., 1991; Olsen, Marvin, 1972).

Yet, because **Hypotheses H4a and H4b**⁹⁴ posit that size will have a differential effect upon each of the four acts, analyses are also undertaken utilising the individual acts as separate dependent

⁹³ Unlike the political efficacy measures, this is a composite index, not a scale. The individual items do not constitute different dimensions of the same latent concept and thus are not necessarily expected to correlate.

⁹⁴ H4a: "Due to the mediating effect of internal political efficacy, the negative effect of size should be stronger for more difficult modes of participation". H4b: "Due to the mediating effect of external political efficacy, the negative effect of size should be stronger for private rather than public modes of participation".

variables. By doing so, it becomes possible to determine the extent to which municipality size (and political efficacy) affects citizens' likelihood of participating in each separate act.

As noted, the effect of municipality size on voting and candidacy will also be triangulated using aggregated electoral data, which will provide accurate, municipality-level estimates of the municipality size-effect. This triangulation analysis will also provide a reference point for assessing the external validity of the survey-based analyses. Voter turnout and candidacy figures are obtained from the electoral commission of the respective states (Electoral Commission of South Australia, 2019b; Western Australian Electoral Commission, 2018). The voter turnout measure is calculated based on ballot returns as a percentage of *eligible* electors⁹⁵. The candidacy rate is measured, following Voda et al. (2017), as the ratio of candidates per 1000 *enrolled* electors; it is thus a relative measure, not an absolute measure of candidacy. The candidacy figure includes candidates for any available position (mayor or councillor).

Control variables

In addition to estimating the relationships of primary interest, it is also necessary to account for spurious effects – that is, the existence of confounding variables which are non-causally related to both the independent and dependent variable. A common example is the sorting effects of socio-economic status – if people in smaller municipalities have, on average, a higher SES, and those with higher SES participate at higher levels, then any negative relationship observed between size and participation may be spurious – instead of being the result of size, it may actually be the result of SES. To ensure that any size-efficacy-participation relationship is not merely “the result of differences in the *composition of the local population*” (Denters et al., 2014: 22 [italics in original]), it is necessary to identify the source of these various spurious effects, and account for them in the analyses through the use of control variables.

Control variables have been identified based on the theoretical discussion of participatory determinants in Part II. Specifically, as per the resources model, those with more time, money and civic skills are likely to participate at higher rates (Brady et al., 1995). Where these factors cannot easily be measured directly, proxy measures are typically used – such as the age, education, and occupational status variables used here. In addition, residency length, gender and

⁹⁵ The eligible elector figure is superior to the population figure in two respects. Firstly, if at least one ward election is not held, residents of that ward will not be included in the figure for eligible electors (unless a mayoral/area councillor election is also being held); thus, those who did not have an opportunity to vote are not conflated with those who did not vote. Second, the franchise is not limited to residents – each state also makes provision for non-resident landowners to be included on the municipal voting roll (though no person can vote or stand for election in the same municipality more than once).

state of residence are also controlled. Controlling for residency length is necessary because informed attitudes about a particular council are more likely to form after a period of acclimatisation. As Verba and Nie (1972: 145) find, “[c]itizens who have lived for a shorter time in the community are, in general, less politically active”. In relation to gender, previous studies have demonstrated that, due to systemic factors – including comparative disadvantages in access to resources and available time, but also barriers attributable to ingrained socio-cultural norms – women tend to participate less than men (Assendelft, 2014; Conroy, 2011; Fox and Lawless, 2005; Kjaer et al., 2018; Webster and Fa’apoi, 2018). This is particularly the case in relation to candidacy. Finally, to the extent that there are any institutional and cultural differences between the states which lead to differences in participation rates, it is necessary to control for the state of residence.

The individual-level control variables and associated measures utilised in the study are listed in Table 6.5. For the purposes of statistical analysis, age, education and residency length are treated as continuous variables, with a ranking of 1 to 5, as a clear hierarchy can be discerned from young to old, low to high, short to long. The remaining questions are treated as nominal/categorical variables as the responses do not denote any sort of hierarchy.

The conventions of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020b) were utilised as a reference point for this set of questions – in particular the age and education cohort intervals. Achieving a degree of compatibility with existing ABS measures was important for ensuring that the sample’s descriptive statistics could easily be compared with population-wide statistics. Cognisant of the need for sensitivity (Krosnick and Presser, 2010; Shively, 2009), and seeking to avoid compromising respondents’ motivation to answer optimally, the age of participants is measured in intervals rather than single years. As the effect of age as a determinant of efficacy and participation is generally, in the theoretical literature, ascribed to one’s position in the lifecycle (Verba and Nie, 1972), ten-year periods are considered an ample level of precision⁹⁶. Education is measured at five levels. Cognisant, again, for the need for sensitivity (particularly given the face-to-face intercept-survey method), it was decided against using income as a measure of socio-economic status. While income is often utilised in other studies, it is nonetheless typically highly correlated with education, with the latter having a much stronger and well-developed claim as a determinant of participation and efficacy in the theoretical literature (Brady et al., 1995; Finifter and Abramson, 1975).

⁹⁶ Age categories were coded in SPSS using the midpoint method, which allows a post-estimation of average age for the purpose of regression analysis (de Vaus, 2002: 155).

Table 6.5. Demographic questions

Variable	Question	Response options
Age	This survey is open to persons aged 18 years and over. How old are you?	[1=18-24] [2=25-34] [3=35-44] [4=45-54] [5=55-64] [6=65-74] [7=75 or over]
Education	What is your highest level of completed education?	[1=Did not complete high school] [2=Completed high school] [3=TAFE/ Certificate/Diploma/Apprenticeship] [4=Undergraduate (bachelor) university degree] [5=Postgraduate university degree]
Employment status	Which best describes your current employment status?	[1=Full-time] [2=Part-time] [3=Casual] [4=Not currently employed] [5=Full time student]
Residency length	How long have you lived in your current local government area?	[1=Less than 1 year] [2=Between 1 and 3 years] [3=Between 3 and 6 years] [4=Between 6 and 10 years] [5=Over 10 years]
Gender	What is your gender?	[1=Female] [2=Male] [3=Other]
State of residence	This survey is open to residents of Western Australia and South Australia. In which state do you currently live?	[1=Western Australia] [2=South Australia] [3=None of the above]

The above individual-level variables are complemented by a number of ‘contextual’ control variables derived from secondary, aggregated data sources. The applicability of each control variable depends upon the analysis being undertaken and the statistical method used, however they include the following:

- *SES status of the respondent’s home suburb.* It is widely accepted that SES status has an influence upon political behaviour (Brady et al., 1995; Finifter and Abramson, 1975). However, SES status may also have contextual effects – the civic culture of a ‘high SES’ suburb may differ to that of a ‘low SES’ suburb. It may, for example, have higher levels of social capital, amenity, safety and improved civic infrastructure (Bickel, 2007). Not accounting for these differences may confound any size effects – either enhancing or suppressing them. Suburb SES status is measured using the ABS’s (2018) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) (national percentile), which is a composite measure composed of census-derived indicators that tap income, level of education, employment status, occupation status, tenancy status, and familial situation.

For the purposes of the triangulation analysis, which is conducted on municipal-level aggregated data, the municipal IRSAD percentile is used instead.

- *Municipality population density.* As reasoned by Tavares and Carr (2013), population density may play a role in local participation, as proximity can foster greater cohesion and facilitate mobilisation, while larger physical distances (from councillors and civic centres) may add barriers to participation. Population density is measured as persons per square kilometre, with data derived from the ABS (2020c).
- *The presence of a mayoral campaign.* According to mobilisation-based theories of participation (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995), people are more likely to participate if they are interested and engaged in local politics. If this is the case, it is important to control for factors which may raise or lower levels of interest in an election, but which are not inherently related to size. One of these factors is the presence of a mayoral campaign (Asquith, 2008). Despite the mayor's role in both states being relatively weak, broadly limited to presiding at meetings and carrying out ceremonial duties, the position of mayor still commands an elevated public status compared with that of the councillor (Grant et al., 2011; Sansom, 2012). As such, interest and turnout in local government elections are likely to be higher when a mayoral campaign is being run⁹⁷. The presence of a mayoral campaign is measured using a dichotomous dummy variable.
- *Municipality median age.* This variable is utilised as a control in the triangulation analyses of voter turnout and candidacy. The inclusion of this variable is justified for similar reasons as the SES status variable; as participation rates are expected to differ at different stages of the life-course (Verba and Nie, 1972), municipalities with an older median age may exhibit higher rates of participation. Being aggregated at the municipality level, this measure is admittedly a crude proxy, however as the triangulation analyses are conducted on data aggregated at the municipal-level, finer-grain measures are not possible. Data for each municipality's median age is sourced from the ABS (2020b).

Pilot survey

Pretesting of questionnaires and measures via a pilot survey is a common ex-ante method of checking for potential sources of random and systematic unreliability in the survey instrument (Presser et al., 2004; Shively, 2009). These sources may include complicated phrasing that affects

⁹⁷ Even in municipalities with a popularly elected mayor, there are two situations where an election may proceed without a mayoral campaign. The first concerns WA's system of half-term elections, where every second election will take place without a mayoral campaign. The second situation occurs where a candidate for mayor has been nominated unopposed.

respondents' understanding of the questions, the use of uncommon terminology that is unintelligible to some respondents, editorial errors (punctuation mistakes, inconsistencies, repetition, verbosity), insufficient instructions, leading questions, sensitive questions, and duration-induced fatigue (Shively, 2009: 46).

In line with a common method of pre-testing as detailed by Krosnick and Presser (2010: 296) and recommended by Shively (2009: 51), the pilot survey involved inviting a small segment of the sample frame to complete a questionnaire, and subsequently gathering participants' assessments of the process. In July 2018, all political science 'higher degree by research' students studying at the University of Western Australia (27 in total) were invited to participate in the pilot survey, with questionnaires carried out online via the Qualtrics survey software. The draft questionnaire included a feedback section, in which the students were encouraged to provide feedback, including whether the questions and expressions were clear, whether the answer choices were sufficiently precise, and whether the survey length was appropriate. In all, eight students participated, and feedback was positive with no changes necessary. The survey took approximately five minutes for participants to complete, which was confirmed as being a comfortable duration.

Survey administration

Ethics approval (RA/4/20/4052) was granted on 24 October 2017 to conduct the intercept surveys across the Adelaide and Perth metropolitan areas. Fieldwork ran from the month of August to the month of December, 2018 (as detailed below).

On-site participant recruitment

As has been noted, while purposive sampling was utilised for site-selection, on-site participant selection was conducted by way of convenience sampling. This involved, following Flint et al (2016: 110), asking any adult who happened to be at a particular site, with no quotas set, nor screening conducted for any outwardly discernible demographic characteristics prior to selection (except for avoiding those obviously under the age of 18 years). The aim was to approximate random selection at the site-level, with minimal selection bias. As already noted, two screening questions were included in the survey itself – age (over 18) and state of residence (WA or SA)⁹⁸. Screening was not, however, conducted for 'municipality of residence' or 'metropolitan/rural status', as it could not be assumed that respondents would know these answers.

⁹⁸ Although not a screening criterion per se, as the survey was conducted in English, participation was also necessarily limited to English speakers.

Notwithstanding this commitment to objectivity, it is acknowledged that unlike other modes of survey administration, which rely upon the participant's initiative to self-select, and thus may suffer from some degree of self-selection bias, intercept surveys also require the administrator's initiative and discretion to first select participants, and are thus also liable also to the biases of the administrator (Bruwer et al., 1996; Butler, 2008). While it is easy to overstate the potential impact of administrator-selection bias – given that it is impossible to adjudge a potential participant's participatory attitudes and behaviours simply from their outward appearance, a number of strategies were put in place to maintain an objective, consistent and unbiased approach to participant selection.

First, acknowledging that the compartment, age and, possibly, gender and ethnicity of the survey administrator (in this case, I was the sole administrator) may affect the willingness of certain people to participate in intercept surveys (Spooner and Flaherty, 1993), a number of strategies to mitigate this possibility were adopted. Specifically, while on-site, I always wore a t-shirt clearly emblazoned with the University of Western Australia branding; I carried a clipboard (both to look the part of someone carrying out surveys, and to hold the Participant Information Forms); I introduced myself with a clear introductory spiel; and I consciously adopted a friendly, welcoming disposition, and a gentle/thankful tone of voice.

Second, I endeavoured to rid myself of any reluctance to approach any person who was nearby, on the basis that “[a]ny inhibition to approach people can lead to coverage and sampling error” (Flint et al., 2016: 121). There were, however, three reasons for not asking a particular person or group at a site. Firstly, following the example of Flint et al. (2016: 110), I sought to avoid “people engaged in activities that would clearly be interrupted by a request to participate”. Secondly, in seeking not to be a burden when approaching groups, I adopted a strategy of asking for, among them, one participant only. I did not, however, object (indeed, I expressed gratitude) when additional group members volunteered to participate (as it transpired, the tablet was often passed along to other group members un-prompted). Thirdly, I sought to avoid those clearly under the influence of a substance or who were otherwise considered a threat to my safety⁹⁹.

⁹⁹ On one occasion I introduced myself to a person who, as it turned out, was severely inebriated. Not wanting to be impolite, and thinking on the spot, I did not give him the option of filling out the survey on the tablet himself. I asked only a few questions (which involved long, meandering responses), giving the impression that the survey was much shorter than it actually was. I thanked him and did not submit the responses.

Upon approaching potential participants, I introduced myself with a statement that was designed to be concise, clear (using plain language) and informative:

“Hello, I’m sorry to bother you, I’m a university student conducting surveys on people’s attitudes towards their local council. Would you have five minutes to help me out with a survey?”.

If the person exhibited interest, I would provide further explication of the study, myself, and what they can expect from the questionnaire (admittedly, by using the words ‘university student’ rather than ‘PhD researcher’, and by asking for ‘help’, I was consciously appealing to their good graces).

After offering participants a printed copy of the Participant Information Form (PIF) (see Appendix 6.3), they were given the option of completing the survey themselves or having the researcher read out the questions. The latter option was necessary given that participants may not have had their glasses with them, or may have not have felt confident handling the tablet. It is acknowledged, however, that there may be a slight chance of “social desirability response bias” (Krosnick and Presser, 2010: 285) inherent in these responses when compared with self-administered responses. Such bias may occur when a respondent moderates their answers to accord with their perception of what is socially acceptable. Given the non-sensitive nature of the questions posed in this questionnaire, however, the likelihood of such bias affecting this survey was considered to be very low. The researcher found, in general, that participants were neither hesitant in denouncing their council, nor were they embarrassed to admit to having little interest or engagement with local politics. Even so, the researcher sought to assume a relaxed and comforting comportment and made it clear (through demeanour and, where appropriate, words) that any truthful answer the participant gives is okay. By way of “legitimising the less desirable response option” (Krosnick and Presser, 2010: 287), the researcher commonly opened up to participants that even he did not know the name of his mayor ‘until recently’.

Finally, it is noted that if participants asked for clarification of a question or any further explanation, in the interest of consistency and bias minimisation, I would clarify the questions using synonyms, but would not add any content to the questions, advising that it was up to their interpretation¹⁰⁰.

¹⁰⁰ The most commonly clarified question was question A3 (“Do you know the name of your local government area (council)?”), with people asking whether local government is the same thing as a council (to which I answered ‘yes’). Other requests for clarification included ‘What constitutes contact?’ (in relation to question C4/C5), to which I advised that they interpret the question however they perceive it.

Survey instrument, site notes and periodic assessment of sample representativeness

Making use of modern technologies, the intercept surveys were administered on a tablet computer. As Flint (2016: 106) attest, the use of “[c]ontemporary technologies, including recording devices, portable tablet computers, and project management software applications, make digitally-enabled intercept surveys quite feasible, and keep face-to-face interview protocols short and simple”. Qualtrics software was utilised both to build the questionnaire on the PC and to administer it in the field on the tablet; participants were able to select answers by touching their preferred response. Upon completion, the data was automatically uploaded to the online database. The software automatically added a tag to each response, with the time, date, and GPS coordinates (location) appurtenant to where the survey took place.

While purposive sampling of intercept sites increased the possibility of including people from certain municipalities and certain SES areas, it could not ensure their inclusion. This is because it is impossible to know, once on-site, how many responses will be gathered, and of these, how many would hail from that particular locality. However, as Flint et al. have noted (2016: 114–115), one benefit of conducting the survey on a tablet is that “[t]he representativeness of the participants... [could be] periodically assessed throughout data collection to facilitate adjustments in field strategy”. Periodic assessments of the survey descriptive statistics were thus undertaken to provide a running-tally of number of responses per municipality. With this knowledge, repeat visits were arranged to particular sites or municipalities, consistent with a purposive sampling strategy.

Transparency being essential to the perception of rigour and integrity, extensive notes were also taken from the field. Following the example of Flint et al. (2016: 111), the site notes included the date and time of visit, number of responses received, number of non-responses, where participants were located and what they were doing when asked, and any other events of interest. These notes were in addition to the tags that were automatically added by the Qualtrics survey software.

Fieldwork report

The Adelaide surveys were conducted from 21 August 2018 to 11 October 2018. It was important to conclude the surveys by 12 October, as this was the date that campaigning for new local government elections in that state commenced. If the survey continued into the campaign period, these participants would likely have more knowledge of local politics compared with those who completed the questionnaire before that date.

The Perth surveys did not have a pre-determined finishing date, though having commenced on 1 December 2018, there was a desire to gather all responses – being at least as many as gathered in Adelaide – before the Christmas/New Year period. This goal was met, with the researcher conducting the Perth surveys in a more intensive fashion, seven days per week. Surveying concluded on 21 December (although one additional site was visited after Christmas (28/12), when the opportunity arose to visit a site in a municipality that had not yet been visited).

As detailed in Table 6.6, 99 site visits were made in total, to 80 unique locations¹⁰¹. The response rate, at 71%, is comparatively high by the standards of other sampling methods. Intercept surveys were conducted in a total of 39 out of 48 municipalities. Municipalities that were not visited (Bassendean, Belmont, Claremont, Kalamunda, Kwinana, Mundaring, Serpentine Jarrahdale, Subiaco, and West Torrens), include three from size quintile 1, one from quintile 2 and five from quintile 3 (nonetheless, the survey still captured participants from each of these municipalities). There are three reasons for not conducting surveys in all municipalities:

- First, a site visit was only recorded if at least one person was asked at that site to participate (this was to provide a fair minimum definitional standard of what constituted a site visit). Many sites were visited, however, where no one was present or amenable to being surveyed; thus, these sites were not recorded as site visits. In some instances, these sites were in municipalities where there were otherwise no other site visits (for instance, the Town of Bassendean was visited multiple times but has no site visit recorded for it).
- Second, several sites were visited which were on or very close to the border of neighbouring municipalities.
- Third, while obtaining responses from residents of the smallest municipalities generally required multiple visits to those localities, obtaining responses from the more numerous residents of larger municipalities did not always require visiting the specific municipality. Rather, these participants could be readily accessed by visiting highly trafficked, centralised locations, such as a large, regional scale park (such as King’s Park, WA).

¹⁰¹ These are locations – parks, promenades, precincts – that are clearly demarcated as physically distinct and separate. Contiguous parks, such as along a foreshore for example, would constitute one unique site, whereas physically separated parks would be considered separate, unique sites.

Table 6.6. Intercept survey, summary statistics

	SA	WA	Total
Number of site visits	58	41	99
Number of unique sites visited	46	34	80
Municipalities visited:Total municipalities	17:18	22:30	39:48
Number of people asked	364	432	796
Number of responses	267	298	565
Response rate	73.4%	69%	71.0%

The location of each intercept site in geographic context is provided in Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Map references are provided in Appendix 6.4, together with the following details for each site: date and time visited, suburb, municipality, suburb's SEIFA percentile, distance from civic centre, land use type, land use scale, number of people invited to take part in the survey, number of responses recorded. The maps show all municipalities considered by the respective state electoral commissions to be within the cities' metropolitan region (Electoral Commission of South Australia, 2015; Western Australian Electoral Commission, 2018). The dispersal of intercept site locations reflects the settlement patterns of the respective cities (maps are not to scale).

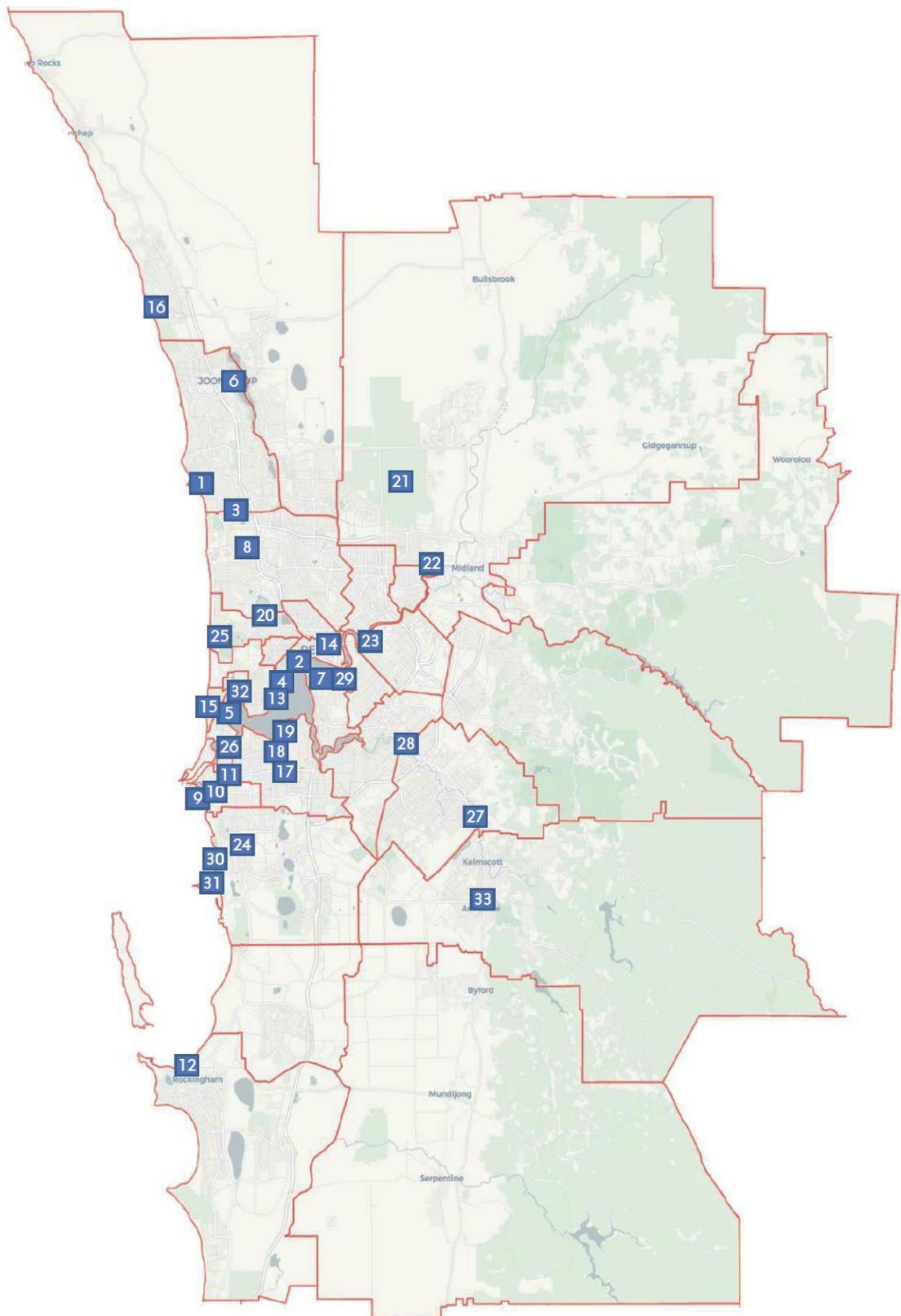


Figure 6.2. Perth metropolitan municipalities and intercept sites.

Note. Base map sourced from Digital Transformation Agency (2019).

Experience and lessons learnt

The first person I approached, both in Adelaide and in Perth, declined to participate. These encounters, I must admit, did nothing to allay my initial anxieties about my decision to pursue this 'innovative' intercept method. Yet, by a coincidental stroke, that first day in Adelaide, and the second day in Perth, turned out to be my most productive in the respective states. How quickly fortunes change.

I consider myself to have a generally high regard for the good nature of humanity. Yet, even I must admit that I was taken aback by the graciousness of those whom I encountered in my intercept journey. I was surprised at the high response rate, and the willingness of people to offer me their time, with no reward. It was easy to become despondent upon being turned down, particularly when receiving harsh remarks (there was one "piss off", one "get lost", and a few dismissive hand waves), but these were far outweighed by the overwhelmingly positive response, the pleasant exchanges (even with those declining to participate), the many offers of food from picnic banquets, and the many long and valued conversations.

Parks are best, and dog parks especially...

The site-selection strategy called for visiting a diversity of land uses. For example, it was initially expected that I would visit shopping precincts – including public 'high streets' and private shopping malls. This strategy came upon an initial hurdle when several shopping mall operators refused permission to conduct the survey on their premises. A second hurdle arose during the first visits to high streets (Prospect Road, Prospect and King William Road, Hyde Park), which yielded no willing participants. It became quickly evident that those willing to participate in the survey were those who were in a relaxed, recreational state, not those rushing past with purpose. As Flint et al. (2016: 110) also found, parks offered "easy access to a cross-section of the local population with no restrictions on access anytime of the day or day of the week". Thus, public parks became the predominant destination to gather responses. There was, nevertheless, a concerted effort, following Flint et al. (2016: 110), to visit "different park settings... to reach a variety of people with different park-going purposes to diversify the pool of participants". Within this broad designation of 'park', sites included riverbank precincts and promenades, beach foreshores (but not the actual beach), lakes, picnic spots, dog parks, playgrounds and skateparks (parents watching their children), sports fields, city parks, suburban parks, regional parks, and university grounds. By far the most consistently amenable participants, it should be noted, were dog walkers, who were generally very generous with their time as they watched their dog romp in the park.

Don't linger...

Rather than staying all day in one location, experience quickly taught me not to linger for extended periods in one place. Where a park is not highly utilised, or where there is a low turnover of park-goers, remaining on-site is not an efficient use of time. Few sites benefited from lingering – with King's Park in WA being the most notable exception. The researcher was always cognisant that he was interrupting people's recreation time – there was therefore an effort not to be a burden, annoyance, or a reason for people to avoid the park. Finally, lingering on one site could be detrimental to the sampling strategy, if too many responses were gathered. While it was tempting to remain in locations such as King's Park, where gathering responses was relatively seamless, there was a risk that visitors to King's Park are not representative of the general population. Thus, it was important to be disciplined, to follow the site-selection strategy by visiting a diversity of other sites, even though this may constitute a whole day of walking with very few responses to show for it (as it often did).

People are optimisers, generally...

Survey participants, as explained by Krosnick and Presser (2010: 265), execute four cognitive processes when completing questionnaires;

“First, they must interpret the question and deduce its intent. Next, they must search their memories for relevant information, and then integrate whatever information comes to mind into a single judgment. Finally, they must translate the judgment into a response, by selecting one of the alternatives offered by the question”.

Given that carrying out these steps requires a not insignificant amount of effort, survey participants are said to fall on a spectrum, from those who carry out each task diligently, seeking their optimal response, to those who offer a cursory degree of reflection, content with satisfactory – if not arbitrary – responses. A number of strategies were implemented via the questionnaire design to encourage participants to respond optimally. For example, the questionnaire design sought to ensure easy comprehension through use of simple language, and dichotomous, closed-ended answer choices. The short length of the questionnaire, requiring approximately only five minutes to complete, was also integral in minimising fatigue and distraction.

Based on body language, the evident level of interest shown, and the length of time spent comprehending and considering each answer (particularly when an answer to one of the confirmation questions was on the tip of their tongue), the researcher is confident that the vast majority of respondents made an effort to respond to the questions optimally. Certainly, a

proportion (though a relatively low proportion) of respondents appeared to sprint through the questionnaire – an indication of satisficing (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Yet many (a seemingly higher proportion) went above and beyond in their level of commitment, with some interactions lasting over half an hour (conversation included).

In relation to comprehension, the overwhelming message from participants was that the questions were easy to understand, and the closed-ended answers made responding simple. While a relatively small number of respondents did seek clarification in relation to some questions, question difficulty does not appear to have compromised respondents' effort or intention to optimise. In relation to survey length, the researcher noted only two occasions where a respondent commented that the survey length was excessive. One nonetheless completed the questionnaire, and another did not (the latter had an evidently low English language level, which would have greatly increased the level of effort required to answer each question). Many participants commented that the questionnaire was shorter than they expected, with some even encouraging their friends to also complete it based on its short length. The majority of participants, it appeared, considered the length to be satisfactory (though, I suspect, it was at the limit of what most participants would have considered reasonable).

Conclusion

Building upon the conceptual framework from Chapter 5, this chapter has outlined the research methodology that is employed to carry out the empirical study. As noted, a quantitative and cross-sectional research design is adopted, targeting the adult population living within the municipalities of metropolitan Adelaide and Perth. Data for the study are collected primarily by way of a street-intercept survey, carried out in accordance with a two-level sampling strategy – purposive sampling to select survey sites across a diversity of locations, and convenience sampling once on site (with a concerted effort to approximate random selection by minimising selection bias).

This chapter also detailed the process of developing the survey instrument and associated measures. In particular, measures for the key variables of IPE, EPE and political participation were developed with strong justification from the literature – adapting question sets from past studies to enhance validity, reliability and comparability. Measurement of these and the control variables has also sought to attain a balance between the benefits of precision and the need to be sensible of the time and privacy of participants.

Finally, the chapter has outlined the process undertaken in conducting the intercept survey on-site, including selection bias-minimisation strategies. As noted, the intercept survey method was successful in generating a relatively large sample (n=537) of respondents from all municipalities across metropolitan Adelaide and Perth. As well as representing the full spectrum of municipality size in the two cities, survey participants are also broadly representative of the demographic spectrum – with all ages, education levels and occupational statuses included in the sample.

Drawing on this dataset, the next chapter seeks to answer the research questions and determine the accuracy of the research hypotheses. After first preparing the data for analysis – including data coding, cleaning, and validity testing – and after setting out the statistical methods to be utilised, that chapter presents the findings of the statistical analyses, with each relationship in the conceptual framework's causal model being tested.

Chapter 7. Data analysis and results

"[T]he dearth of systematic research on local democracy in Australia detracts from our ability to make informed judgements"
(Power et al., 1981: 103)

This chapter tests the hypotheses depicted in the conceptual framework by way of a series of statistical analyses conducted on the study's dataset. The chapter is presented in three sections. Section 1 details the measures taken to prepare the dataset for analysis, including testing scale validity and reliability (confirmatory factor analysis), and data cleaning and coding procedures. The second section outlines the statistical methods and analytical strategies utilised to analyse the data. The third, and most substantial section presents the results of the analyses and provides discussion on the implication of these results for the hypothesised conceptual framework.

Preparing the data

This section sets out the procedures utilised to prepare the dataset for analysis, including validity and reliability testing for multi-item political efficacy scales, as well as the identification and amelioration of pertinent issues in relation to the coding of answers.

Assessing scale validity and reliability: confirmatory factor analysis

As has already been established in Chapter 6, the variables 'internal political efficacy' (IPE) and 'external political efficacy' (EPE) are to be measured via multi-item scales. Each item per scale is postulated as an indicator that captures part of the essence of the target construct – also known as a latent variable or 'factor' (Cramer, 2006). The use of multiple items to measure latent attitudinal or psychological constructs is desirable for several reasons. Firstly, the use of multiple items minimises the chance of incorrectly assuming that the item does indeed measure the target construct. In other words, compared to a single measure, a multi-item scale often has higher construct validity – the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Secondly, multiple items, each tapping slightly different aspects of the target construct, enable the researcher to interrogate its full complexity (de Vaus, 2002). In other words, compared to a single measure, a multi-item scale often has higher content validity (Cramer, 2006). Thirdly, the use of multi-item scales also offers the promise of higher measurement reliability, by reducing the reliance upon individual questions which will invariably contain an element of response error (de Vaus, 2002: 181). While it is not possible, in a cross-sectional study, to pose a single question to a participant multiple times to determine response consistency, by interrogating inter-item

correlations, multi-item scales do offer the ability to assess and control for measurement reliability (Cramer, 2006; de Vaus, 2002)¹⁰².

To assess the validity and reliability of the political efficacy scales, a *confirmatory factor analysis* (CFA) is conducted. CFA is a commonly utilised technique for testing how well a pre-determined, or hypothesised, model fits the sample data (2007: 291). As Brown (2015: 90) emphasises, “CFA requires specification of a measurement model that is well grounded by prior empirical evidence and theory”. The postulated two-factor, nine-item model applied here, as set out in Table 6.3 of the previous chapter¹⁰³, derives from substantial theorising on the division between IPE and EPE, and on the conceptualisation of each of these concepts (see Chapter 4). Based on this theorising, the items that comprise each postulated scale have strong face validity as measures of these latent constructs. Moreover, rather attempting to derive entirely new measures, the scales utilised here have been borrowed from Niemi et al. (1991), whose work has previously confirmed the validity and reliability of the scales in relation to large sample-size datasets.

The CFA was conducted in the SPSS AMOS software programme, using the Maximum Likelihood estimation method. The initial model was run with the nine-items loaded onto two latent factors, with all measurement error presumed to be uncorrelated. While this initial model resulted in a poor fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 8.310$; TLI = .788; CFI = .847, RMSEA = .118 – see discussion below for explanation of model fit indices), the CFA output does provide important information which can be used to make adjustments to the model in order to improve its fit. Model re-specification, as this process is termed, is possible (and commonly undertaken¹⁰⁴) within the CFA framework, provided there is a substantive and empirical basis to guide this re-specification (Brown, 2015; Byrne, 2016).

An important consideration when examining model re-specification, as much recent research on scale development has indicated, concerns the potential presence of ‘method effects’ caused by response set measurement error (Brown, 2015; Williams et al., 2004). In particular, it has been

¹⁰² It is emphasised here that although the ‘Overall Participation’ variable is also derived from multiple items, it is a composite measure, rather than a scale. Specifically, whereas a scale seeks to reduce measurable traits into a parsimonious set of factors, this variable is a simple count of the number of participatory acts a subject has engaged in. Unlike a scale, which relies upon the inter-correlation of items, it is not purported that the constituent participation items (i.e. voting, candidacy, contacting and meeting attendance) measure the same latent construct and it is not necessarily assumed that they will correlate highly with one another. Thus, validity and reliability testing, as discussed in this section, are not applicable for this variable.

¹⁰³ IPE: COMPLEX, UNDERSTAND, SELFQUAL, PUBOFF, INFORMED. EPE: NOSAY, NOCARE, ELECRES, GOVRESP.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Pai et al. (2007), Niemi et al. (1991) and van der Voet et al. (2017).

well established that negatively worded items often load poorly with positively worded items, despite appearing, on their face, to be measuring the same latent construct. This form of measurement artifact can be detrimental to scale reliability and validity, while in a framework of exploratory factor analysis (EFA), it can even give rise to an additional ‘method factor’ that is not substantively meaningful (Brown, 2015; Hinkin, 1995; Williams et al., 2004; Woods, 2006; Zhang et al., 2016). Indeed, as previous researchers employing EFA have found, the distinction between items putatively measuring EPE, trust and responsiveness often divide into factors based largely on their question word order (Citrin, 1977; Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991). It is noted here that of the four EPE items, two are positively worded and two are negatively worded, and as expected, there is substantial correlation (.42) between the errors of the negatively worded items¹⁰⁵. To account for the systematic residual covariance between these two items, the approach suggested by Brown (2015), Marsh (1996) (as well as many others) is followed – specifically, by specifying a path of covariance between the error terms of the two negatively worded EPE items (NO SAY and NO CARE).

Negative wording also appears to have contributed to the poor loading of COMPLEX on the IPE factor in the initial model, where it stands out as having the weakest loading on its assigned factor, at only .24. This weak loading of COMPLEX replicates the finding of both Niemi et al (1991) and Morrell (2003), who also found the item to load weakly on IPE in addition to exhibiting evidence of cross-loading with EPE. Observing the correlation matrix (see Appendix 7.1, table a) for evidence of negative-wording method effects, it is evident that COMPLEX is moderately and significantly correlated with the other two negatively worded items, NOSAY (.305) and NOCARE (.258) (the fact that it is not correlated at all with the positively worded EPE items suggests that its apparent cross-loading with EPE is due entirely to method effects rather than to shared trait variance).

As correlated errors typically should not be specified among items of different factors (Pai et al., 2007), an attempt was made to account for the systematic residual variance shared between the three negatively worded items by loading them onto a negative wording ‘method factor’ (Brown, 2015; Williams et al., 2004)¹⁰⁶. Doing so, however, does not mitigate the poor loading of COMPLEX

¹⁰⁵ Examining the residual covariances table provides further evidence for the presence of method effects between positive and negatively worded items. Specifically, negative covariances are present between the negative and positively worded EPE items, while a positive residual covariance is present between all negatively worded pairs – including not just NOSAY and NOCARE, but also COMPLEX (which is also negatively worded).

¹⁰⁶ COMPLEX’s loading on the negative wording method factor was greater than its loading on IPE, at .5. For the interest of future research into EPE scale development, it is noted that moving COMPLEX to the EPE factor results in a similarly low loading on that factor as it does on the IPE factor (.28). Indeed, doing

upon the IPE factor. As a result, despite COMPLEX having considerable merit on face validity as a measure of IPE – given the small-is-beautiful emphasis on issue and task complexity – its poor loading necessitates its removal from the re-specified model.

Finally, in addition to negative wording method effects, modification indices indicate correlated residuals for the IPE items UNDERSTAND and INFORMED. The residual correlation between these two items – that is, the correlation that they share beyond that which taps the latent factor (Brown, 2015) – may be due to their common regard for knowledge. Specifically, while being knowledgeable about the goings-on of local politics may be largely a matter of personal competence (hence tapping IPE), one’s knowledgeability may also be influenced by external considerations (such as the degree of governmental openness and the degree to which information is made available by a council). Adding merit to this contention, the correlation matrix (Appendix 7.1, table a) shows that these items are consistently more strongly related to all EPE items than are the other two IPE items, suggesting that their shared residual variance relates to external considerations of the political environment. Given this theoretical and empirical rationale, the errors for these two items have also been correlated in the re-specified model.

Following re-specification, the model was run again, this time achieving good model fit. Figure 7.1 depicts the complete specification of the final two-factor model. All relationships between observed variables and their respective latent factors are statistically significant, with standardised loadings on the IPE factor ranging from .47 to .88 and standardised loadings on the EPE factor ranging from .50 to .75. The model performs well against commonly reported indices of overall model fit. The chi-square¹⁰⁷/degrees-of-freedom ratio ($\chi^2/df = 3.876$) is well below the typically accepted upper limit of 5.0 (Niemi et al., 1991). Subjective model fit indices, including Tucker Lewis Index (TLI = .930), Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .957), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = .971), and the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = .938) all indicate good fit, with values above .9 for these indices typically considered as acceptable, and values ‘close to .95’ demonstrating good fit (Byrne, 2016; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Marsh, 1996). In addition, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = .074) and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = .0738) indicate reasonably good fit, with values below .1 seen as acceptable, below .08 as good, and closer to .05 as close fit (Byrne, 2016; Cangur and Ercan, 2015; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

so in the presence of a negative wording method factor brings its loading on EPE down to .04, suggesting that its commonality with EPE items is purely due to its similar wording.

¹⁰⁷ Chi-square (χ^2) = 65.897 (d.f.= 17; $p < .05$). Although a statistically significant chi-square is traditionally seen as inconsistent with good overall model fit, this measure has become less commonly relied upon, given its sensitivity to sample size (Byrne, 2016).

The CFA results also provide evidence for convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. Convergent validity – which is the degree to which scale items relate to one another – is measured using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). CR values are above the recommended threshold of .7 (at .748 for the IPE scale and .735 for the EPE scale) indicating good internal consistency (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), however at the same time, the AVE for both scales indicates that the variance captured by the constructs is below the desired threshold of 50% (at .438 for IPE and .414 for EPE). Nevertheless, because AVE is a conservative measure, Fornell and Larcker (1981: 46) suggest that in the case where these measures produce conflicting results, conclusions about convergent validity may be made on the basis of CR alone.

Finally, the discriminant validity of the model – which is the degree to which the scales are measuring distinct constructs – is high. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981: 46), acceptable discriminant validity is achieved when the AVE is greater than the squared correlation between another factor, which is achieved here for both scales (squared correlation is 0.011). Discriminant validity is also indicated by the low correlation (.11) between the two factors – well below the cut-off of .85, as indicated by Brown (2015: 146).

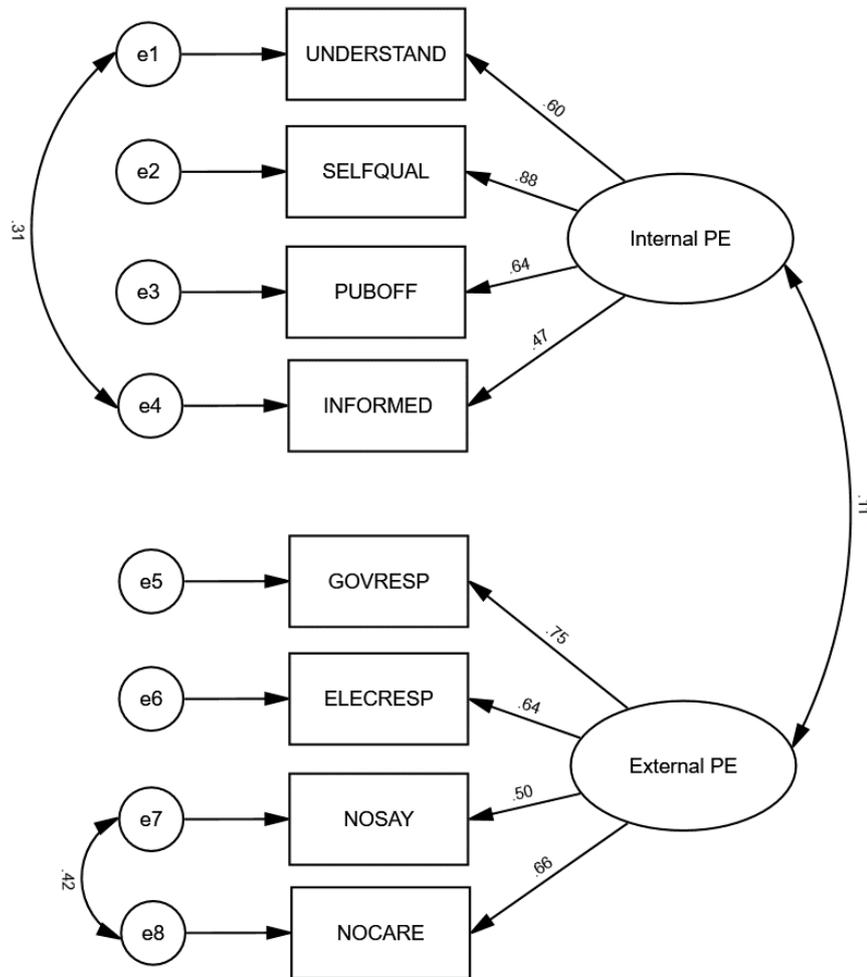


Figure 7.1. Final two factor, IPE-EPE CFA Model.

Note. Standardised coefficients are presented.

Common method bias

Common method variance (CMV) and associated measurement bias (common method bias – CMB) is increasingly highlighted as a potential problem in survey research when a single source and method are utilised to gather data (Podsakoff et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2009). Specifically, when all variables are obtained from respondent self-reports, utilising a single survey instrument, there is the potential for correlations among responses to be artificially inflated due to shared measurement error (George and Pandey, 2017). CMV, as Podsakoff et al. (2003: 879) have defined it, refers to the “variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent”. In contrast to the negative wording method effect that was seen to have conflated between-item relationships, CMB is a form of systematic measurement error that typically affects all survey items in common.

As Podsakoff (2003: 887) and Conway and Lance (2010) suggest, the key to minimising CMB lies in the design of the survey instrument and procedures. As discussed in Chapter 6, extensive efforts were made at the survey development stage to minimise response biases that could occur as a result of design of the questionnaire, the selection of intercept sites, and the manner of survey administration. In particular, there was a concerted effort to reduce the likelihood of participants 'satisficing'¹⁰⁸, and thus producing a pattern of formulaic answers. This was done through attention to item order and survey length – specifically, by placing the more cognitively straining political efficacy items close to the beginning¹⁰⁹, and by limiting the questionnaire length to approximately five minutes.

One of the principal concerns in relation to CMB is when (self-reported) predictor and outcome variables are obtained from the same respondent (Conway and Lance, 2010; George and Pandey, 2017). When this occurs, it is possible that the mindset of the respondent can bias the observed relationship between predictor and outcome (Podsakoff et al., 2003: 887). Any such concerns are minimised in the present study, given that municipality size – a measure derived from electoral data rather than survey self-reports – constitutes the independent variable in the majority of analyses (Podsakoff et al., 2012: 548). Moreover, in line with Podsakoff et al.'s (2012) recommendations, while participation rates are self-reported, their location in the questionnaire and their binary response set differs from the Likert scales that are used for the political efficacy items. To further account for any measurement bias, the study also includes a triangulation analysis that reports on turnout and candidacy rates deriving from electoral commission data.

To assess the presence of CMB, two post-hoc tests were carried out. First, the Harman Single Factor Test was run. This test involves conducting an unrotated exploratory factor analysis (in SPSS), comprising all Likert items, to determine the amount of variance explained by a single factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Common method bias is indicated if the first factor accounts for more than 50% of variance in the items. In this case, the first factor accounted for only 23% of the variance (see Appendix 7.1, table b).

¹⁰⁸ As discussed in Chapter 6, satisficing occurs when respondents' fail to provide optimal answers, which can occur when motivation and effort levels fall (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Podsakoff (2012) advise that efforts to reduce satisficing can be instrumental in reducing common method bias.

¹⁰⁹ Whereas the political efficacy items (utilising Likert response scales) rely upon a degree of subjective self- and context- assessment, the participation items are relatively simple, objective measures of past behaviour, relying upon recall rather than analysis (and requiring a simple dichotomous YES/NO response).

Second, the commonly utilised (Richardson et al., 2009) Correlated Marker Variable Test was conducted. Originally developed by Lindell and Whitney (2001), this technique utilises the smallest zero-order correlation between manifest variables as a marker or “proxy” for CMV (Lindell and Whitney, 2001: 115) – with the inference being that if CMV is responsible for inflating correlations equally in the dataset, the smallest correlation among variables in the dataset must reflect its upper-bound (Lindell and Whitney, 2001: 115). If any statistically significant zero-order correlations between manifest variables become non-significant after ‘partialling out’ this marker, there is evidence of CMB in the dataset.

Common method variance is partialled out in accordance with the following equation from Lindell and Whitney (2001),

$$r_{ij.M} = \frac{r_{ij} - r_S}{1 - r_S}$$

where $r_{ij.M}$ is the partial correlation coefficient between two manifest variables, controlling for CMV; r_{ij} is the zero-order correlation coefficient between the same two manifest variables; and r_S is the smallest observed positive correlation between any two manifest variables.

Referring to the correlation matrix (Appendix 7.1, table a), the smallest the correlation coefficient between manifest variables is that between NOCARE and SELFQUAL (.008). When this value is partialled out from all other statistically significant zero-order correlations, all relationships remain statistically significant. Thus, together, the Harman Single Factor Test and the Marker Variable Test indicate that the risk of common method bias in the present dataset is low.

Data cleaning and coding

In relation to data cleaning and coding, two issues bear commenting upon for the purposes of transparency. First, the manner in which a participant’s home municipality was identified, and second, how item non-response was dealt with.

Verifying participant’s home municipality

It could not be assumed that all participants would know the name of the local government area in which they reside, nor that their response is correct. Thus, verification of the participant’s home municipality required a post-hoc cross-referencing procedure which had regard to the participant’s answers in relation to their home postcode and home suburb. The verification

process required the development of a database of all postcodes and suburbs nested within local government areas.

A set of rules was established to guide the cross-checking process. A participant's local government area could be cross-checked with reference to several questions. The cross-checking process proceeded by utilising answers to the simplest question (SUBURB) as a reference point, assuming by default that the participant's response to this question was correct. Only when the suburb response was missing, unclear or spanned more than one local government area, were other answers considered as reference-points. The cross-checking process is detailed in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1. Participant home municipality verification procedure

Response	Rule	Instances
1. Where participant has stated their suburb...	Refer to SUBURB	
2. Where a suburb is not stated, is unclear or spans two or more LGAs...	Refer to POSTCODE	9
3. Where the respondents' stated postcode does not align with the suburb...	SUBURB takes priority (i.e., disregard POSTCODE, as the respondent likely got it incorrect)	
4. Where a suburb and postcode are not stated, or are both in two LGAs...	Refer to LOCALKNOWLEDGE	39
5. Where a suburb and postcode are not stated, or are both in two LGAs AND where LOCALKNOWLEDGE response is blank...	Refer to participant's MAYOR response (i.e., name of mayor – this is an additional question posed in the final set of questions, which is not detailed here)	3
6. Where all above are undetermined...	Exclude case listwise from analyses	22
7. Where a suburb is located outside of the metropolitan area...	Exclude case listwise from analyses	22

Dealing with item non-response

Non-response to any dichotomous, closed-ended question required no elaborate procedure; the case was simply excluded listwise¹¹⁰ from any analysis that included that variable. On the other hand, a consistent, and statistically acceptable method was required for dealing with a

¹¹⁰ The listwise deletion method omits an entire case from a particular analysis.

respondent's political efficacy scale score where the respondent has missed one or more of the answers. Frequency statistics for item response and non-response are provided in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2. Item response and non-response frequency

Scale	Item	Valid responses	Missing responses
IPE	UNDERSTAND	535	2
	SELFQUAL	534	3
	PUBOFF	534	3
	INFORMED	535	2
EPE	GOVRESP	533	4
	ELECRESP	533	4
	NOSAY	535	2
	NOCARE	533	4

Note. n=537

One common approach is to exclude that participant's case listwise from the analyses (Roth et al., 1999). This approach has the disadvantage, however, of reducing the sample size, thus compromising the power to detect effects and ignoring valuable information provided by participants (Siddiqui, 2015). Listwise deletion also requires that responses are missing completely at random, as a systematic pattern to missing items may produce biased estimates (Fairchild and McDaniel, 2017). Another approach is to impute missing values based on the subject's mean scores for the remaining scale items. As several studies of imputation techniques have found (Huisman, 2000; Roth et al., 1999; Siddiqui, 2015), subject-level imputation has the benefit of maximising the use of the available data, with minimal consequence upon statistical power, effect sizes and scale reliability.

On the basis that subject-level imputation should proceed only where the missing item represents not more than 40% of the subject's scale score (Roth et al., 1999; Siddiqui, 2015), the imputation method was utilised for the IPE and EPE scales. Thus, where a respondent missed one item in a scale, this value was imputed based on the mean of the other three completed items. This criterion applied to a total of three cases for the IPE scale, and six cases for the EPE scale. Where more than one item was missing, however (meaning that the subject's missing items exceed the 40% cut off), the case was deleted listwise from the analyses. This criterion applied to a total of two cases each for the IPE and EPE scales.

As imputation based on the mean of the subject's completed scores is only appropriate when applied to scales (given the assumption of inter-item correlation) (Roth et al., 1999), this method was not appropriate for the Overall Participation variable, which is a simple count of the number of different participatory acts the subject has engaged in (based on YES responses to the four participation items). Although this variable is derived from the summation of multiple items, there is no expectation that these constituent items correlate highly with one another. As a result, it is not appropriate to impute that a subject engaged in one act just because they answered YES to engaging in the other acts. Therefore, in calculating the Overall Participation variable, cases with non-response to any of the four dichotomous participation items were excluded listwise.

Statistical method

Acknowledging the fact that individuals are nested within municipalities, this study follows a number of recent works on political participation and efficacy at local government level – including those of Andrews et al. (2019), Denters et al. (2014), Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz (2016) and Kelleher and Lowery (2009) – by utilising random intercept multilevel regression (MLA)¹¹¹ in the analysis of the survey data¹¹². A computationally complex method, MLA has been gaining in popularity in recent years with advancements in statistical analysis software (Bickel, 2007) (SPSS is used to conduct the regression analyses in this study). As emphasised by Bickel (2007) and Maas and Hox (2005), MLA regression is essentially an extension of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, with several advantages. Most importantly, MLA allows the nested nature of the data to be modelled. As Kenny (2007: ix) states, “Social science data are typically multilevel: Children are in classrooms, workers are in departments or organizations, and people live in neighbourhoods”. Where individuals are nested within groups (such as municipalities), they will likely exhibit a degree of convergence (or within-group homogeneity) in relation to certain traits – as Denters et al. (2014: 27) state, “Individuals live in different communities or social-institutional settings, each of which has a set of properties that provide a context for how individuals experience daily life and the political world around them”. By utilising MLA, this within-group homogeneity can be accounted for.

¹¹¹ Because I am primarily interested in the effect of municipality size, which is a contextual variable measured at level 2, the MLA analyses include random intercepts but fixed slopes (random slopes can be set only for level 1 variables). Random effects (intercepts) are modelled utilising the SPSS default ‘variance components’ covariance structure, as recommended by Field (2009: 739). Maintaining this approach even where participation is predicted by political efficacy ensures consistency for the mediation analysis.

¹¹² OLS multiple regression is used for the single-year triangulation analysis instead of MLA, as this analysis relies upon pre-aggregated electoral data.

Unlike MLA, a typical OLS regression does not distinguish between individual-level (i.e., level 1) variables and contextual-level (i.e., level 2) variables. Instead, all data are analysed as though they are measured at the same level. When using multilevel/nested data, this means either that contextual effects must be disaggregated and analysed as though they are traits of individuals (thus measuring all variables at level 1), or that individual-level effects must be aggregated to create contextual – level 2 – variables (Denters et al., 2014: 28; Hox, 2002: 2; Krull and MacKinnon, 1999: 419). Both approaches entail drawbacks. The disaggregation approach, for example, assigns the same group score to all individuals within a group (e.g., municipality) as though it were an observation of individuals. Such an approach violates the assumption of independence (i.e. uncorrelated residuals) and artificially inflates the sample size (and hence degrees of freedom) of level-2 variable/s (Bickel, 2007: 34/109-111; Denters et al., 2014: 28; Hox, 2002: 2–3; Krull and MacKinnon, 1999: 419). As a result, estimates of standard errors are likely to be downwardly biased, thus increasing the likelihood of committing a type I error – that is, erroneously reporting results as statistically significant.

Aggregation, on the other hand, introduces other problems. Firstly, it can compromise statistical power (Hox, 2002: 3), as Krull and MacKinnon (1999: 419–420) explain, “When individual level data are aggregated by computing group means, the number of observations in the analysis is reduced from the number of individuals to the number of groups, decreasing the power of tests to detect effects of one variable on another”. Aggregation also poses analytical problems – analyses of aggregated data prohibit the ability to measure individual level variation and the ability to make inferences at the individual level – attempting to do so would lead to the potential of committing what is known as the ecological fallacy (given that group level means can often disguise substantial within-group variability) (Denters et al., 2014: 28; Hox, 2002: 3; Krull and MacKinnon, 1999: 420).

In practical terms, interpretation of MLA output for the fixed components is analogous to the coefficients of an OLS analysis; indeed, coefficient values are often very similar in OLS and MLA analyses (Bickel, 2007). The most obvious difference between the output of the two approaches in this respect is that standard errors are generally higher in MLA (for the reasons discussed above), making statistical significance more difficult to achieve in MLA than in OLS (Bickel, 2007). Additionally, whereas R^2 is regularly used in OLS regression as a measure of how completely the dependent variable can be explained by the observed variables in the model, no well-accepted equivalent to R^2 exists for MLA (nor does SPSS offer one). Instead, the overall fit of a multilevel model is typically tested using goodness-of-fit measures based on a chi-square likelihood ratio test. In this chapter, the AIC (Akaike’s Information Criterion) is used to assess model fit, with lower

values indicating relatively better model fit (absolute values of the AIC are not intrinsically interpretable) (Field, 2009: 304; Liu et al., 2008)¹¹³.

Regression diagnostics

Like OLS regression, multilevel regression relies on the basic assumptions of normally distributed residuals, homogeneity of variance (homoscedasticity), linearity, absence of multicollinearity, and independence of errors (Field, 2009: 220–221). Following the procedures set out by Field (2009) and Hox (2002: 20), diagnostic tests were conducted for all analyses to ensure that the data satisfied the above pertinent assumptions. Specifically, normality was tested by comparing the models' residuals to the normal distribution using a P–P (probability–probability) Plot, while also having reference to a histogram to detect indication of skewness and kurtosis. The assumption of independent errors is addressed through the use of multilevel regression, which specifically models within-group correlation, thus addressing any concern that participants from the same municipality are not independent. To confirm conformance with this assumption, reference was made to the Durbin-Watson test, where values less than 1 and greater than 3 indicate potential non-independence (Field, 2009: 221). Homoscedasticity and linearity were tested by plotting standardised residuals against standardised predicted values of the outcome variable. This plot, together with reference to leverage statistics, also provides indication of the presence of influential outliers in the data (a Cook's distance greater than 1 indicates cause for concern (Field, 2009: 217)). Finally, multicollinearity was assessed with reference to variance inflation factors (VIF), which should not exceed a value of 10, or an average value substantially greater than one (Field, 2009: 224)¹¹⁴. Subject to a natural log transformation of the municipality size variable, diagnostics for all analyses in this chapter were found to be within acceptable bounds¹¹⁵.

To uphold the assumption of linearity, it is also necessary to consider the level of measurement for the dependent variable being included in the model. Multilevel and OLS linear regression assume a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variable, and as such these

¹¹³ MLA can be estimated using either maximum likelihood (ML) or restricted maximum likelihood (REML). Because ML is better suited to unbiased estimation of fixed effects (which are the primary focus of this study), and because ML is necessary for model comparison (Field, 2009: 746), estimation is carried out using ML.

¹¹⁴ As SPSS does not provide collinearity or leverage diagnostics in its multilevel (mixed model) output, the same analyses are conducted using OLS regression in order to examine VIF and Cook's Distance values.

¹¹⁵ One exception is the OLS analysis of the relationship between municipality size and the candidacy rate, where the Cook's distance is marginally above 1, indicating that outliers may be influencing the model. The outlier case in this analysis was identified as that of Peppermint Grove (the smallest municipality by size, and thus an important data point). Testing the effect of this outlier by running an analysis with the case omitted did not affect the statistical significance level of the municipality size coefficient. As such, the full dataset (including outlier) is retained for this analysis.

methods are appropriate where the dependent variable (DV) is measured on a continuous scale. That is, where values can be quantified and where “equal intervals on the scale represent equal differences in the property being measured” (Field, 2009: 9). A categorical variable violates this assumption (as well as the related assumptions of homoscedasticity and normally distributed residuals). To overcome this problem, multilevel binary logistic regression – which models non-linear relationships, enabling them to be expressed in a linear manner – is utilised where the DV is dichotomous.

Mediation analysis

To answer **sub-question 2b** – *Do citizens of smaller municipalities (a) participate to a greater extent in local political affairs, and (b) is this due to the mediating effects of political efficacy?* – a mediation analysis is undertaken. In contrast to a typical regression analysis, which seeks to determine the total effect of an independent variable (X) upon a dependent variable (Y), a mediation analysis seeks to identify the causal mechanism (M), through which the effect of X is transmitted to Y (Fairchild and McDaniel, 2017). A mediation analysis posits that the total effect of X on Y comprises both an indirect (or mediated) effect, which can be traced in Figure 7.2 as the product of the *a* and *b* paths, and a residual direct effect (labelled *path c* in Figure 7.2), which is assumed to be the result of a direct (unmediated) causal relationship between X and Y (Hayes, 2009).

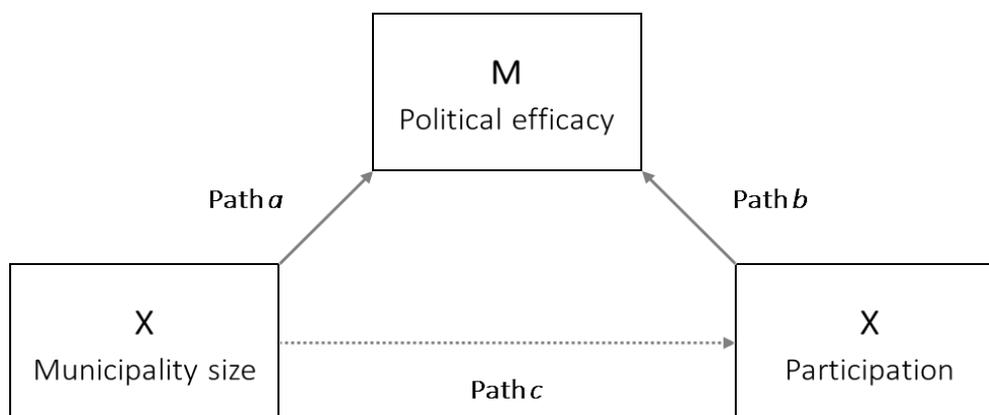


Figure 7.2. Indicative mediation model.

Note. The product of the a and b paths represent the mediated (or, indirect) effect. Path c represents the direct effect of the independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (Y), while the total effect is the sum of both indirect and direct pathways.

Several alternative methods exist for analysing mediation. The most common is the ‘causal steps’ approach, popularised by Baron and Kenny (1986), which seeks to infer whether mediation is occurring by tracing several steps in a logical model (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2007).

According to this approach, the researcher must first confirm the statistical significance of the total X–Y effect and of each of the constituent paths (a, b, c). Mediation is determined if the effect of X on Y decreases when controlling for the mediator. In this rubric, *full* mediation is said to occur if the independent variable’s coefficient decreases to the extent that it is no longer statistically significant. *Partial* mediation is said to occur when the independent variable’s coefficient decreases but remains statistically significant.

While beguilingly logical, the causal steps approach has, over the past decade, become subject to heavy criticism on a number of statistical and methodological grounds – in particular, its lack of statistical power and its inability to quantify (rather than merely infer the presence of) the indirect effect (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2007; Preacher and Hayes, 2008; Rijnhart et al., 2017; Rucker et al., 2011).

Instead of the causal steps approach, and in line with the recommendation of a growing chorus of statisticians (Fairchild and McDaniel, 2017; Hayes, 2009; Preacher and Hayes, 2008; Rijnhart et al., 2019; Rucker et al., 2011) – including Kenny (2018) himself, this study follows the ‘product of coefficients’ approach to assessing mediation. This approach focusses solely on the indirect pathway and is calculated by multiplying the coefficient of *path a* with the coefficient of *path b*, followed by a test to determine whether this *ab* product is statistically significantly different from zero. As Preacher and Hayes (2008: 9) reason:

“The logic behind the product of coefficients strategy is simple. If M mediates the effect of X on Y, then X should affect M and M should affect Y while controlling for X. If either a or b is zero, then their product will be zero. If both a and b are nonzero, as is the case if M mediates the X→Y relationship, then the product will be nonzero. The product of a and b will be further from zero as the strength of the indirect effect increases”.

Unlike the causal steps model, the product of coefficients approach does not carry the heavy assumption that all paths must be statistically significant (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2007; Rucker et al., 2011). Indeed, as Hayes (2009: 413) states, “it is possible for M to be causally between X and Y even if X and Y aren’t associated”. This may occur, for example, as a result of other, unmeasured variables exerting a countervailing indirect effect, suppressing the total (X–Y) relationship to the point of non-significance (Hayes, 2009; Rucker et al., 2011). It is also noted that when conceptualising mediation according to the product of coefficients framework, the term ‘full’ mediation is not applied, as there will almost always be a residual direct effect between X and Y (though often what appears as a residual direct effect is merely the combined effects of a host of additional unidentified mediators) (MacKinnon et al., 2007; Rucker et al., 2011). Instead,

the product of coefficients approach allows the size of the mediated effect to be more precisely calculated, in terms of the 'proportion mediated' (i.e., indirect effect divided by total effect).

Conducting a product of coefficients mediation analysis requires three steps:

- (1) A regression analysis¹¹⁶ is conducted regressing the mediator (M) against the independent variable (X). This produces the coefficient for path a.
- (2) A second regression analysis is conducted regressing the dependent variable (Y) on the mediating variable (M), controlling for the independent variable (X). This produces the coefficient for path b.
- (3) The indirect (or mediated) effect is determined as the product of the *a* and *b* path coefficients, and its statistical significance is tested by dividing this product (*ab*) by its standard error (as calculated using the Sobel Test (1982))¹¹⁷.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Examining the descriptive statistics in Table 7.3 provides some insight into the average levels of political efficacy and participation across the whole sample. Consistent with the literature (Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011), the political efficacy scales represent the sum (total) of the scores of their four constituent (1-5 score) Likert-based items. Thus, values on the summary IPE and EPE variables fall between four and 20, with 12 representing the midpoint (neutral) position. As shown in Table 7.3, the mean response for both political efficacy scales (IPE= 12.52, EPE= 12.99) in this sample falls slightly above this midpoint, indicating that respondents tend, in general, to have a marginally positive view of their own capabilities (IPE) and a slightly more positive view of their councils' responsiveness (EPE).

¹¹⁶ The product of coefficient approach is typically undertaken using either OLS regression or SEM – the two approaches perform equivalently (Preacher and Hayes, 2008; Rijnhart et al., 2017, 2019). It is also noted that Krull and MacKinnon (1999) has found that MLA regression performs equivalently to OLS regression when conducting this form of mediation analysis, particularly in intercept-only models as applied here.

¹¹⁷ While the Sobel Test remains perhaps the most common approach to testing the statistical significance of the *ab* pathway, some scholars do suggest using a (non-parametric) bootstrapping method for its improved statistical power (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). However, the Sobel Test does have the advantage of being less likely to commit a Type I error (false positive) and, as Koopman et al. (2015: 240) have found, in large samples (>140 cases) the Sobel Test "appears to satisfy necessary [parametric] assumptions, avoids exceeding acceptable Type I error rates, and provides a sufficient level of statistical power for testing mediation hypotheses".

In relation to respondents' engagement in the four acts of local political participation, which are measured dichotomously (1= participated; 0 = did not participate), more than half (60%) stated that they voted in the last election, and a quarter (25%) had contacted their local representative at least once over the past two years. The rates of meeting attendance and candidacy were notably lower, however, with 8% having attended a meeting and 6% having run for local office. In terms of overall participation, which is a summary measure of the four participation items and thus falls on a 0-4 scale, respondents engaged on average in 1.05 participatory activities over the past two years. However, this mean score disguises great variability: while 39.9% engaged in one activity, an almost equal number (31.7%) did not engage in any activity. At the other end of the spectrum, 20.5% engaged in two activities, 7.4% engaged in three activities and only 0.5% (n=2) engaged in all four activities over the period.

Table 7.3: Descriptive statistics of survey items

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N
IPE	12.52	3.76	4	20	535
EPE	12.99	3.63	4	20	535
Voting	.60	.491	0	1	421
Candidacy	.06	.232	0	1	420
Contact	.25	.433	0	1	531
Attendance	.08	.276	0	1	529
Overall participation	1.05	.928	0	4	419

Size and political efficacy

To answer **Sub-question 1** – *Do citizens of smaller municipalities have a higher sense of (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy than citizens of larger municipalities?* – separate linear MLA regression analyses were undertaken, first with IPE as the dependent variable regressed against municipality size as the independent variable, and second with EPE regressed against municipality size. Each analysis is conducted according to an identical design, including the same set of control variables.

Each MLA analysis comprises four models. As advised by Bickel (2007: 105) and following Andrews et al. (2019: 670–671), Denters et al. (2014: 39), Gendźwił and Swianiewicz (2016: 770) and Kelleher and Lowery (2009: 79), each analysis commenced with an 'empty' model (model 1), without independent or control variables. This model enables an analysis of within- and between-group variance of the dependent variable, in the form of the unconditional ICC. The ICC represents the proportion of total variability in the dependent variable that is attributable to

differences between municipalities, as opposed to differences between individuals within the same municipality (Bickel, 2007; Field, 2009)¹¹⁸. Next, model 2 provides the bivariate regression coefficient, which is a measure of the total effect of size on IPE/EPE without control variables. Models 3 and 4 add additional covariates to this model to control for individual-level effects (model 3), and contextual, or suburb/municipal/state-level effects (model 4). Any significant bivariate relationship (model 1) which is no longer significant after controlling for individual or contextual effects would indicate that any apparent differential between citizen's level of political efficacy in small and large municipalities is not due to the effect of size *per se*, but to demographic or contextual factors. However, a significant municipality size coefficient in the fully specified model 4 would indicate that size does have an effect upon citizens' levels of political efficacy, independent of any other (measured) effects.

Having regard to Table 7.4, the first finding of note is the relatively low ICC value in model 1, indicating that only 4.3% of the variability in IPE occurs between municipalities, compared with 95.7% of the variability occurring within municipalities (in other words, there is substantial variability in the level of IPE among citizens of the same municipality). With similarly low ICCs also found by Andrews et al. (2019: 671), Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz (2016: 770) and Kelleher and Lowery (2009: 80), it appears that individual-level factors, in aggregate, are by far the most important when predicting IPE. Nevertheless, while size may not be the primary determinant of IPE, it may still be an important factor in individuals' differences in IPE. Indeed, looking at the subsequent models, it is evident that municipality size does have a statistically significant negative effect on IPE in this sample. The significant negative bivariate coefficient in model 2 remains in the fully specified model 4, which controls for both individual and contextual variables (B= -.129, SE= .0460, p<.01). This statistically significant negative finding thus supports **Hypothesis H1**, which posited that *Citizens of smaller municipalities possess higher levels of internal political efficacy*.

¹¹⁸ In a linear model, the ICC is calculated as $r = \frac{\sigma_b^2}{\sigma_b^2 + \sigma_w^2}$ where σ_b^2 denotes the between-group variance and σ_w^2 denotes within group-variance (Bickel, 2007). In a logistic model, the ICC (in what is known as the *latent response formulation*) is calculated as $r = \frac{\sigma_b^2}{\sigma_b^2 + \frac{\pi^2}{3}}$ (Merlo et al., 2006, 2016).

Table 7.4. The effect of municipality size on internal political efficacy, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (bivariate)	Model 3 (indiv. controls)	Model 4 (contx. controls)
Size (log-n)		-0.172 (.0450)**	-0.092 (.0409)*	-0.129 (.0460)** [-.493]
Age			.206 (.0557)***	.204 (.0557)***
Residency length			.150 (.0431)**	.148 (.0431)**
Education level			.160 (.0413)***	.182 (.0424)***
Gender (1 = Female)			.037 (.0824)	.026 (.0826)
Employment status ^a				
Not employed			-.154 (.1415)	-.164 (.1412)
Casual			-.345 (.1388)*	-.347 (.1397)*
Part time			-.121 (.1190)	-.105 (.1193)
Retired			.042 (.1557)	.029 (.1556)
Student			-.569 (.1939)**	-.591 (.1937)**
Suburb SES				-.102 (.0511)*
LGA Pop Density				.002 (.0483)
State (1 = WA ^b)				-.042 (.0841)
Constant	.009 (.0539)	-.004 (.0452)	.085 (.0667)	.118 (.0800)
AIC ^c	1519.725	1509.124	1403.983	1399.776
ICC	.043			
N (individuals)	524	524	524	524
N (municipalities)	48	48	48	48

Note. Multilevel linear regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardised beta in square brackets for municipality size variable to enable effect size calculation.

^aReference category for employment status variables is ‘full time’.

^bWA denotes Western Australia

^cAIC (Akaike’s information criterion) is a measure of model fit for multilevel models. Lower values indicate relatively better model fit (Field, 2009: 304).

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Scrutinising the results further, it is evident that although the extent of variance that can be attributed to differences between municipalities is relatively small, the effect of municipality size is not inconsequential. Given that the municipality size variable has been log-transformed, the

unstandardised coefficient (-.493) can be interpreted in terms of relative change¹¹⁹. Specifically¹²⁰, a 50% increase in municipality size results in a decrease in the predicted level of IPE by $[-.493 * \ln(1.50) =] -.200$, while a doubling of population size results in a $[-.493 * \ln(2) =] -.342$ unit decrease in level of IPE on the 17-point scale. The difference in predicted IPE for citizens in a municipality with a population of 1,721 (the size of the smallest municipality in this study) and those in a municipality with a population of 220,249 (the size of the largest municipality in this study), an approximately 128-fold delta, is equivalent to a decrease in level of IPE by $[-.493 * \ln(128) =] -2.39$ on the 17-point IPE scale – a 13.5% difference¹²¹.

Comparing the standardised regression coefficients of the covariates in model 4, the negative effect of municipality size on citizens' sense of IPE is almost equivalent to the influence of residency length ($B = .148$), and is comparable to the effect of education ($B = .182$), though age appears of notably greater importance as a predictor of IPE ($B = .204$). As a predictor of IPE, municipality size is also more important than the SES status of the respondents' suburb ($B = -.102$) – which curiously is negatively related to IPE, suggesting that – all else equal – citizens of higher status suburbs actually feel a lower sense of IPE. This could perhaps be due to the comparative nature of IPE – one's sense of one's own abilities is evaluated not in a vacuum, but in comparison with those in one's social milieu.

The positive effect of age and education on IPE accords well with the theory – particularly Verba and colleagues' resources model (Brady et al., 1995). The results for occupational status also accord well with the resources model. Specifically, while the coefficients for the employment dummy variables (or, for that matter, state and gender dummy variables) cannot be compared with the other coefficients in terms of relative size, they can give an indication of the difference between people of different occupational status (or state of residence/gender). Most notably, compared to those in full-time employment, casual employees ($B = -.347$) and students ($B = -.591$) have a lower sense of IPE. It may be said that the lower level of self-reported IPE among students, in particular, demonstrates a sense of honest (and perhaps even modest) self-reflection that repudiates the self-assured characterisation that is often popularly attributed to the millennial generation.

¹¹⁹ While standardised coefficients enable comparison of relative effect size among variables, unstandardised coefficients are more readily interpretable (for example, given that the municipality size variable is log-transformed, the standardised coefficient for IPE would represent the change in level of IPE due to a one standard deviation increase in the log of municipality size).

¹²⁰ Following the approach of Ford (2018).

¹²¹ Putting this into further perspective, a drop of 2 points in the distribution of IPE is the equivalent to a drop from the 72nd percentile of respondents to the median or from the median to the 34th percentile.

Table 7.5. The effect of municipality size on external political efficacy, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (bivariate)	Model 3 (indiv. controls)	Model 4 (contx. controls)
Size (log-n)		-.115 (.0433)*	-.078 (.0445)	-.075 (.0504) [-.276]
Age			.111 (.0606)	.107 (.0609)
Residency length			-.036 (.0470)	-.037 (.0471)
Education level			.038 (.0450)	.036 (.0464)
Gender (1 = Female)			-.089 (.0898)	-.094 (.0904)
Employment status ^a				
Not employed			.151 (.1541)	.1532 (.1545)
Casual			-.103 (.1512)	-.078 (.1528)
Part time			.180 (.1296)	.179 (.1306)
Retired			.307 (.1696)	.325 (.1703)
Student			.158 (.2112)	.166 (.2119)
Suburb SES				.052 (.0560)
LGA Pop Density				-.047 (.0528)
State (1 = WA)				.037 (.0920)
Constant	.003 (.0455)	-.001 (.0433)	-.034 (.0727)	-.055 (.0876)
AIC	1523.018	1518.181	1493.806	1494.036
ICC	.008			
N (individuals)	535	535	526	524
N (municipalities)	48	48	48	48

Note. Multilevel linear regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardised beta in square brackets for municipality size variable to enable effect size calculation.

^aReference category for employment status variables is ‘full time’.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Turning to the relationship between municipality size and EPE, as presented in Table 7.5, the first finding of note is the even smaller ICC. Prima facie, one would have thought that differences between municipalities – whether they be due to size or simply differences in government performance – would have played a more prominent role in determining individuals’ sense of EPE. However, model 1 in Table 7.5 shows a much smaller ICC coefficient (0.8%) than was found for IPE (4.3%). This suggests either that council responsiveness doesn’t materially differ between municipalities, or that citizens’ perception of their council’s responsiveness is due more to their own subjective pre-conceptions than to any objective evaluation of actual council performance. While municipality size does register a statistically significant negative effect on individuals’ sense

of EPE in the bivariate analysis (model 2), this effect becomes insignificant when individual (model 3) and contextual (model 4) effects are controlled for¹²². In summary, **Hypothesis H2**, which posited that *Citizens of smaller municipalities possess higher levels of external political efficacy*, fails to find support.

Size and participation

To examine the effect of municipality size on participation, and thus answer **Sub-question 2a**, *Do citizens of smaller municipalities participate to a greater extent in local political affairs?*, a series of five multilevel regression analyses were undertaken. Applying the same four-model design as above, with the same set of control variables, this section begins by analysing the effect of municipality size on 'Overall Participation' (Table 7.6). Being a measure of how active citizens have been over the past two years – from 'complete activists' who have engaged in all four activities, to 'the inactives', who have not engaged in any activity – this analysis provides an initial indication as to whether municipality size has an effect upon individuals' overall predilection to participate. The subsequent four analyses (Table 7.7) report the effect of municipality size upon citizens' engagement in each individual participatory act – voting, candidacy, contacting, and meeting attendance. These analyses enable an examination of the differential effect that size may exert upon different types of participation.

Looking first at Table 7.6, and the overall relationship between size and participation – as measured by the number of participatory acts engaged in over the past two years – we see a negative and statistically significant size-effect both in bivariate (model 2) and when controlling for individual and contextual effects (model 4) ($B = -.225$, $SE = .0565$, $p < .001$). That is, as size increases, citizens appear to be less actively engaged in local politics generally. The negative effect of municipality size is stronger than for all other covariates – none of which, contrary to expectations (Brady et al., 1995; Finifter and Abramson, 1975; Verba and Nie, 1972), are statistically significant. As with the previous analyses, this effect can be quantified by calculating relative change – that is, a 50% increase in municipality size results in a reduction in the number of acts engaged in by $[-.212 * \ln(1.50)] = -.086$, while a doubling of population size results in a $[-.212 * \ln(2)] = -.152$ point reduction. The model predicts that citizens in the largest municipality included in this study (pop=220,249), which is approximately 128 times larger than the smallest municipality, will engage in 1.03 fewer acts compared with citizens of the smallest municipality (pop=1,721) [i.e. $-.212 * \ln(128) = -1.03$].

¹²² None of these controls are themselves statistically significant predictors of EPE.

This result provides support to **Hypothesis H3**, that *citizens of smaller municipalities participate to a greater extent in local electoral politics than citizens of larger municipalities.*

Table 7.6. The effect of municipality size on overall participation, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (bivariate)	Model 3 (indiv. controls)	Model 4 (contx. controls)
Size (log-n)		-.198 (.0479)***	-.181 (.0499)***	-.225 (.0565)*** [-.212]
Age			.086 (.0682)	.093 (.0683)
Residency length			.060 (.0627)	.066 (.0632)
Education level			-.041 (.0504)	-.024 (.0517)
Gender (1 = Female)			.129 (.0992)	.118 (.0999)
Employment status ^a				
Not employed			-.045 (.1775)	-.052 (.1777)
Casual			.007 (.1709)	.006 (.1731)
Part time			.064 (.1442)	.064 (.1454)
Retired			.1581 (.1785)	.1467 (.1792)
Student			.086 (.2340)	.0915 (.2343)
Suburb SES				-.094 (.0622)
LGA Pop Density				-.020 (.0607)
State (1 = WA)				.064 (.1025)
Constant	.008 (.0543)	-.006 (.0478)	-.141 (.0823)	-.170 (.0988)
AIC	1193.431	1179.250	1166.027	1164.997
ICC	.024			
N (individuals)	411	411	411	411
N (municipalities)	48	48	48	48

Note. Multilevel linear regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardised beta in square brackets for municipality size variable to enable effect size calculation.

^aReference category for employment status variables is ‘full time’.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Next, Table 7.7 provides the results of four multilevel logistic regression analyses, predicting the effect of municipality size on each individual act of participation – voting, candidacy, contacting and meeting attendance. The results shown in Table 7.7 relate to the fully specified model in each case (model 4), with full regression output (including the ‘empty’ and bivariate models) provided in Appendix 7.2. Each analysis in Table 7.7 includes the standard set of individual and contextual

control variables. For the voting analysis, the appendix provides a fifth model, which includes a dummy variable for the presence of a mayoral campaign.

Table 7.7. The effect of municipality size on individual participatory acts, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Voting	Candidacy	Contacting	Meeting attendance
Size (log-n)	-.201 (.1238) [-.204]	-.172 (.2428) [-.175]	-.309 (.1312)* [-.314]	-.545 (.1633)** [-.554]
Age	.045 (.1465)	-.268 (.2968)	.309 (.1536)*	.207 (.2293)
Residency length	-.029 (.1358)	-.035 (.2604)	.479 (.1278)***	.311 (.1895)
Education level	.053 (.1114)	-.133 (.2252)	-.072 (.1164)	.030 (.1741)
Gender (1 = Female)	.318 (.2143)	-.205 (.4249)	.149 (.2279)	.210 (.3337)
Employment status ^a				
Not employed	-.129 (.3768)	-.396 (.8665)	-.380 (.4147)	.149 (.5468)
Casual	.137 (.3668)	-.261 (.7614)	-.123 (.4025)	-.489 (.6723)
Part time	.225 (.3141)	.735 (.5327)	-.345 (.3424)	-.271 (.4945)
Retired	.552 (.3961)	-.225 (.8769)	.126 (.3902)	-.236 (.5535)
Student	.258 (.5056)	-.387 (1.0246)	.381 (.5371)	-.145 (.9468)
Suburb SES	-.237 (.1346)	.032 (.2623)	-.163 (.1477)	.055 (.2335)
LGA Pop Density	-.097 (.1302)	.023 (.2540)	.099 (.1416)	-.080 (.1982)
State (1 = WA)	.174 (.2205)	-.139 (.4342)	-.016 (.2431)	.053 (.3424)
Constant	-.012 (.2096)	-2.538 (.4105)***	-1.228 (.2282)***	-2.540 (.3355)***
N (individuals)	413	412	520	518
N (municipalities)	47	47	48	48

Note. Multilevel logistic regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardised beta in square brackets for municipality size variable to enable effect size calculation. Full regression output for each participatory act is provided in Appendix 7.2.

^aReference category for employment status variables is 'full time'.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Examining Table 7.7, it appears that despite the overall negative relationship between municipality size and electoral participation, size does not affect all modes of participation equally. Specifically, while the standardised coefficients for municipality size are negative for all acts of participation, this relationship is statistically significant only for the acts of contacting ($B = -.309$, $SE = .1312$, $p < .05$) and meeting attendance ($B = -.545$, $SE = .1633$, $p < .01$).

Comparing standardised coefficients for covariates in column four, municipality size's effect on respondents' log odds of contacting their local councillor is equal to the effect of age, and greater than the effect of education (which is, interestingly, not statistically significant). Of all included covariates, only residency length eclipses municipality size as a predictor of contacting. The effect of municipality size on meeting attendance (column five) is even stronger. Not only is its standardised regression coefficient substantially larger than that of contacting, but size is a stronger predictor of meeting attendance than any other individual or contextual covariate (indeed, no other variable in column five reaches statistical significance).

To interpret the magnitude of the size-effect, we turn to the unstandardised regression coefficients – which represent the change in the logit of the outcome variable associated with a one percent change in the predictor variable (where the logit of the outcome represents the natural logarithm of the odds of the outcome occurring)¹²³ (Field, 2009). A doubling of municipality size, therefore, would lower the odds of contacting by a factor of $[\exp(-.314 \cdot \ln(2)) = 0.804]$, or 20%, and lower the odds of meeting attendance by a factor of $[\exp(-.554 \cdot \ln(2)) = 0.681]$, or 32%. The model predicts that citizens in the largest municipality included in this study (pop=220,249), will be 78% less likely to contact their representatives $[\exp(-.314 \cdot \ln(128)) = 0.218]$, and 93% less likely to attend meetings $[\exp(-.554 \cdot \ln(128)) = 0.068]$, than citizens of the smallest municipality (pop=1,721).

As noted, the relationships between municipality size and voting and municipality size and candidacy are not statistically significant¹²⁴. The failure to detect a size relationship for either of these variables is particularly curious given that these acts represent the polar extremes of the political participation spectrum: voting is a private act defined by its simplicity and low task difficulty, while candidacy is a public act, typically acknowledged as the most difficult and demanding form of participation. If, **Hypothesis H4a**¹²⁵ were astute, then size should be weakly related to voting (a relatively simple act), moderately related to contacting and meeting attendance, and strongly related to candidacy (a relatively difficult act). If, on the other hand,

¹²³ Thus, the odds ratio represents the exponent of the unstandardised coefficient (or logit). Methods for calculating and interpreting logged coefficients are discussed in Barrera-Gómez and Basagaña (2015).

¹²⁴ Despite theoretical expectation that a mayoral campaign would increase interest and therefore turnout in local elections, the addition of the mayoral campaign dummy variable (see Appendix 7.1) had little effect on the size-voting relationship; size remained statistically insignificant and its coefficient was only marginally (downwardly) affected (from -.201 to -.180).

¹²⁵ **H4a:** *Due to the mediating effect of internal political efficacy, the negative effect of municipality size should be stronger for more difficult modes of participation.*

Hypothesis H4b¹²⁶ were correct, size should be strongly related to the private acts of voting and contacting and weakly related to the public acts of candidacy and meeting attendance. As it turns out, neither hypothesis is supported.

One potential explanation for this lack of statistically significant relationship between size and candidacy is the relatively small number of YES responses (n=24, or 5.7%), yielding insufficient power to detect a statistically significant effect (Olvera Astivia et al., 2019). Additionally, voting may have been overreported as a result of some respondents confusing voting in state or federal elections with voting in local elections (despite the survey question specifically referring to ‘council’ elections)¹²⁷. If the pattern of overreporting was biased only slightly in favour of larger municipalities, then any evident size-effect in the sample would be diminished. Fortunately, the relationship between municipality size, voting and candidacy can be re-tested, or triangulated, using electoral data.

Triangulation analysis (secondary electoral data)

Table 7.8 provides the multivariate regression estimates for voter turnout and candidacy rate (number of candidates per 1000 population), relating to the latest election in each state at the time the surveys were being conducted (2014 in SA and 2017 in WA). This permits a direct comparison with the survey data, where participants were asked whether they voted or stood for election at the last election, and thus also a test of the external validity of the survey findings. OLS multiple regression is used for these analyses instead of MLA, as the (aggregated) data are inherently single level (and level-2 variables cannot be used as dependent variables in two-level MLA analyses). Both models control for a number of demographic indicators aggregated to the municipal level. The same diagnostic tests that were undertaken for the MLA analyses are also undertaken for the OLS analyses, with no notable deviations from normality, homoscedasticity, linearity, multicollinearity, and independence found¹²⁸.

¹²⁶ **H4b:** *Due to the mediating effect of external political efficacy, the negative effect of municipality size should be stronger for private rather than public modes of participation.*

¹²⁷ Indeed, this possibility becomes more plausible when it is revealed that eight people who attempted to identify the name of their council confused their council with their state or federal electorate.

¹²⁸ As mentioned earlier, in relation to the analysis of the relationship between municipality size and the candidacy rate, the Cook’s distance was found to be marginally above 1, indicating that outliers may be influencing the model. However, testing the effect of this outlier by running an analysis with the case omitted did not affect the statistical significance level of the municipality size coefficient. As such, the full dataset (including outlier) is retained for this analysis.

Table 7.8. The effect of municipality size on voter turnout and candidacy rate, electoral data, regression results

Independent variables	Voter turnout %	Candidacy rate
Size (log-n)	-.442 (.085)*** [-2.917]	-.950 (.077)*** [-.716]
Municipality median age	.120 (.096)	.026 (.081)
Municipality SES	.085 (.109)	-.087 (.098)
Municipality pop. density	.117 (.093)	-.072 (.085)
Mayoral election (1 = held)	.655 (.171)***	n/a
State (1 = WA)	1.113 (.191)***	-.264 (.173)
Constant	-.955 (.161)***	.171 (.126)
Adjusted R ²	.76	.80
F	25.23***	36.90***
N (municipalities)	48	47

*Note. Ordinary least squares, multiple linear regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardised betas in square brackets for municipality size variable. Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.*

As provided in Table 7.8, the results of the OLS analyses of electoral data do appear to differ in magnitude from the earlier analyses based on the self-reported voting and candidacy responses. Both voter turnout ($B = -.442$, $SE = .085$, $p < .001$) and candidacy rate ($B = -.950$, $SE = .077$, $p < .001$) are statistically significantly negatively related to municipality size. Comparing standardised coefficients, the effect of size is stronger for candidacy than for voting, in accord with **Hypothesis H4a**. In both cases, however, size is a stronger predictor of participation than municipality median age, SES, and population density. In relation to the voter turnout analysis, the dummy variable for mayoral election is statistically significant, indicating that the presence of a mayoral campaign lifts voter turnout. The state dummy variable is also significant, indicating that voter turnout is, on average, higher in metropolitan WA compared with SA.

Effect sizes can be discerned using the unstandardised coefficients, in a similar manner to the previous multilevel linear analyses. Specifically, a doubling of municipality size results in a decrease in voter turnout by $[-2.917 \cdot \ln(2)] = -2.02$ percentage points, and a decrease in the candidacy rate by $[-.716 \cdot \ln(2)] = -0.50$ candidates per 1000 electors. The difference in predicted voter turnout and candidacy rate for the smallest municipality (pop= 1,721) and the largest municipality (pop= 220,249), an approximately 128-fold delta, is equivalent to a decrease in voter turnout by $[-2.917 \cdot \ln(128)] = -14.15$ percentage points, and a decrease in candidacy rate by $[-.716 \cdot \ln(128)] = -3.47$ candidates per 1000 electors.

To test the robustness of these single year results¹²⁹, repeated measures analyses were also conducted, incorporating electoral data from the most recent three elections for which data are available (SA: 2010, 2014, 2018; WA: 2013, 2015, 2017). To account for non-independence of observations (given that the repeated observations derive from the same municipality there is likely to be within-group correlation), mixed effects regression with random intercepts is utilised rather than OLS. Building upon the statistical principles of MLA, mixed effects analysis has emerged as well-accepted, efficient, flexible and robust method of modelling repeated measures data (Field, 2009; Liu et al., 2008; Steele, 2008; Van Der Leeden, 1998). The results of these analyses, provided in Appendix 7.2, confirm the results of the single year OLS analyses. Specifically, when the additional data points from the extra election cycles are added to the model, municipality size remains negatively and statistically significantly related to both the voter turnout rate and the candidacy rate.

In summary, the analyses of electoral data were able to detect statistically significant effects of municipality size that could not be discerned from the survey data alone. This indicates that the survey data has slightly *underestimated* the negative effect of municipality size on voting and candidacy – what is known as a type II error. In other words, the results based on the survey data appear to be conservative estimates of the real-world municipality size–participation relationships.

Size–efficacy–participation: the indirect effect of size

In addition to asking whether (a) citizens of smaller municipalities participate to a greater extent in local political affairs, **Sub question 2** asked whether this higher predilection to participate is (b) *due to the mediating effects of political efficacy?* Negative relationships may have been found between size and participation, but it does not necessarily follow that political efficacy had any bearing upon these relationships. As has been noted previously, individuals’ decision to participate may be driven by a range of factors, and non-participation may not necessarily mean that the individual is ‘alienated’. Therefore, it is important to determine, statistically, whether patterns of participation or non-participation are indeed influenced by an individual’s sense of political efficacy.

To determine whether political efficacy does, indeed, exert a mediating (or indirect) effect in the size-participation relationship, one mediation analysis is conducted for each dimension of political

¹²⁹ Following the examples of Drew and Dollery (2016), and Zeedan (2017).

efficacy and each mode of participation. As noted earlier in this chapter, the mediation analyses are conducted according to the 'products of coefficients' approach, which relies on the results of two separate regression analyses. First, the effect of municipality size (X) on political efficacy (M) is measured. Then, the effect of political efficacy (M) on participation (Y) is measured, controlling for the effect of size (X). Regression coefficients are estimated using multilevel regression (linear and logistic), while the Sobel Test¹³⁰ is used to determine whether the product of the indirect pathway (*ab coefficient*) is significantly different from zero. To ensure consistency – following Denters et al. (2014: 37) and Krull and MacKinnon (1999: 438) – the same set of demographic and contextual control variables are included in all regression analyses as per the previous multilevel analyses.

All regression results for the mediation analyses are provided in Appendix 7.3. By means of summarising these results, as suggested by Fairchild et al. (2017) and as demonstrated by Denters et al. (2014), the standardised regression coefficients for each path are presented via illustrative path diagrams. Figure 7.3 presents the results with IPE as the mediating variable, while Figure 7.4 presents the results with EPE as the mediating variable.

Referring to Figure 7.3 and the associated tables in Appendix 7.3, IPE is posited as a mediating variable between municipality size and political participation. The path *a* coefficient represents the effect of municipality size on IPE, which, as has already been found earlier in this chapter, is negative and statistically significant ($B = -.129, p < .01$). The path *b* coefficients in Figure 7.3 represent the effect of IPE on each separate act of participation (including overall participation), controlling for municipality size. The standardised regression coefficients for overall participation (.315, $p < .001$), voting (.399, $p < .01$), meeting attendance (.477, $p < .05$) and contacting (.818, $p < .001$) are all statistically significant, while the coefficient for candidacy (-.015) is non-significant.

¹³⁰ Preacher and Leonardelli's (2010) calculator is used to perform the Sobel Test.

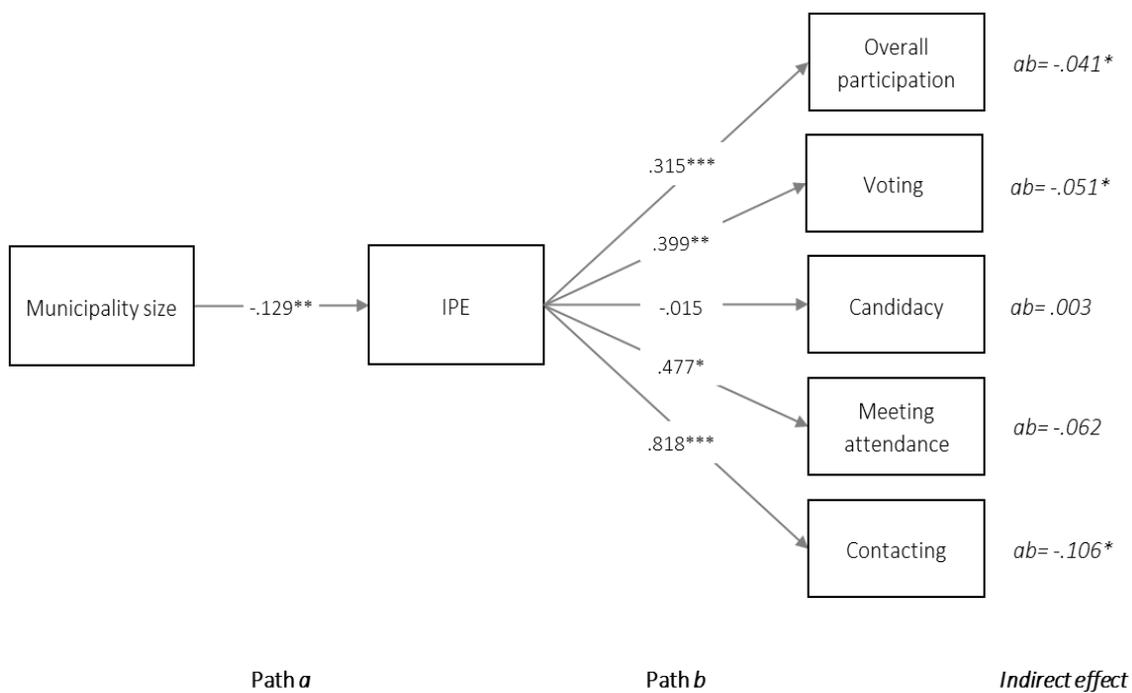


Figure 7.3. Internal political efficacy indirect effect, illustrative path diagram.

Note. Standardised coefficients are presented. Path a and b coefficients are estimated with the standard set of control variables, while the path b coefficient also includes 'municipality size' as a control variable. Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The estimate for the mediated (indirect) effect is represented by the product of the ab path coefficients. Dividing the resulting ab coefficients by their standard errors, and comparing this ratio to the standard normal distribution (via the Sobel Test), enables a determination as to whether the mediated effect is significantly different from zero. The resulting calculations indicate that IPE significantly mediates the effect of municipality size on overall participation, voting and contacting (each at the $p < 0.5$ level), but does not mediate the effect of size on candidacy or meeting attendance. Proportion-mediated effect size estimates for the individual mediation pathways, calculated by dividing the indirect effect (ab) by the total effect¹³¹, indicates that IPE explains 18% of the total effect of municipality size on overall participation, 26% of the total effect of size on voting, and 34% of the total effect of size on contacting.

These findings thus provide some support to **Hypothesis H4**, which posited that *internal and external political efficacy [would] mediate the negative relationship between municipality size and political participation*. Specifically, IPE can be said to partially mediate overall levels of participation, as well as the particular acts of voting and contacting. Interestingly, despite size exerting a relatively large total effect on meeting attendance (as found earlier), and despite both a and b paths being statistically significant, the mediation test for the size–meeting attendance

¹³¹ As outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008: 22).

relationship failed to achieve statistical significance, due to a relatively large standard error for the *b* path coefficient (see Appendix 7.3). While the large standard error may be attributed to the relatively small sample of YES respondents ($n= 44$), the finding also indicates that another unidentified mediator is largely responsible for the negative size–meeting attendance relationship. Future speculation on what this variable may be would best begin by examining small-is-beautiful arguments.

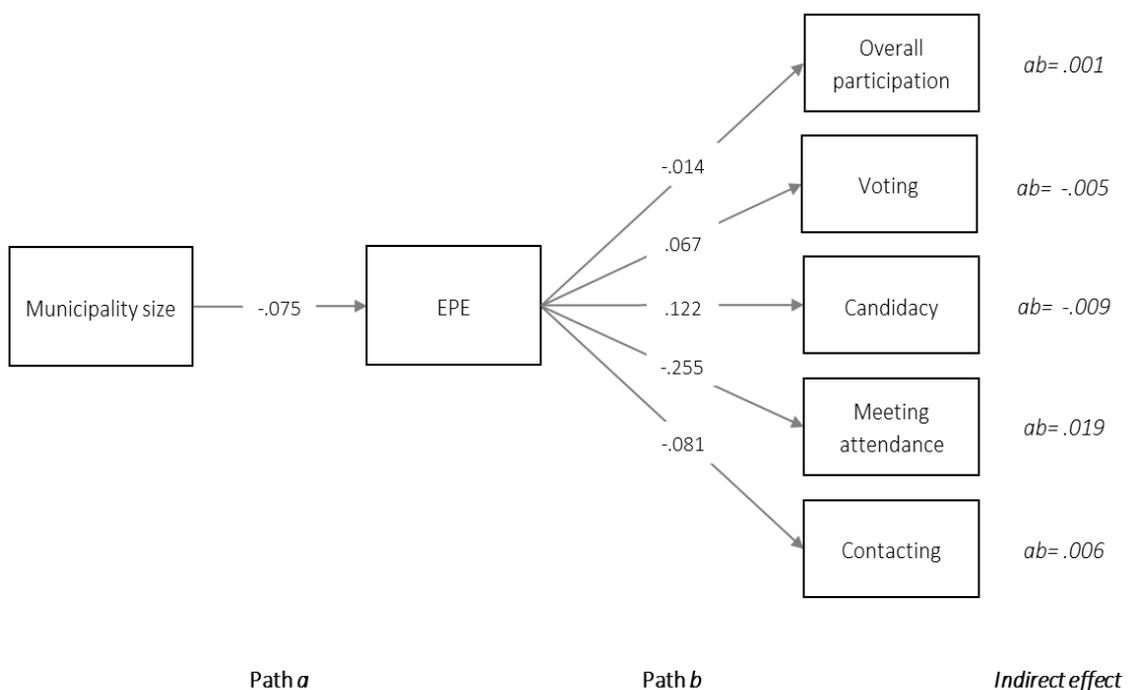


Figure 7.4. External political efficacy indirect effect, illustrative path diagram.

Note. Standardised coefficients are presented. Path *a* and *b* coefficients are estimated with the standard set of control variables, while the path *b* coefficient also includes ‘municipality size’ as a control variable. Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Referring to Figure 7.4 and the associated tables in Appendix 7.3, EPE is posited as a mediating variable between municipality size and political participation. Path *a* represents the effect of municipality size on EPE, which is statistically insignificant ($B = -.075$). This indicates, as has already been established, that municipality size has no effect on EPE. The *b* paths in Figure 7.4 represent the effect of EPE on each separate act of participation (including overall participation), controlling for municipality size. The standardised regression coefficients are all statistically insignificant, indicating that EPE has no effect on any form of participation measured here¹³². The estimates for the indirect effect, as represented by the *ab* coefficients, are also all statistically insignificant,

¹³² Overall, the stronger relationship between IPE and participation than between EPE and participation is consistent with the theoretical literature (see Chapter 4), which has long posited that IPE – given that it reflects relatively stable personality traits – would be a more reliable predictor of all forms of political participation (Oh and Lim, 2017; Shingles, 1981).

indicating that EPE does not mediate the relationship between municipality size and any of the participation variables. Thus, while **Hypothesis H4** was partially correct in predicting that IPE would mediate the negative size–participation relationship, its prediction that EPE would also contribute to the mediation of the size effect is unsupported.

Supplementary analysis: explaining the absence of an EPE relationship

While the above results accord with both the theory and the international empirical literature in relation to the effect of size on IPE and (to partial extent) IPE on participation, the lack of any size–EPE relationship is anomalous. As was shown in Chapter 5, and in line with the small-is-beautiful assumptions, most international studies have found a negative size–EPE relationship. Indeed, Andrews et al. (2019) found that the between-municipality variance in levels of EPE in the Welsh context is even greater than for levels of IPE (as indicated by a higher ICC statistic) – the opposite of the finding in this study. Interestingly, however, the only other Australian study to have investigated the size–EPE link, Soul (2000), also did not find a size–EPE relationship. This study marks the second time such a null finding has been made in the Australian context.

Two explanations for the lack of a size–EPE relationship appear possible. First, it may be that respondents’ self-reports are objective and accurate interpretations of the actual situation, and that representatives in smaller municipalities fail to take advantage of their greater proximity, while those in larger municipalities are able to maintain a relatively high level of responsiveness despite their larger constituency sizes. The second possible explanation may be that rather than offering an objective evaluation of council responsiveness, citizens of smaller municipalities may simply be, systematically, unduly critical of their councils’ performance, and have higher expectations when it comes to responsiveness. Determining which explanation is correct will require assessing whether or not respondents’ subjective sense of EPE is in accord with some more objective measure of council responsiveness.

Two supplementary questions included in the intercept survey offer themselves as candidates for proxy indicators of ‘objective responsiveness’. These are, specifically:

- In the past two years, have you participated in a formal community consultation exercise run by council staff to gather community feedback on a particular issue (e.g., via surveys, workshops, street-corner meetings, etc.)? [Yes/No]
- In the past two years, has a local councillor or mayor/shire president contacted you to seek your views? [Yes/No]

Both questions, in different ways, provide a measure of councils' efforts to be responsive to their citizens; to provide avenues through which citizens can air their voice and influence policy. Admittedly, these are incomplete indicators of 'objective' responsiveness; they are, for example, measures of 'input responsiveness', as opposed to 'output responsiveness' (the latter would include indicators such as councillor competence and capability, and service output metrics) (Bluhdorn and Jun, 2007). Moreover, it is acknowledged that the first question is not directly a measure of councils' engagement efforts, but of citizens' willingness to engage in them. Though, as citizens who do participate can only do so if the opportunities exist, this measure does at least provide an indication of responsiveness; any glaring differences in council engagement efforts between small and large municipalities would likely to show up in the data¹³³.

Taken together, these two measures should at least allow us to inch closer towards understanding whether the null size–EPE finding is the result of the first or the second explanation. Specifically, by regressing 'municipality size' against these measures, it should be possible to determine whether 'objective' responsiveness differs according to municipality size, and whether this represents an incongruity with the null size–EPE finding. To this end, two MLA regression analyses have been conducted with output provided in Table 7.9. The full set of standard control variables are applied in all models, though only the variable of interest (municipality size) is shown in the table (see Appendix 7.4 for the full regression results).

Table 7.9. The effect of municipality size on councillor-initiated contact and participation in community consultation exercises, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Participation in consultation exercise	Councillor-initiated contact
Size (log)	-.210 (.1351)	-.351 (.1271)**
N (individuals)	519	520
N (municipalities)	48	48

Note. Multilevel logistic regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Full regression output for each participatory act (including the 'empty' and bivariate models) is provided in Appendix 7.4.

*Level of significance: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001*

¹³³ A more direct measure of 'objective' responsiveness would require data sourced from each council reporting on their engagement initiatives.

A number of inferences may be made from the findings reported in Table 7.9. First, the results presented in the second column indicate that municipality size has no bearing upon whether citizens engage in community consultation exercises. This null-finding is in accord with the null size-EPE finding, providing some evidence that citizens' subjective assessment of their council's responsiveness accords with the objective situation. However, it should be noted that the null-finding here may also represent a point of concern for proponents of amalgamation. As will be discussed in the next chapter, local government reform commissions have made much of the potential for 'enhanced community engagement' to offset any potential responsiveness deficit in larger/amalgamated municipalities (NSW Local Government Review Panel, 2013; Western Australia Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel, 2012). The finding in column two suggests, however, that levels of participation via community engagement are no higher in larger municipalities than they are in smaller municipalities.

By contrast, the results presented in column three indicate that citizens of smaller municipalities are indeed more likely to be contacted by their local elected representatives than are citizens of larger municipalities ($B = -.351$, $SE = .1271$, $p < .01$). This finding, which accords with the similar finding by Abelson (1981) in a Sydney metropolitan context, confirms the widely held assumption that local representation (i.e. delegate style representation) is compromised in larger municipalities (Burdess and O'Toole, 2004; Hearfield and Dollery, 2009). When considering this from a purely logistical perspective, this is an unsurprising result. As Dahl (2015) has argued, time is a finite resource, and as constituency size increases, it becomes increasingly infeasible to meet with a substantial proportion of the electorate. It should be noted, however, that the question did not specify how the contact needed to have taken place – indeed, the contact could have taken place via the telephone, post, or email, which are much less constrained by time.

These results suggest, then, that despite a higher degree of reciprocal contact between citizens of smaller municipalities and their representatives (contact to and from representatives), this does not translate into an increased sense of EPE. One explanation for this incongruity may be that the greater level of access that citizens of smaller municipalities have to their local representatives is not translating into increased councillor responsiveness – and yet despite this, these citizens persist in their attempts to influence their representatives. Another, perhaps more reasonable and likely deduction, however, is simply that citizens of smaller municipalities – being closer and more engaged in local affairs – have a more accurate, and thus more moderate view of the performance of their representatives. As for citizens of larger municipalities, it may also be true that despite their lower average levels of IPE, lower levels of participation and less reciprocal contact with their representatives, they may, as Citrin (1977: 383) has hypothesised, "blame

themselves...” not the system “...for their lack of [internal] political efficacy”. Undoubtedly, further empirical research will be necessary to illuminate this discussion and explain the apparent lack of a size–EPE relationship in the Australian context.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter go a long way towards affirming the small-is-beautiful assumptions laid out in Chapter 5. As predicted by **Hypothesis H1**, municipality size has been found to be negatively related to citizens’ feelings of IPE. In other words, citizens of smaller municipalities tend to regard themselves as being more capable of participating effectively in local political affairs. The negative relationship between size and political (electoral) participation also confirms **Hypothesis H3**, with size found to be negatively related to citizens’ overall predilection to participate, as measured by the number of participatory acts engaged in over the preceding two years. More particularly, analysis of survey data revealed that citizens of smaller municipalities are more likely to contact their local mayor/councillor and attend council meetings, while analysis of electoral data revealed that voter turnout rates and candidacy rates (number of candidates per 1000 population) are higher in smaller municipalities.

In partial support of **Hypotheses H4**, there is also evidence that IPE mediates the effect of municipality size on participation. Specifically, the negative relationship between size and citizens’ overall level of participation, as well as the relationships between size and voting and size and contacting, were all partially mediated by IPE. In other words, citizens of smaller municipalities tend to feel a greater sense of IPE, and partly as a result of this greater sense of IPE, they tend to participate more often in local political affairs. **Hypothesis H4a**, on the other hand, failed to find support. It predicted that – as a result of the mediating influence of IPE – the negative effect of size would be stronger for the more difficult acts of participation. However, no such pattern could be discerned from analysis of the survey data.

In addition, the analyses failed to find support for **Hypothesis H2** – the size of a municipality does not appear to influence individuals’ sense of EPE. Supplemental analyses sought to discern the reason for this, with tentative evidence suggesting that citizens of smaller municipalities may be more aware and thus critical of the responsiveness of their elected members, thus offsetting the subjective benefits they glean from increased access to their representatives. Further research would be required before anything more definitive could be inferred in this regard, however. Finally, with no evidence that EPE mediates any of the size–participation relationships, and no

evidence of a differential effect of size contingent upon whether the participatory act is private or publicly oriented, related **Hypothesis H4b** also failed to garner support.

As well as confirming much of the small-is-beautiful account, it can be reasonably concluded from the analyses in this chapter that large-is-lively arguments oversell the participatory virtues of large municipalities. In particular, the findings provide no support for the large-is-lively contention that increased levels of political interest and competition in larger municipalities would lead to higher levels of mobilisation and thus participation – at least not in the SA and WA contexts, where political parties do not play an overt role in local politics. Specifically, no positive associations were found between municipality size and political efficacy or between municipality size and political participation.

Study limitations

As with any quantitative undertaking, it must be noted that this study has several limitations that are necessary to consider when interpreting and drawing inferences from the findings. The first, of course, is that of geographic scope. The data upon which these findings rest was drawn from citizens of metropolitan municipalities in two states of Australia. Generalisations to some other contexts (particularly rural contexts) may not therefore be appropriate – although, as the social and political contexts of these metropolises are (it is argued) reasonably typical of Australian urban experience, generalisations to other Australian capital cities would appear feasible. In similar manner, generalisations will also be limited by the size of municipal units included in this study. Specifically, with the largest municipality in this study having a population of 220,249, nothing can be inferred regarding the potential effect of municipality size above this upper threshold. To broaden our understanding of the effect of municipality size in Australia, further studies from a range of rural and urban contexts would be beneficial.

Second, as was emphasised in the previous chapter, the (survey) sample upon which these statistical analyses have been based is non-probability in nature. In other words, it is not strictly a random sample. Thus, despite extensive efforts to minimise sampling bias and to control for spurious effects, any inferences about the generalisability of the findings to the wider population should be read with care. While the evidence presented here should indeed be regarded as adding to the accumulation of knowledge in the iterative and collaborative exercise of model building and theory testing (Kriska et al., 2013), as Lades et al. (2020) have acknowledged in relation to their own non-probability based study, research based on probability samples remains essential in order to make definitive conclusions about the democratic effects of municipality size

in Australia. The present work is not a substitute for such endeavours, but it does offer indicative findings and a tested analytical framework upon which to base future, confirmatory, probabilistic research.

Third, and related to the above, while extensive steps were taken to minimise sampling and measurement bias, and while the Harman Single Factor Test and the Correlated Marker Variable Test indicated no evidence of common method bias in the survey responses, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that some degree of measurement error may remain which may affect the external validity of the findings. For instance, the triangulation analysis, which analysed the effect of municipality size on voting and candidacy utilising electoral data, does indicate a slight divergence between the sample and the population. However, the analysis also indicated that to the extent the survey data are slightly biased, they are nevertheless conservative, or underestimates (rather than over-estimates) of the real-world negative size-participation relationships.

Fourth, the results of the mediation analyses are qualified. The issue here is that mediation implies a causal pathway and in order to make inferences of causality it is generally necessary to establish that the cause occurred before the effect. Achieving certainty as regards temporal precedence, however, generally necessitates longitudinal data, or the manipulation of variables in an experimental setting. When mediation analyses are carried out on cross-sectional data – as indeed they often are – Preacher and Hayes (2008: 21) suggest that the conclusion should be tempered: “frequently the best that can be claimed is that the data are consistent with (or do not contradict) the hypothesis of mediation”. To confirm the findings of the present study, future work would benefit from longitudinal data, where changes in levels of political efficacy and participation before and after a series of municipal amalgamations or de-amalgamations could be assessed (such as by utilising regression-based difference-in-differences estimation). As presented in Chapter 5’s systematic review, such ‘quasi-experiments’ have grown increasingly common in the local government literature, offering several potential benefits over cross-sectional designs – including their ability to test causation, but also their capacity to overcome problems of endogeneity arising from Tiebout (1956) sorting, and to mitigate biases attributable to unobserved or unmeasurable confounding variables. However, such methods also introduce several additional complications which would need to be addressed by any future quasi-experimental endeavour – including the need to anticipate and measure in advance of a suitable (exogenously imposed) (de)amalgamation process, the need for a non-reformed control group, and the need to separate-out the effects of any reform that was implemented simultaneously with the (de)amalgamation (Lassen and Serritzlew, 2011).

Chapter 8. Reclaiming the local: study implications and policy options

“If there is a desire to foster a "democratic culture" in Australia, one of the most promising areas in which to experiment would be that of local government. The impediments to doing so are not produced by the physical environment nor by historical factors, but by political considerations”
(Robbins, 1978: 89).

Over the course of the past several years, the Australia-based research group, *Democracy 2025*, has embarked on an attempt to enquire into the minds of Australian citizens, politicians and civil servants, with the objective of identifying policy solutions that might help “bridge the trust divide” (Stoker et al., 2018a: 4). Through a series of surveys, focus groups and a deliberative jury, the team invited representatives from all three groups to put forward their proposals for addressing the accelerating trend of distrust, dissatisfaction, and disengagement with Australian democracy.

Some consistencies can be found in the groups’ proposals. In the first instance, it is very much worth noting that all groups share a perception that democratic norms are faltering, and that citizens are growing alienated from politics¹³⁴. They also share in a belief that these phenomena portend gloom for our democratic institutions. Common solutions proposed to bridge the trust divide include those that increase communication between constituents and politicians (including through e-petitions, grassroots participation in political parties, and campaign pledge declarations), those that aim to enhance politicians’ integrity (including campaign financing and open government), and those that address ‘short-termism’ (lengthening electoral and policy cycles to enable longer-term strategic planning). The need for enhanced civics education is also acknowledged by both citizens and politicians (Evans, Hunter, et al., 2019; Evans, Stoker, et al., 2019; Stoker et al., 2018b).

As expected, there are differences, too, between the groups. Federal civil servants, naturally, focus on the policy-cycle, including relationship-building, openness and inclusivity in policy and service design (Evans, Hunter, et al., 2019). Elected politicians prefer to support incremental reforms of parliamentary rules and party governance – reforms which buttress the existing party-

¹³⁴ Thirty-eight percent of politicians are not satisfied with the way democracy works (Evans, Stoker, et al., 2019: 10); almost 50% of Australian Public Service participants felt that the decline in citizen trust has impacted ‘very significantly’ upon their work, and almost all felt some impact (Evans, Hunter, et al., 2019: 14); citizen satisfaction with democracy stands at a mere 41% (Stoker et al., 2018b: 21).

based representative system (Evans, Stoker, et al., 2019). Citizens, on the other hand, seek a greater involvement in political decision-making beyond elections – including the use of citizen juries and service co-design opportunities, and enhanced extra-electoral accountability mechanisms – including the right to recall MPs and the introduction of elected-member performance reviews (Evans et al., 2017; Stoker et al., 2018b).

Yet, among all groups, the issues of amalgamation and municipality size never once receives a mention. Indeed, despite the emphasis on civic education, the role of local government as a training ground – a school for democracy – is also conspicuously absent. While citizens desire a greater role in the political process and in decision making, this does not appear to translate into a concerted desire to rescale politics, or specifically, to re-localise local government. Certainly, as Chapter 3 has demonstrated, those directly affected by amalgamation will often rail against it. But unprompted, this issue – perhaps too banal – simply does not appear to excite popular passion (Aulich et al., 2014: 2)¹³⁵. Despite three decades of persistent local government reform, which has seen the number of municipal bodies across Australia decrease by 35% and their average population size grow by 56%, municipal amalgamation is simply not regarded as a relevant contributory factor to the “democratic winter” that is said to be descending ever more menacingly upon us (Wood and Flinders, 2014: 151).

The findings of this study suggest that municipality size should be taken into consideration in discussions of political alienation. They indicate, specifically, that local government amalgamations – by increasing the population size of municipal units – have led citizens to feel a greater sense of powerlessness, indicated by lower levels of internal political efficacy (IPE). The findings also suggest that citizens of larger municipalities participate less in municipal politics – they are less likely to vote, to run for local office, to contact their local councillor, and to attend a council meeting. As discussed in Chapter 4, this lower sense of IPE and diminished predilection to participate is likely to have implications for the individual and for the system. The individual who doesn't feel able to participate effectively is deprived of an important opportunity for self-actualisation and empowerment, of a chance to gain a civic education, or indeed – for those so inclined – an apprenticeship in a political career (Goldie, 2001; Mansbridge, 1983; Pateman, 1970). Low rates of participation, moreover, are likely to result in less accountable and less responsive government, delivering services that fail to meet the needs and preferences of the citizenry (Almond and Verba, 1963). Non-participants, as Verba and Nie (1972) famously found,

¹³⁵ In an evaluation of amalgamation processes in Australia, drawing upon both practitioner interviews and desktop research, Aulich et al. (2014: 2) find, that “[c]oncerns for any diminution of local democracy as a result of amalgamations are muted”.

are less influential and are less likely to have their concerns addressed by the political elite – and where whole cohorts of the population participate systematically less than others, political equality is compromised, the distribution of public goods is skewed, and resentment can accrue.

So, if, as this study has demonstrated, smaller municipalities tend to foster a more efficacious and participatory citizenry, how best can this potentiality be harnessed? This final chapter offers some preliminary answers to this question. After summarising the study's findings and key contributions in the next section, the chapter proceeds by considering the prospect – the political and logistical realities – of municipal (re)fragmentation. By drawing on an analysis of past examples of municipal secession, as well as on the limited extant literature available on the issue of 'de-amalgamation', some guiding principles for future secession processes are outlined. Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of several possible alternatives to secession, noting potential avenues for future research.

Summarising the study and findings

At the beginning of this research project, the question was asked:

Are citizens of smaller municipalities less politically alienated than citizens of larger municipalities?

The answer to this question, based on the empirical findings of this study, is a qualified 'yes'. Understanding political alienation in both its attitudinal manifestation – conceptualised in this study as internal political efficacy (IPE) and external political efficacy (EPE) – and its behavioural manifestation – in this case, four acts of local 'electoral' participation, the findings indicate that as municipality size increases, citizens become more political alienated. Employing multilevel regression in the analysis of primary survey data – comprising responses from 537 residents of the Adelaide and Perth metropolitan areas – as well as OLS multiple regression in the analysis of electoral data, this study found that municipality size is negatively related to feelings of IPE and to rates of political participation. This negative relationship holds both for overall levels of political participation and for participation in the individual acts of voting, candidacy, contacting and meeting attendance. By employing mediation analysis, this study has also been able to further conclude that the negative size–participation relationship is partly mediated by IPE, suggesting that the lower rates of participation in larger municipalities are not merely correlated with, but can be causally attributed to, a lower sense of IPE. This mediating effect was only partial, however, and was not detected for the acts of candidacy and meeting attendance, suggesting that there is

more to the size–participation relationship than can be explained solely by differences in IPE. Determining what these additional causal mechanisms might be will require further empirical investigation, guided by further theorising on the link between individual participatory determinants and municipality size.

On the other hand, no relationship was found at all between municipality size and feelings of EPE, or between EPE and participation. Citizens of smaller municipalities may feel more personally ‘powerful’ and they may participate more at the local level, but their opinion of their council’s responsiveness is not necessarily any higher as a consequence. This finding appears at odds with the international evidence, which generally reports a negative size–EPE relationship; however, it does accord with the limited existing Australian evidence (Soul, 1999, 2000). Some examination was conducted in Chapter 7 into this finding, which suggested that citizens of smaller municipalities may be more aware and therefore more critical of their council’s performance; thus, any actual (objective) benefit that size might deliver in terms of councillor responsiveness may not appear in subjective assessments. Nevertheless, these conclusions are cursory at best, and further exploration of this lack of a size–EPE relationship in the Australian context would be beneficial.

It is, of course, important not to overstate the study’s conclusions regarding the relationship between municipality size, IPE, and participation. Just as it would be unreasonable to expect that the complex, long-run trend of alienation could be attributed to just one single source, size’s contribution – as distinguished by the relatively low ICC statistics in Chapter 7 – is modest. Nevertheless, in view of the accumulated literature and this present study’s own empirical offerings, municipality size does indeed have a *measurable, consistent, and substantive effect* on people’s democratic attitudes and behaviours. For instance, controlling for demographic and contextual factors, the analysis presented in Chapter 7 (Table 7.8) indicates a 13.5% drop in predicted level of IPE for citizens of the largest municipality compared with citizens of the smallest municipality under study here. Similarly, the modelling provided in Table 7.10 through 7.12 predicts that citizens of the largest municipality will be 78% less likely to contact their local representatives and 93% less likely to attend council meetings, while the voter turnout and candidacy rates will be lower by 14.15 percentage points and 3.47 candidates (per 1000 electors) respectively. When considering overall levels of engagement in these four activities, the modelling predicts that citizens of the largest municipality will engage in 1.03 fewer participatory acts over a two-year period compared with citizens of the smallest municipality.

Contributions to the literature

The empirical findings of this study contribute to the literature in several respects. Most notably, the study adds to the empirical evidence on the democratic effects of municipal amalgamation in the Australian context. Prior to this study, as found in Chapter 5's systematic review, there had been no Australian study into the effect of amalgamation/municipality size on rates of voting, meeting attendance or candidacy using quantitative, inferential statistics. Moreover, there had been no quantitative study into the effect of municipality size on rates of local contacting since Abelson's study in 1981 – well before programmes of large-scale amalgamation began to transform Australia's municipal landscape. In addition, the systematic review revealed that the relationship between municipality size and IPE has been completely unstudied in an Australian context, while the effect of municipality size on citizens' sense of EPE had not been examined in an Australian setting for two decades. Given the substantial institutional changes that have taken place over the past three decades, and the recent concern with levels of political alienation, this study's investigation into each of these research gaps was thus well overdue.

The study's findings also contribute to the still nascent international evidence-base on local political participation and political efficacy. In particular, with the systematic review finding only one extant study on the relationship between municipality size and candidacy, this study adds key additional evidence in relation to this important democratic indicator. When it comes to candidacy, the predominant interest in Australian and international literature has been on the effect that amalgamation has had on competition, representativeness and the quality of representation (Burdess and O'Toole, 2004; Conroy, 2011; Kjaer et al., 2018; Webster and Fa'apoi, 2018). But the normative importance of candidacy comes not merely from its effect on the composition and responsiveness of elected bodies, but also as an act of participation unto itself. It is hoped that by highlighting the substantial negative effect that municipality size appears to exert upon citizens' likelihood of running for office, more attention will be afforded in the literature to the participatory benefits of widespread involvement in the act of candidacy (and, indeed, officeholding). If local government is to be a training ground for democracy, an opportunity for self-development and, not least, an apprenticeship for politics, high rates of candidacy would appear imperative (Aars and Offerdal, 1998; Copus, 2016).

The evidence that the size–participation relationship is partially mediated by IPE is also an important empirical and methodological contribution to the literature. As noted in Chapter 5, while the literature is replete with discussion of participatory determinants and hypotheses on the causal mechanisms linking municipality size to participation, there have been very few efforts

(Denters et al., 2014; Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz, 2016) to statistically determine a causal pathway, by way of mediation analysis – and none, evidently, which have formally quantified or tested the statistical significance of the mediated effect, such as through the use of the *products of coefficients* mediation technique utilised in this study. By considering the effect of size on both political participation and political efficacy, and, importantly, by formally analysing the mediating role of political efficacy in the size–participation relationship, this study offers a novel and important link between “two literatures usually considered in isolation” (Lapointe et al., 2018: 514).

Related to the above, this study also offers an advancement on much previous work on the participatory effects of municipality size, which often focus solely on the act of voting, by postulating that size exerts a differential effect on participation depending upon the mode in question. While the differential effect of size in the present results did not align precisely with the expectations of **Hypotheses 4a** and **4b**¹³⁶, it is nonetheless evident that the influence of size – transmitted via the mediating effect of IPE – is not uniform across all forms of participation. The study also adds to the literature on the conceptualisation and measurement of IPE and EPE. First, the study has confirmed (possibly for the first time in a local government context) the validity and reliability of Niemi et al.’s (1991) IPE scale, providing further empirical evidence to support its use as a standardised measure. Second, by identifying the presence of method effects in the four-item EPE scale, it is postulated that past efforts to develop a satisfactory EPE scale may have been hampered by measurement error caused by the presence of negatively worded items. As such, it is recommended that future development of an EPE scale should either seek to avoid reverse-worded items, or should account for the resultant method effects in the measurement model.

Harnessing the potentiality of smallness: policy implications

For policy makers, this study’s findings suggest two key messages. First, the unqualified exuberance surrounding municipal amalgamation as a cure-all for the local government sector’s woes should be tempered. There should be much greater hesitancy towards, and scepticism of, any future attempt to carry out projects of municipal amalgamation – particularly forced amalgamation. Not only, as examined in Chapter 3, do the economic claims appear to have been somewhat overstated, but there does appear to be genuine, measurable, and substantive

¹³⁶ **H4a:** *Due to the mediating effect of internal political efficacy, the negative effect of municipality size should be stronger for more difficult modes of participation.* **H4b:** *Due to the mediating effect of external political efficacy, the negative effect of municipality size should be stronger for private rather than public modes of participation.*

democratic consequences. As always, there will be a need for balance between liberty and efficiency, but this study – together with the mounting international findings – suggests that this balance may already have shifted too far.

Second, with the accelerating impetus to design solutions that address the rising tide of alienation, the lessons of scale should be heeded. With popular policy proposals – such as those outlined in this chapter’s introduction – focussed either on the promise of democratic innovation or on direct interventions to moderate politicians’ behaviour, there has been relatively little emphasis on the potentiality of local government and the merits of a more proximate local politics. Indeed, as severe and as widespread as the municipal amalgamations of the past three decades have been, they continue to be overlooked as a factor which may have shaped Australians’ alienated disposition (Cameron, 2020; Leigh and Terrell, 2020). The findings of this project call for greater emphasis on the municipality size–alienation link, and suggest that the virtues of small municipalities be afforded consideration when designing policy responses to reverse alienation.

Municipal fragmentation – via secession or ‘de-amalgamation’¹³⁷ – is the obvious policy response to reversing the deleterious democratic effects of amalgamation and harnessing the potentiality of smallness. “Localism”, Robbins avers, “might... be better tapped by creating more, rather than fewer, local government areas” (Robbins, 1978: 89). Yet, it is one thing to conclude that small municipalities should play a part in efforts to address alienation, but it is quite another to achieve this goal. Is it possible, not least tenable, to unscramble the scrambled egg of Australian local government? The discussion that follows offers a cursory examination of the prospect for secession in the Australian context, including the logistical and political barriers to reform.

Following the approach suggested by Dollery et al. (2011: 604), this section commences with an examination of past instances of secession. This brief historical survey provides an indication of the political and logistical prospects for secession, the circumstances that give rise to secession and the barriers that are faced. Drawing upon these historical examples, a suggested process for future municipal fragmentation is outlined, which emphasises the importance of public acceptability and political and logistical feasibility.

¹³⁷ ‘De-amalgamation’ is merely a secession that occurs in the aftermath of a municipal amalgamation.

The prospect of secession

Compared to the “voluminous” scholarly literature dedicated to amalgamation, “almost no analytical work has been undertaken on de-amalgamation” (or secession) in Australia (Dollery et al., 2011: 603)¹³⁸. Moreover, despite some descriptive material on the most recent cases of de-amalgamation in Victoria and Queensland (Aulich et al., 2011b; Chen, 2002; de Souza et al., 2015; Dollery et al., 2011), the literature offers little in the way of a chronicle of past instances of secession (as noted by Dollery et al., 2011). Nevertheless, amidst the overall trend of municipal consolidation, over the course of Australia’s history there have in fact been quite a number of instances where the number of municipalities has increased as a result of secession.

Indeed, during the early days of permissive incorporation, secession was a common means of ‘localising’ municipal politics. Wood (1981: 653), for example, notes that much of the early municipal fragmentation in metropolitan Perth occurred through the ‘excision’ – of localities (upon petition) from the Perth District Road Board, which had at one time extended to an area of some 1320 square kilometres. Separately, the City of South Perth, once subject to the jurisdiction of the Perth City Council, was also established (in 1892) as a result of a grass-roots secession movement. As Crowley (as cited in Wood, 1981: 653) states:

“the residents in the west [of the suburb] began a campaign for improved roads and other public amenities. They complained that though they were enrolled as voters for the Perth City Council they had no ward representative to air their grievances... In January 1888 they petitioned the Governor for a separate road board administration”.

The privilege of self-government for the residents of East Fremantle was similarly forged of secessionist spirit, when in 1897 a series of public meetings had culminated in residents seeking to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the Fremantle Road Board, “as they were so distant... and [as] the district had little in common with the affairs of that body” (Crowley, as cited in Wood, 1981: 654). Secession was enabled and anticipated in federation-era Western Australia by legislation enabling citizens to petition the Governor (Wood, 1981) – a process similar to one which, as Power et al. (1981: 13) note, had been regularly utilised in Queensland in the years immediately before and after federation among those communities unsatisfied with their compulsorily established boundaries.

¹³⁸ Internationally, too, municipal secession remains very much an ‘under-researched’ topic (Swianiewicz, 2020a).

While secession grew rarer as comprehensive systems of local government became more firmly established, isolated instances continued to arise from decade to decade. Many of these examples occurred in regional areas of the country, where the jurisdictions of large towns were excised from their rural hinterlands to produce what are known as ‘doughnut’ councils. Such separations have occurred at different times across the country, but were particularly common in New South Wales during the 1970s (Cohen et al., 2003). The rationale for the creation of doughnut councils – many of which have since been re-amalgamated – was the contrasting priorities of urban and rural residents, with residents of rural areas willing to receive more modest services in exchange for lower rates (Cohen et al., 2003: 28)¹³⁹. As noted by a former Mayor of one such council – Evans Shire, which encircled the City of Bathurst, NSW:

“A rural council is created to cater for rural lifestyle and rural values and expectations. This was acknowledged by the State Government in the 1970s when some doughnut councils, as in the case of Evans, were established” (Byrne 2003, as cited in Cohen et al., 2003: 28).

In addition to doughnut councils, a small number of other government-initiated secessions – following a similar contextually-specific, strategic rationale – have taken place. In Western Australia, for example, the industrial northern portion of the Rockingham Road District was excised to form the Kwinana Road District (later the City of Kwinana) in 1954 (Government of Western Australia, 1953). Similarly, in 1989, the City of South Sydney was created out of part of the City of Sydney. This government-led process – which followed the dismissal of the City of Sydney Council for being “insufficiently committed to some major infrastructure projects” (State Records Authority of NSW, n.d.) – sought to separate the central business district from surrounding suburbs, to ensure a greater focus on the city’s financial, commercial and tourist functions.

More recently, there have also been several examples of successful ‘grass-roots’ led secession movements. The first of these took place shortly after the aforementioned division of Sydney, when, in 1992, the residents of Pittwater led a successful rebellion to secede from the Warringah Shire Council. In many ways, this process was decades in the making, with Pittwater residents long harbouring a desire to secede. However, the campaign intensified in the late 1980s, with the establishment of a residents’ group and a petition of more than 14,000 residents (from a population of approximately 50,000) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Morcombe, 2015).

¹³⁹ In present times, by contrast, many commentators and politicians view doughnut councils as particularly ripe for consolidation given the high degree of inter-jurisdictional externalities (Cohen et al., 2003: 5; Dollery et al., 2011: 607; Self, 1997: 300; Tiley and Dollery, 2010).

Beyond the scale and consistency of the push, the fact that Warringah Shire's council had been dismissed by the Minister in the mid-1980s for governance "irregularities" (Morcombe, 2015), no doubt ensured that the secessionists would be heard by a more sympathetic government. Successive Local Government Ministers responded to the campaign by sending the case off for review by the Boundaries Commission, which twice failed to offer definitive support for the secessionists' case (Morcombe, 2015). This was underlined by a postal referendum of Pittwater residents instigated by the Local Government Minister, which although receiving overwhelming support, attracted a turnout of only 48% of eligible residents (Morcombe, 2015; NSWLR, 1992). Nevertheless, the decision to separate the riding (ward) of Pittwater from its parent council was ultimately made at the discretion of the Local Government Minister (Gerry Peacocke, National Party), likely swayed by political calculation – given that secession garnered substantial popular support and had received only minimal vocal opposition from residents. By 1992, a provisional council was in place, comprising the three riding councillors from Warringah Shire and six appointed representatives (Morcombe, 2015; Warringah Council, 2006).

The localism demonstrated in Pittwater could not, alas, hold back the rising tide of centralism. Caught up in the 2016 wave of amalgamations in New South Wales, Pittwater Council was not merely re-amalgamated with Warringah, but also with neighbouring Manly, to form the Northern Beaches Council. Nevertheless, among secession cases, the under-studied example of Pittwater is unique in that strong and sustained localist sentiment was able to be mobilised in the absence of any threat (at that time) of forced amalgamation. By contrast, all other recent, successful instances of grassroots-led secession have occurred in the aftermath of forced amalgamations, where the imposition of reform provided an immediate focus for local effort. This is not to diminish the efforts of local campaigners, however, for what each of the subsequent examples have in common with Pittwater is a sustained, grass-roots commitment to the secessionist cause, and a refusal to accept the finality of government decree.

The importance of grass-roots mobilisation is most notable in the case of the de-amalgamation of the rural Victorian Shire of Delatite – the result of almost a decade of sustained local campaigning. The Shire of Delatite was originally formed from the merger of parts of four municipalities¹⁴⁰ during the round of forced amalgamation which took place under the Kennett (Liberal) Government in 1994 (Chen, 2002). Disgruntled with the amalgamation process and lacking a sense of shared community and economy with the residents of Benalla, residents of the

¹⁴⁰ The City of Benalla, parts of the Shire of Benalla, the Shire of Mansfield and a portion of the Shire of Violet Town (Chen, 2002).

former Shire of Mansfield embarked in earnest on a de-amalgamation campaign (Chen, 2002). Perceiving an opportunity to intensify their campaigning in the wake of the Kennett State Government's electoral loss in the 1999 state election, the Mansfield and District Residents' and Ratepayers' Association was established and, running on an anti-amalgamation platform, was able to secure four of the eight councillor positions in the subsequent council elections (in addition to seeing the incumbent conservatives lose in a 2000 state by-election for the Seat of Benalla, in favour of a pro-amalgamation Labor candidate) (Chen, 2002; Dollery et al., 2011). As a result of the strength of community feeling and council gridlock, the Minister for Local Government set up an ad-hoc review (with the requirement that it be funded by the Delatite Shire, to dissuade other secessionists) to investigate the financial feasibility of de-amalgamation. Convinced by the weight of community support, and that financial sustainability could be achieved subject to rate increases (which, the review found, a substantial majority of Mansfield residents were willing to pay), the Minister announced the de-amalgamation of Delatite Shire in 2002 (Chen, 2002; Dollery et al., 2011).

Common with the above, the most recent instances of de-amalgamation, all taking place in 2014 – one in the Northern Territory and four in Queensland – have also been carried through by the force of local voice, capitalising upon a moment of political opportunity. For example, as was asserted by Bruhn (as cited in LePla, 2016), the Northern Territory government's decision to proceed with the de-amalgamation of the Victoria Daly Shire Council appears to have been at least in part driven by the government's desire "to win the bush vote". Tapping a popular resentment, the incoming Country Liberal government's opposition to the previous government's amalgamated 'super shires' no doubt eased the path for the Victoria Daly secession (Betts, 2017; Tollner, 2013). While the drivers for de-amalgamation in this instance are largely unique to the regional Northern Territory experience, given the vast distances and low-density settlement patterns composed primarily of scattered and at times isolated Indigenous communities, there are nonetheless some general insights that can be gleaned from the experience. Of particular note is the collegial approach that was adopted between the local councils and the Territory government. Councillors representing both councils, for example, worked together with departmental representatives, the local member of parliament, representatives from the Northern Territory Local Government Association, and community members on the de-amalgamation process, with each having a seat on the formal transition committee (West Daly Regional Council, 2016). Moreover, while the two de-merged councils – Victoria Daly Regional Council and West Daly Regional Council – have since experienced financial stress, requiring government subsidisation and support (Betts, 2017; LePla, 2016), the Territory government has

been working cooperatively with the new councils to alleviate these issues and explore options to improve service output, including via shared services (Betts, 2017; LePla, 2016)¹⁴¹.

In respect to procedure, no de-amalgamation process has been as systematic as that which took place in Queensland in 2013-2014. Indeed, unlike all other examples of de-amalgamation, which were isolated instances, the more comprehensive approach taken in Queensland has been “without precedent in Australian local government history” (de Souza et al., 2015: 1405). The de-amalgamation process in Queensland saw its genesis in the Liberal National Party’s (LNP) 2012 state election campaign, which “promised to heal discontent surrounding the 2008 amalgamation programme” (de Souza et al., 2015: 1408) by offering those discontented with the previous government’s forced amalgamations the prospect of de-amalgamation. After coming to power in a landslide victory, the new government set about establishing the process for de-amalgamation.

In contrast with all other instances of grass-roots led amalgamation, where the communities themselves campaigned and ultimately convinced the relevant state Minister to consider their proposal, the Queensland process – driven as it was by diffuse (rather than specific) discontent with the 2008 forced amalgamations – had the state government inviting any amalgamated shire to submit an application for de-amalgamation (de Souza et al., 2015). Proponents, however, were presented with a number of hurdles to overcome in their pursuit of secession. Specifically, submissions to the Minister for Local Government needed to be signed by 20% of the voting population of the former shire; they needed to provide detailed estimates of financial costs; and they were required to demonstrate that the signatories to the proposal understood that they would bear the full cost of de-amalgamation (de Souza et al., 2015). The Minister would then decide upon the eligibility of each proposal, before referring the proposals to the Queensland Boundaries Commissioner – of the 19 proposals received by the Minister, five cases were ultimately referred to the Commissioner (de Souza et al., 2015)¹⁴². The Commissioner’s role was to assess both the costs of de-amalgamation and the longer-term viability of the proposed arrangements, relying upon advice from the Queensland Treasury Corporation, with successful proposals being put to a poll of citizens in the affected communities. As it emerged, the Boundaries Commissioner recommended a poll with respect to only one of the proposals (de

¹⁴¹ Quite unusually, there has also been a reluctance from the government to use the de-merged councils’ plight as a means either to denigrate the proponents of secession or the merits of de-amalgamation more generally (Betts, 2017).

¹⁴² Common reasons for de-amalgamation included contentions around incompatibility (e.g. intrinsic or economic differences), loss of representation, and dissatisfaction with the equity of decisions post-amalgamation (de Souza et al., 2015).

Souza et al., 2015). Nevertheless, applying discretion, the Minister for Local Government allowed a poll to proceed for four proposed de-amalgamations, stating:

“I am being upfront... in saying that at the end of it there will be added costs... It will be up to them to decide if the community gain is worth the financial pain” (Crisafulli 2012, as cited in Mesner, 2012).

As discussed in Chapter 3, each of these four polls (with questions formulated to inform voters that they would be responsible for the costs of de-amalgamation) saw majorities in favour of de-amalgamation – “a testament to the endurance of interest groups seeking de-amalgamation, as well as the strength of community feeling in the forcibly merged councils” (de Souza et al., 2015: 1417). As a result, de-amalgamation proceeded in all four cases (Douglas Shire Council, Livingstone Shire Council, Mareeba Shire Council, and Noosa Shire Council), on 1 January 2014, with transition arrangements set out in legislation¹⁴³. This process included the Ministerial appointment of a ‘transfer manager’ as the acting chief executive officer for the new council, the development (by the Minister’s department) of ‘transfer methodology’, and the establishment of a ‘transfer committee’ (comprising the transfer manager and the CEO of the continuing council) tasked with agreeing on the distribution of assets, liabilities and other transitional arrangements.

The process of secession

The foregoing examples demonstrate not simply that municipal secession has been carried out on many occasions and in different contexts, but that it is also a tenable and feasible reform option. Just as governments can impose amalgamation, they can decree fragmentation. Nevertheless, beyond the very occasional, situation-dependent circumstance, governments are unlikely to instigate a secession process. Of course, the latent preference among all state and territory governments seems to be to consolidate, not to increase the number of municipalities. Yet, the above examples indicate that governments (often newly elected ones) will consider the prospect of secession if the political calculation is favourable. That is to say, they will consider secession if it is supported by a vocal and sustained grass-roots campaign. As has been seen in the above examples – and as identified by both Aulich et al. (2011b) and Dollery et al. (2011) – well-organised grass-roots campaigns are essential as catalysts for a secession process, and are integral to the ultimate success of secession.

¹⁴³ Local Government (De-amalgamation Implementation) Regulations (2013).

Yet, as with amalgamation, there are transitional costs and complexities associated with secession (Dollery et al., 2011). In addition to establishing the transitional council, there is the potentially acrimonious business of dividing assets and reallocating – and housing – employees (e.g., sch 3, City of Sydney Act, 1988). It may also be necessary to acquire or build new facilities. When Pittwater seceded from Warringah, for example, the Mona Vale library became the new municipality’s central library. However, as that library was designed as a branch of a wider library system, the building was of insufficient size to house the necessary bookstock and technology, thus requiring refurbishment at substantial cost (Northern Beaches Council, n.d.).

As Dollery et al. (2011: 607) note, secession processes can also be divisive in the communities concerned. There is no guarantee, for example, that all members of the community will support secession or that they will all be satisfied with the new boundaries. Even in the case of de-amalgamation, as demonstrated in the case of the Delatite Shire, there is no guarantee that the de-amalgamation process will see a return to the previous boundaries – rather, as Dollery et al. (2011: 607) state, citizens may be presented with “rather a different configuration of local councils and patterns of local representation”.

To ensure that secession/de-amalgamation proceeds with the best prospects for success, at least four key criteria would appear to be essential considerations in any secession proposal. These criteria follow from the preceding discussion of historical secession examples, and draw upon insights from the literature – in particular, Dollery et al.’s (2011) ‘Normative Model for Local Government De-Amalgamation’, and Allan’s (2001) ‘Secession: A Manifesto for an Independent Balmain Local Council’, which represent perhaps the only systematic analytical examinations of local government secession in Australia.

Criterion 1 – community support

The first criteria for successful secession, as emphasised by Dollery et al. (2011), is that proposals for secession must command wide support among the affected community. As noted above, this has been achieved in the past, on an ad hoc basis, through local polls, and Dollery et al. (2011: 609) posit the possibility of state and territory governments instituting a poll provision in legislation. Dollery et al. (2011) suggest that such a process might mirror that which is in place to facilitate community polls on amalgamation proposals in Western Australia. As discussed in Chapter 3, Schedule 2.1 the WA Local Government Act (1995) provides that after being given notice of a government-proposed municipal amalgamation, citizens may petition the Minister for a municipality-wide poll on the matter. A petition signed by at least 250 local electors (or 10% of residents of an affected municipality, whichever is the lesser) will trigger a poll. Provided turnout

for the poll exceeds 50% of the municipality's electors, a majority vote against the proposal is required to successfully prevent amalgamation.

Given the requirement for strong community support, a similar legislative accommodation would appear to be the most publicly acceptable, politically feasible, and indeed the simplest reform directed towards “creating more, rather than fewer, local government areas” (Robbins, 1978: 89). This is a voluntary process, similar to that carried out in pre-federation Western Australia¹⁴⁴. The provision for a petition, followed by a poll (with reasonable hurdle requirements), would not only ensure that a substantial proportion of the affected communities support any secession proposal, but it will also provide a formal and transparent process, offering the certainty that local groups require to focus their actions, rally localist sentiment and support, and act swiftly within a ‘window of opportunity’ (Chen, 2002; Swianiewicz, 2010). Another path to boundary reform would be to follow Grant and Drew’s (2017: 374) suggestion of a comprehensive, carefully-planned, government-led and metropolitan-wide process, involving genuine community engagement in the drafting of new boundaries and governance arrangements. Such a process would appear to have considerable strategic, equity, and efficiency advantages, and thus could be regarded as the optimal path towards municipal fragmentation. Nevertheless, given the acrimonious history of local government structural reform, bedevilled by an underlying centralist agenda, path-dependent parochialism, and political opportunism, the political conditions for such a comprehensive, cooperative, and evidence-based process appear unlikely to emerge anytime soon. In the interim, the benefits of small size may be most realistically achieved in a voluntary (or permissive) manner, with communities mobilising to make use of the legislated poll provision.

Criterion 2 – financial sustainability

While a poll provision may be sufficient to instigate a secession process, it is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure a successful secession process. Indeed, given state governments’ preoccupation with efficiency and the financial sustainability of local government, a secession proposal will necessarily need to address this concern – both, as Dollery et al. (2011) emphasise, in relation to long-term viability, and short term transitional costs. One way to achieve this is for secession proposals to be cognisant of drawing boundaries that provide the best long-term prospects for financial and strategic sustainability. It would be reasonable – indeed, responsible – for both government and secession proponents to avoid simply reverting to historical

¹⁴⁴ The petitioning and review process is also currently utilised in England with respect to the establishment of new Parish Councils (which sit beneath larger principal councils). Specifically, if a council receives a valid petition, it is under a statutory duty to carry out a ‘community governance review’ (Sandford, 2019).

boundaries, but instead to “plan the new fragmented council spatial structures to incorporate current and future patterns of economic development, population growth, urbanisation, and the like” (Dollery et al., 2011: 608). While ward boundaries appear to offer the simplest and cleanest route to secession – as evidenced by the Pittwater example – some realignment should be expected. Nevertheless, it would appear necessary to ensure that an overly planned approach does not derail the secession process, either by increasing transition costs, or by rearranging boundaries in such a manner that the original community impetus is diluted.

In his ‘manifesto for an independent Balmain’, Allan (2001) proposes another method for reducing transition and ongoing costs associated with secession. “The answer”, he suggests, “is to break up our metropolitan councils into smaller political units and amalgamate their back offices into contestable shared-service centres” (Allan, 2003: 74). By separating the political and the administrative arms of the council, Allan (2001) argues that the democratic benefits of small size can be achieved while retaining the benefits that come with scale. In Allan’s (2001) proposal, the Balmain/Rozelle ward would be separated from the Leichhardt Council¹⁴⁵. Then, an independent Balmain council composed initially of the four ward councillors, could contract out its administrative functions to the Leichhardt Council on a transitional basis; “If it refused to do the job, or its services were too expensive, then a neighbouring Council’s administrative wing could be offered the business” (Allan, 2001: ix). In time, the Balmain Council, supported by a small secretariat, could contract its functions to other service providers on a value-for-money basis (Allan, 2001)¹⁴⁶. Not only would this staged approach reduce transitional costs, but Allan (2001) contends that the competition generated among service delivery organisations would generate ongoing efficiencies and service improvement.

Placing to one side the uncertain evidence on the question of scale economies in local government (Dollery, 2003; Drew et al., 2014), Allan’s (2001) model would appear to have considerable merit, given the positive (in principle) view among Australian local government scholars of shared services arrangements. Indeed, shared service arrangements have been regularly touted as the “chief alternative” to amalgamation (Drew and Dollery, 2014: 135), enabling small councils to combine forces with other councils to capture economies of scale where they might exist, while retaining the benefits of small size (Abelson, 2016; Dollery et al.,

¹⁴⁵ Ironically, not only was the Balmain secession movement unsuccessful, but the municipality of Leichhardt was later (in 2015) merged with two other municipalities to form the even larger Inner West Council.

¹⁴⁶ With state government support, Allan (2001) envisions large shared service centres being established which would tender for council business.

2005, 2009; Dollery and Johnson, 2005). However, shared service arrangements can come in a multiplicity of forms, including ad hoc agreements on individual services, formal strategic regional alliances, state-wide arrangements, and quasi two-tier governance structures (Cohen et al., 2003; Dollery et al., 2005, 2010; Dollery, Hallam, et al., 2008; Dollery and Johnson, 2005). As Dollery (2003) advises, rather than applying one rigid model in all cases, it would be more feasible to adopt a bespoke approach on a case-by-case basis (Allan's model is unlikely to be suitable, for example, in rural areas), with the aim of retaining pre-existing service-providing entities at least "as far as possible" (Dollery et al., 2011: 611).

Criterion 3 – political equality

In addition to efforts to reduce transition and on-going costs, the principle of political equality demands that some degree and form of central government subsidisation will be necessary to avoid the situation which occurred under the Newman Queensland Government, whereby secessionists were encumbered not only with higher projected rates, but with the full transition costs (Grant and Drew, 2017: 375). While the success of those de-amalgamation polls suggests that many are willing to incur a cost for their dream of secession, too high a burden will mean that secession – and thus the benefits of smaller municipalities – would become a privilege only for the rich. Less advantaged communities, unable to pay, would be confined to larger municipalities, where their relative sense of political alienation would be exacerbated further relative to the more advantaged. Moreover – again learning from the Queensland example, where submissions were rejected by the Minister on account of inadequate justification (de Souza et al., 2015: 1412–1413) – secession processes should be cognisant of the expectations being placed on grass-roots, often inchoate, community groups in relation to the submission process. While well-organised and resource-rich groups may have the means to engage an expert consultant to prepare the submission, other groups may not enjoy such luxury.

From another perspective, the principle of equality may be compromised if the secessionist locality has a high socio-economic status and has been cross-subsidising less advantaged areas of the municipality. In this case, while the viability of the seceding municipality may be secure, the viability of the remaining portion of the larger municipality may be placed in doubt. Critics of municipal fragmentation – such as those concerned with the burgeoning grass-roots movement of 'municipal incorporation' in the USA – point to such situations when claiming that secessionists are attempting to divorce themselves "from the social responsibility of the larger community" (Smith, 2018: 137). Avoiding this a situation will require, as Dollery et al. (2011) have emphasised, the careful drawing of the new council boundaries, with financial sustainability in mind. In relation

to concerns about rates and service equalisation, Allan (2003: 79) also makes the following salient point:

“The purpose of having a third tier of government is so that each municipality should have the discretion to decide both the level of rates and services it wants. Income and wealth distribution is the function of the Commonwealth (and to a lesser extent state) governments, not that of local government”.

Nevertheless, municipal secession does not preclude cross-subsidy (horizontal fiscal equalization) of rate revenue (Grant and Drew, 2017: 375). It may still be possible, for example, for a progressive levy to be placed on rate payers, with proceeds distributed via a grants commission to less-advantaged councils (Allan, 2003).

Criterion 4 – conflict minimisation

In addition to efficiency considerations, it must be acknowledged that secession can be fraught with conflict – demonstrated not least in a legal case between Warringah Shire and the provisional Pittwater Council, which concerned the issue of staff transfers and redundancy liabilities (NSWLR, 1992). Strategies and processes that anticipate and minimise such conflict should be established, addressing the distribution of assets, liabilities, and staffing arrangements (Dollery et al., 2011). Previous occasions of secession, including those of Pittwater, West Daly and the four Queensland examples, established transition councils or committees to manage this process.

Such examples can offer a guide to future secession processes. However, to ensure consistency and transparency, it would be prudent for state governments to legislate a suitable transition procedure in advance, as a complement to the poll provision. As Dollery et al. (2011: 612) state, “ex ante state regulation in the form of ‘commonsense’ rules for the distribution of assets, as well as judicious ex post Department of Local Government guidance, could reduce the potential sources of conflict” (Dollery et al., 2011: 612)¹⁴⁷.

Alternatives to secession – avenues for further research

While municipal fragmentation – the creation of smaller municipalities – is the logical policy implication of this research, there may be other ways of attaining the democratic benefits of small size without necessarily redrawing the boundaries of municipal units. In this section, three

¹⁴⁷ Shared service arrangements can also offer benefit here, by minimising the need for redistribution and relocation for a substantial proportion of the council’s operations (Dollery et al., 2011).

alternative policy options are outlined. The pertinent question that needs to be considered in relation to each of these alternatives is whether, and to what extent, they can alleviate alienated attitude structures in larger municipalities. Can, specifically, the provision of enhanced community engagement, the establishment of community governance models, or the reduction in ward size/increased councillor numbers overcome the democratic deficiencies of larger municipalities?

Alternative 1 – enhanced community engagement

With a burgeoning of interest in deliberative democracy over the past several decades, there is a tantalising idea that political alienation from electoral politics can be addressed by offering citizens new – and innovative – avenues through which to participate in decision making (Barber, 1984; Dalton, 1999; Fung, 2015; Smith, 2009; Stoker, 2006). In particular, it has been suggested that an enhanced focus on community engagement can help in efforts “to overcome the barriers size poses to political efficacy” (Andrews et al., 2019: 665) and thus “sustain citizen engagement after a municipal merger” (Lundell et al., 2016: 3). Indeed, as Andrews et al. (2019: 668) posit, it would seem “reasonable to hypothesize... that large [local] governments will have greater capacity to resource and deliver” innovative community engagement initiatives at scale.

Such arguments for community engagement’s potential to mitigate the democratic barriers of size have been enthusiastically promoted by Australian state governments and local government review boards in their advocacy of amalgamation. For example, in recommending the reduction in metropolitan councils from 30 to 12, the Western Australian Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel placed a high priority on “better community engagement” (2012: 26):

“The Panel has noticed that tension arises when considering local government reform. This is because there is difficulty in reconciling the community connectiveness of smaller local governments with the strategic capacity and efficiency opportunities in larger local governments. The Panel’s recommendations for community engagement are intended to abate this tension” (27).

Similarly, for the NSW Local Government Review Panel, the offer of enhanced community engagement was a key reason why it felt so confident that any “potential diminution of local democracy... can be managed” (2013: 72), stating: “Mechanisms such as Community Boards and new approaches to place management, community engagement and customer service make it possible to maintain local representation and identity within larger council areas” (2013: 73).

For Australian local government, large and small, “[p]ublic input into decision-making through participatory and deliberative democratic practices has become a widely accepted and legislated responsibility” (Christensen and McQuestin, 2019: 453). Indeed, as the Western Australian Department for Local Government has pronounced, “Across Australia, community engagement is progressively being reframed as core local government business” (Government of Western Australia, 2012). Community engagement – which is associated with what Yang (2012) terms ‘administrative participation’ (see Chapter 4) – is typically conducted on an issue-by-issue basis, or in the development of specific programmes or policies, and may take place through any manner of fora and initiatives, from public hearings, workshops, visioning exercises, written submissions, online surveys, focus groups and citizen juries (Christensen and McQuestin, 2019; Herriman, 2011; Verity, 2016).

To determine whether local governments’ community engagement initiatives have successfully reduced levels of alienation in the context of large municipalities, one approach would be to examine whether participation in such initiatives leads to increased levels of political efficacy among participants. Here, while the evidence base is inchoate, findings do suggest that participation in such activities can build participants’ sense of IPE and EPE (Oh and Lim, 2017), as well as trust (Åström et al., 2017). There is also substantial evidence that participation in engagement initiatives – particularly deliberative exercises – confers political interest and knowledge, in addition to building valuable civic skills (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Michels and Graaf, 2010; Oh and Lim, 2017).

However, such findings, alone, would be insufficient to assert that ‘enhanced’ community engagement can operate to lower levels of political alienation among citizens of larger municipalities, and thus provide a substitute for the loss of small municipalities. The findings of this study, for instance, suggest that small municipalities, by their very institutional presence, exert a downward influence upon aggregate levels of alienation among their resident citizenry. Importantly, citizens do not have to participate to feel the benefit of a higher sense of IPE. Indeed, it is – at least partially – this higher sense of IPE that leads the citizenry to participate in the first place. As such, to truly substitute for small municipalities, the mere *offer* of community engagement would (1) need to raise levels of political efficacy among the wider community. In turn, it would (2) be necessary to determine that, because of this higher sense of political efficacy, community engagement initiatives attract more/different participants than would have participated through conventional (electoral) modes.

Extant evidence on both questions is limited and mixed in its conclusions. In relation to the former (1), it is noted that a recent study by Andrews et al. (2019) found that while municipality size (in Wales, UK) is negatively related to both IPE and EPE, the disparity in levels of EPE (but not IPE) can be moderated somewhat by the presence in larger municipalities of ‘citizen panels’ – typically a representative sample of local citizens which is maintained to respond to survey and consultation activities over a period of time. On the other hand, a study by Astrom et al. (2017: 582) found, in the Swedish context, that the provision of e-survey panels has had “striking[ly] little impact... on citizens’ perceptions” on local democracy. In relation to the second question (2), the evidence that exists on ‘who participates’ in community engagement exercises tends to emphasise the difficulty that many practitioners experience in their attempts to attract the ‘disengaged’. That is, it is often the case that participants in community engagement initiatives are those who would have participated in electoral modes anyway (Åström et al., 2017; Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Lundell et al., 2016; Michels and Graaf, 2010; Saglie and Vabo, 2009; Yang and Callahan, 2005). Saglie and Vabo (2009) have found, for example, that just as citizens of smaller municipalities are more likely to participate in traditional modes, they are also more likely to participate in online engagement. Nevertheless, it is also widely contended that when community engagement initiatives are carried out in a rigorous, sincere, and collaborative manner, their ability to reach disengaged population groups can increase (Fung, 2003; Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2012; Yang and Callahan, 2005).

A key complication, then, for the argument that ‘enhanced’ community engagement can substitute for the loss of small municipalities is that the practical experience of community engagement all too often falls far short of ideal expectations (Åström et al., 2017; Kersting et al., 2016; Moir and Leyshon, 2013). As found in this study (Chapter 7, Supplementary Analysis), participation rates in community engagement exercises do not appear to differ between small and large municipalities¹⁴⁸. Thus, if larger municipalities are delivering more community engagement opportunities relative to smaller municipalities (something that Yang and Callahan (2005) find to be the case in the American context), this has not appeared to have translated, in this sample, into a more engaged citizenry. Thus, while community engagement may in ideal circumstances be able to mitigate some of the democratic deficiencies of larger municipalities, ideal circumstances are rare (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2012: 9). As Lundell et al. (2016: 23) have

¹⁴⁸ Similarly, in a study investigating, *inter alia*, levels of citizen satisfaction with local government engagement efforts in metropolitan Victoria, Drew and Dollery (2016) found no relationship between citizen satisfaction and municipality size (despite finding a negative relationship between municipality size and overall service satisfaction).

stated, “democratic innovations may not resolve all problems when it comes to building a functioning democratic unit following a municipal merger”.

As noted in Chapter 4’s discussion on administrative participation, the perceived legitimacy of community engagement exercises can vary greatly depending upon the reach of the initiative, the skills of the consultant, the resources invested and the degree of authority delegated (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Lundell et al., 2016). In worst-case scenarios, such as when a process is perceived as ‘tokenistic’, community engagement may even exacerbate feelings of alienation (Åström et al., 2017; Fung, 2015; Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Yang and Callahan, 2005). Moreover, there persists the concern, as noted in Chapter 4, that as community engagement takes place at the incumbent’s pleasure and on the incumbent’s terms, the agenda, the degree of conferred discretion and even the invitee list can be tightly controlled (Cooke and Kothari, 2004; Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2012; Gerard, 2014; Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Jayasuriya and Rodan, 2007; Stoker, 2006). This tight control may be contrived, indeed, to ‘nudge’ participants towards desired decisions (Moir and Leyshon, 2013; Swianiewicz, 2020b). Thus, quite aside from any effect that community engagement may or may not have on levels of political alienation, it is a qualitatively different form of participation than would have taken place in the council chambers of a small municipality. The extent to which enhanced community engagement can *substitute* for the loss of small municipalities is therefore just as much a normative question as it is an empirical one.

Alternative 2 – community governance and community boards

Particularly popular among local government reformists has been the prospect of community governance arrangements, typically in the form of ‘community boards’, which promise a permanent mechanism for community input on an area basis (as opposed to typical community engagement exercises, which as noted, generally take place on an ad-hoc, issue basis) (Bolitho, 2013). The New South Wales Local Government Review Panel (2013: 93), the South Australian Local Government Boundary Reform Board (1998: 129), and the Queensland Local Government Reform Commission (2007: 49–50) have all advocated for the potentiality of community boards or committees as a ‘useful’ means of enabling local input and information exchange in the context of amalgamated municipalities.

The broad, in-principle, support levelled in favour of community boards, however, conceals a deep rift in how the term ‘community board’ is conceptualised and operationalised. The community board model often advocated and adopted in Australia generally assumes a purely advisory function, lacking integration into a broader local governance framework. Indeed, for each of the three local government reform commissions noted above as supporting the

community board idea, all envisioned that these boards would be optional – established and maintained at the discretion of the parent council. The Queensland Local Government Reform Commission (2007: 50) explicitly recommended *against* instituting them “as a formal component of Queensland’s local government structure”, and against their being popularly elected (and remunerated) bodies.

In a study of the use of ‘citizen committees’ (which include community boards) in operation across Australian local government, Bolitho (2013: ii) has found that they are typically limited to an advisory status with little decision making authority; as such, they “have limited influence and are not highly inclusive or representative”. Such was the experience, for example, in relation to the Northern Territory’s Local Boards, which were introduced in the aftermath of the 2008 municipal amalgamations as an option for remote communities to retain a say in local affairs. Despite many boards being requested by communities and duly established, these boards often floundered with uncertain purpose, achieved little community buy-in and engagement, and often failed to achieved quorum (Central Land Council, 2010). As Sanders (2013: 482) states: “Board members themselves also often lost interest in meeting once their advisory and peripheral status in the shire decision-making system became clear”. As focus group research by the Central Land Council (2010) found, there was a discerning sense among communities that the principal council regarded the local boards as a low priority. Even with their advisory status, community members felt that the principal councils lacked responsiveness to issues raised at the board meetings, and would often control the meeting agenda (Central Land Council, 2010). As the Central Land Council (2010: 8) states, “community members are angry about the top down approach by the government in demanding ‘how, when and on what the community’ is consulted, which appears to be in contrast to their previous experience of community councils”.

In stark contrast to the Northern Territory model of community boards is the model adopted in New Zealand, where the 21 Local Boards that sit beneath the Auckland Council have been established under legislation to constitute a genuine second-tier of governance for the city (Shirley et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2019). Introduced after the several municipalities of the Auckland metropolitan area were amalgamated in 2017, the Local Boards were designed to ensure a degree of local voice and local choice was retained in the new structure. All local board members are elected and remunerated (with elections often attracting political parties/groupings), thus conferring some degree of popular authority and legitimation to the Local Board (Webster et al., 2019). Local Boards are empowered to advocate for their local areas and make decisions on local matters. They are responsible for developing their own strategic plans; contributing to local event, facility and service planning and delivery; overseeing

operational and capital works programmes; developing and proposing local bylaws; and contributing to the budgeting process (Auckland Council, 2020).

Nevertheless, despite these functions, the autonomy of Local Boards does remain somewhat constrained; they remain unincorporated bodies (unable to separately own land, enter into contracts or employ staff), and are wholly reliant for funding upon discretionary grants from the principal council (s.12, Local Government (Auckland Council) Act, 2009). As such, the governance arrangements have not been without their challenges and board-council animosities (Dollery et al., 2005: 60). It has been noted, for example, that the power imbalance between the principal council and the local boards, their broad mandate, and their restricted and contingent sphere of authority, has meant that local boards “lack profile and respect in the governance system” (Shirley et al., 2016: 8).

Nevertheless, New Zealand’s approach to community governance brings their system ever closer to the federal (or two-tier) local government schemes which were proposed by some greater-city proponents in federation-era Australia (e.g., see Bold, as cited in Wood, 1981: 656), and which have more recently been advocated by Sansom (2003) (as cited in Cohen et al., 2003: 92) and Ramsland and Dollery (2011) as an alternative to amalgamation. For these writers, not only does a two-tier system have the potential to combine the democratic benefits of small size with the enhanced capacity of scale, but such a governance arrangement would appear to be relatively simple to establish. Ramsland and Dollery (2011: 5), for example, note that the Queensland Local Government Act already provides for the designation of various ‘classes’ of local government. Similarly, Sansom (as cited in Cohen et al., 2003: 92) has posited that, in the New South Wales context, the implementation of a two-tier model may be as simple as “going back to the old county council concept”, stating: “The systems are there already...We have the provision for special rates, local improvement rates, and so on. The framework is there. It is a matter of deciding whether we are going to use it...”¹⁴⁹.

Clearly, the precise structure – level of autonomy and governance arrangements – of a community board will be fundamental to any consideration of its democratic virtues. In the New Zealand context, Webster and Fa’apoi (2018) find, positively, that the candidacy and representation of women, ethnic minorities and young people tends to be higher in local boards

¹⁴⁹ An extant example of such a two-tier system can be found in England, where Parishes, although sitting within larger principal councils, enjoy substantial autonomy as a function of general powers of competence, the ability to levy a rate (via precept on the council rate), and their own administrative arm (Sandford, 2019).

compared with the central Auckland Council. McGregor and Webster (2017: 24) postulate that this increased participation at board level may give rise to a “pipeline effect”, which could ultimately lead to enhanced participation and representation at council level. However, available evidence from Europe – where there is a tendency, as in Australia, to constrain the autonomy of sub-municipal units – suggests that the activation of residents in connection with sub-municipal governance is rather more “questionable” (Swianiewicz, 2020b: 36). In order to properly assess the potential of community boards for mitigating the democratic deficiencies of larger municipalities, further research would thus be necessary not only on the relationship between the presence of such boards and citizens’ levels of political efficacy and participation, but also on the development of a community governance model that would maximise the potential for democratic benefit.

Alternative 3 – ward size and councillor numbers

Another, quite different, alternative to secession may lie in reforms that increase the representative-to-citizen ratio (Asquith, 2012). Could, specifically, IPE and EPE – as well as rates of participation – be increased simply by reducing ward size (or dividing presently undivided municipalities on a ward-based structure), and increasing the number of sitting councillors?

Within the Australian local government literature, much has been made of the democratic effects of the country’s ever-expanding representation ratios. As noted in Chapter 5, the focus of much of this work has been on the effect that a reduction of councillor numbers has had on the quality (and perceived quality) of representation (Allan, 2003; Aulich, 1999; Burdess and O’Toole, 2004; Dollery and Grant, 2010; Hearfield and Dollery, 2009; Kiss, 2003; Monro, 2014). While, across the country, there has been a concerted movement towards a ‘corporate’ form of representation, whereby councillors are expected to apply a strategic mindset as they act in the interests of the wider municipality, it is evident from past studies that citizens tend to prefer lower representation ratios, with councillors who are more accessible and who represent the interests of a specific geographic community (what is known as the ‘delegate’ mode of representation) (Burdess and O’Toole, 2004; Hallebone et al., 2000; Ryan et al., 2015).

Given this apparent preference, it would be reasonable to expect that reforms to increase the number of councillors, and to institute (smaller) ward-based constituencies, would bolster feelings of EPE among the citizenry. Certainly, it could be hypothesised that with local councillors acting as advocates for communities, citizens should feel that their voice is being heard and represented in the council chamber. Indeed, a study by Drew and Dollery (2017) has found that when operating as local ‘delegates’, councillors are more likely to advocate for local spending

from the common tax pool. On the other hand, however, a local advocate may be insufficient to overcome the sense of diffuse powerlessness that may be perceived in the context of a large municipality, where there are many other voices and many policy priorities that any single constituency must compete against for attention. By asserting that more councillors will translate into better local representation, one may also fail to appreciate how large municipalities can depoliticise local politics, marginalising the processes through which local preferences emerge. Specifically, whereas citizens in small municipalities have a permanent forum in which to deliberate and argue over substantive policy disagreements and to forge positions of consensus or compromise, communities in large municipalities are expected – if they are to be heard by the wider council – to raise their voice in unison (and, even then, risk being accused of parochialism). In other words, expecting councillors to advocate for local preferences also makes the potentially alienating assumption that there are clear, pre-established local preferences to represent.

Compared with EPE, there is less reason to expect that increasing the number of councillors, or instituting a ward-based system, would increase general levels of IPE among the citizenry, particularly given that the complexity of issues remains largely unchanged. Nevertheless, there may be more specific/localised benefits. Specifically, there is the possibility that citizens will feel themselves more capable of running as a candidate, given that the additional seats should lower the resource-cost (time, money and civic skills) of running a successful campaign, while smaller constituency sizes should reduce the number of constituents required to be canvassed, making the task of campaigning more feasible (Bogdanor, 2006; Bullock, 1990). Contacting should also see a benefit. As Dahl (2015) has argued, as representation ratios decrease, the constraints of time and space ease, meaning that representatives are able to meet and converse with a greater proportion of their electorate. Additionally, being more local, residents are more likely to know their councillor, and may feel more comfortable contacting them (Allan, 2003). Ultimately, however, further empirical study on the relationship between the representation ratio, political efficacy, and participation would be required before greater clarity on the above could be achieved.

Conclusion

It was once held as axiomatic that civic and democratic culture is fostered at the local level (Jefferson, 1816; Mill, 1861; Tocqueville, 1839; Toulmin Smith, 1857). Whereas central government has always been rather “remote, inaccessible”, where “only a few can ever hope to participate actively and a still smaller number can ever gain great influence” (Dahl, 1967: 967), institutions of local government, with their more human proportions, have enabled much more inclusive participation. Through local self-government, it was once widely held, citizens acquire a stake in their society and an interest in its care, they gain an education in democracy and the political process, and they acquire a jealous regard for the principle of liberty.

By the time Australia’s municipal institutions were being forged in the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the democratic virtues of local government were already being couched less in terms of citizenship rights, and more in terms of instrumental utility. Certainly, south and west of the Blue Mountains, the spirit of local self-government was stronger than the traditional, Sydney-centric account has often admitted (Robbins, 1981; Wood, 1981). The rapid municipalisation of Australia’s parched landscapes and incongruous cities owes much to the voluntary petitioning and voluntary labours of ordinary citizens – labours that have in no small part contributed to the nation’s heady democratic culture. Yet, to state governments, local self-government has always been a contingent right. Almost as soon as councils were incorporated, the pull of centralisation had begun. Driven by the pursuit of efficiency, state governments would seek to oversee, regulate, and constrain the activities of local government. Talk of the benefits of amalgamation and greater city governance was never far from the political agenda.

This pursuit of efficiency accelerated sharply from the 1990s, as the twentieth century’s fragile truce between localism and centralism finally unravelled. That decade saw large-scale amalgamation programmes take place in all jurisdictions except for Western Australia¹⁵⁰. The allure of efficiency has been the most prominent driver of this reform. Economies of scale, administrative efficiencies, technical capacity – an emphasis on the outputs of local government – have been the primary focus for reform proponents. The academy, for its part, has not shied away from critiquing these reforms, but even here, the focus has been very much on proving and disproving the economic claims. Very little attention has been afforded to the potential democratic consequences of amalgamation (Dollery and Grant, 2010).

¹⁵⁰ And the Australian Capital Territory, but this jurisdiction doesn’t have a local government sector.

Australia has not been alone in its trend towards larger municipalities, nor in its failure to systematically study its effects on democratic culture. As Dahl famously lamented, as early the 1960s,

“Now what is strangely missing from the discussion of the optimum size of cities is the voice of the political scientist. The question is, of course, broader than the problem of what size of city may be optimal for a democratic political life. But political life is not trivial. Surely political criteria have a place among the criteria for the optimum size of cities; and among these political criteria surely one of the most important is whether a city is beyond the threshold for widespread participation. The whole question needs more study than it has had” (Dahl, 1967: 967).

Despite Dahl’s plea, it was not until the turn of the century that studies on the relationship between municipality size and democracy began to accumulate. Nevertheless, empirical evidence as it relates to the Australian context has remained meagre. As well as being an attempt to draw the connection between political alienation and municipality size, this study has been an attempt to remedy some of the gaps in the empirical broadsheet.

As noted, this study’s findings echo the overwhelming message of the international literature that citizens’ sense of IPE and rates of political participation decrease as municipality size increases. Specifically, drawing on a sample of over 500 residents of metropolitan Adelaide and Perth, a negative relationship was found between size and IPE – though not EPE. Citizens of smaller municipalities were also found to be more likely to vote, to run for council, to contact their councillors and to attend council meetings.

The findings of this study suggest that citizens of larger municipalities are more alienated – from their council and local political processes – than citizens of smaller municipalities. This has important consequences for local government’s input legitimacy. Where citizens are disengaged, where they feel that decisions are happening without their input and in spite of their own wishes (Finifter, 1970), they may be less likely to accept and support the implementation of those decisions (Pateman, 1970). Moreover, output legitimacy may also be compromised, because without an engaged citizenry contributing to the design of local policy (whether directly or indirectly through preference signalling) and without a watchful citizenry holding the council to account, sub-optimal decisions are likely to result (Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba and Nie, 1972).

Yet, beyond the local implications, there may also be polity-wide consequences, for an alienated and disengaged citizenry at the local level is unlikely to bode well for a nation's democratic culture more generally. Civic spirit, according to Sandel (2012: 130), is like a muscle; just as it may grow stronger with exercise, it may atrophy with disuse. Thus, if the tradition of local self-government has indeed been as integral to the development and maintenance of liberal institutions as Toulmin Smith (1849) has vociferously argued, where will be the well-spring for the next generation? As Pratchett (2004: 361) explains:

“Local democracy provides more than simply the opportunity for individuals to influence those decisions that affect their immediate social and economic environment. Local democracy also builds and reinforces notions of participatory citizenship, because it is the primary venue in which most people practise politics. It follows that, without some form of local democracy, the opportunities for developing democratic values and skills that can be used at broader institutional levels would be severely limited”.

If, as Power et al. (1981: 103) have argued, the dearth of systematic research on local democracy in Australia has detracted “from our ability to make informed judgements”, it is hoped that this study's contributions will help to elucidate and quantify the democratic value of small municipalities and the democratic consequences of amalgamation – a counterpoint to the overwhelming emphasis on efficiency. But rather than merely offer a defence against further amalgamation, this final chapter has demonstrated that the benefits of small size are eminently achievable through proactive reform. By chronicling past examples of municipal secession, it has been demonstrated that municipal fragmentation can be made politically, logistically, and economically feasible.

Political alienation is certainly a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Political scientists have, for half a century now, deliberated at length as to its causes and potential remedies. Yet, as the findings of this study attest, municipal mergers should now be taken more seriously as one of the explanations. And smaller local government as one of the cures.

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Appendix 3.1. Citizen poll outcomes

Table a. Summary results of council amalgamation/de-amalgamation voter polls in Australia						
State	Municipality	Year	Purpose of poll	Yes (%)	No (%)	Turnout (%)
NSW	Pittwater Council	1991	Secession	74%	N/A	N/A
NSW	Mosman Council	1962	Amalgamation	N/A	91%	N/A
NSW	Mosman Council	1974	Amalgamation	N/A	91%	N/A
NSW	Mosman Council	1977	Amalgamation	N/A	87%	N/A
NSW	Mosman Council	1983	Amalgamation	N/A	89%	N/A
NSW	Mosman Council	2004	Amalgamation	N/A	79%	N/A
NSW	Mosman Council	2012	Amalgamation	N/A	81%	N/A
QLD	Mareeba Shire Council	2013	De-amalgamation	6,165 (57.90%)	4,482 (42.10%)	10,748 (87.19%)
QLD	Douglas Shire Council	2013	De-amalgamation	3,230 (57.64%)	2,374 (42.36%)	5,655 (81.98%)
QLD	Livingstone Shire Council	2013	De-amalgamation	10,862 (56.59%)	8,331 (43.41%)	19,388 (87.57%)
QLD	Noosa Shire Council	2013	De-amalgamation	24,477 (81.38%)	5,602 (18.62%)	30,349 (87.16%)
SA	Port Lincoln Council	1996	Amalgamation	2:1 against		N/A
SA	Lower Eyre Peninsula Council	1996	Amalgamation	2:1 against		N/A
SA	Tumby Bay Council	1996	Amalgamation	2:1 against		N/A
SA	Town of Walkerville	1996	Amalgamation	3.5%	96.5%	73%
Tas	Tasman Council	2019	Amalgamation	629 (31.37%)	1,376 (68.63%)	2,025 (77.47%)
WA	City of Cockburn	2015	Amalgamation	3,744 (16.72%)	18,654 (83.28%)	22,438 (36.25%)
WA	City of Kwinana	2015	Amalgamation	1,156 (12.02%)	8,462 (87.98%)	9,638 (52.93%)
WA	City of South Perth	2015	Amalgamation	3,026 (22.25%)	10,572 (77.75%)	13,616 (50.83%)

WA	Town of East Fremantle	2015	Amalgamation	680 (24.07%)	2,145 (75.93%)	2,831 (54.68%)
WA	Town of Victoria Park	2015	Amalgamation	2,930 (38.42%)	4,697 (61.58%)	7,656 (38.02%)
WA	Shire of Cuballing	2013	Amalgamation	96 21%	353 (79%)	449 (80%)
WA	Shire of Westonia	2012	Amalgamation	28 (18%)	126 (82%)	154 (77%)
WA	City of Geraldton-Greenough	2011	Amalgamation	2,158 (28%)	5,721 (72%)	7,903 (36%)
WA	Shire of Mullewa	2011	Amalgamation	28 (17%)	139 (83%)	167 (35%)
WA	Shire of Perenjori	2011	Amalgamation	20 (8%)	273 (92%)	296 (80%)
WA	Shire of Northam	2007	Amalgamation	41 (7%)	555 (93%)	596 (23%)
WA	Greenough Shire	2006	Amalgamation	519 (20%)	2,045 (80%)	2,564 (29%)
WA	Shire of Narrogin	2004	Amalgamation	129 (28%)	325 (72%)	454 (76%)
WA	Shire of Narrogin	1999	Amalgamation	49 (9%)	502 (91%)	551 (89%)
WA	Shire of Greenough	1999	Amalgamation	479 (10%)	4,410 (90%)	4,891 (63%)
WA	Shire of Northam	1999	Amalgamation	89 (5%)	1,591 (95%)	1,680 (74%)
WA	Shire of Albany	1998	Amalgamation	1,713 (43%)	2,267 (57%)	3,983 (44%)
WA	Shire of Albany	1989	Amalgamation	25%	75%	<33%
WA	Shire of Albany	1987	Amalgamation	20%	80%	56%
WA	City of Subiaco	1976	Amalgamation	5.6%	94.4%	~60%

Note. While an attempt was made to catalogue all known poll results from a range of data sources, any such list will invariably be incomplete. Data sourced from Berry (2016), Dollery and Byrnes (2005), Electoral Commission Queensland (2020), Local Government Boundary Reform Board (1998), Morcombe (2015), Mosman Council (2016), Tasmanian Electoral Commission (2019b), West (2015), Western Australian Electoral Commission (2015)

Appendix 5.1. Systematic review results

Table a. Systematic review of the effect of municipality population size on citizens' sense of local political efficacy							
Publication	Country	Efficacy measure/s	Efficacy type#	Relationship	Controls	Sample size	Statistical method and data source
Lapointe, Saarimaa, and Tukiainen (2018)	Finland	No explicit measure provided. The authors state that the survey questions related to 'the degree to which respondents feel like they can take part in and have an impact on local politics'.	Internal	Negative*	Nm	13 – 388 (per municipality)	Quasi-experiment. Regression-based DiD analysis on data from survey of residents from 86 purposively sampled municipalities. Conducted in 2008 and repeated in 2011.
Huang & Deng (2017)	China	Index of: (1) Public officials care what people like me think; (2) Public officials can hear if I present my advice or complaint; (3) Public officials pay attention to people's attitude towards government; (4) The government would adopt my suggestion on public affairs.	External	Negative*	Af Ag Co Ed Et Ge Pc	4609	Cross-sectional. OLS and quantile regression on survey data from stratified sample of residents from 47 counties, conducted in 2010.
Gendziwł & Swianiewicz (2016)	Poland	Do people like you have impact on the issues of this municipality?	External	Negative*	Af Ag Co Ec Ed Ge Lr	2967	Cross-sectional. MLA regression on survey data from stratified sample of residents from 243 municipalities, conducted in 2015.

Denters et al. (2014)	Switzerland	<p>Index of:</p> <p>(1) I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in local politics.</p> <p>(2) I feel that I could do as good a job as a member of the municipal council as most other people.</p> <p>(3) I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing my municipality.</p> <p>(4) How well informed do you feel you are regarding what happens in municipal politics?</p>	Internal	Negative*	Ag Cm Ed Ge Lr Oc Ps Re Rs Ts	1530	Cross-sectional. MLA regression on survey data from stratified sample of residents from 50–60 municipalities per country, conducted in 2001.
	Norway		Internal	Negative*		1452	
	Denmark		Internal	Negative*		1567	
	Netherlands		Internal	Negative*		653	
Hansen (2013)	Denmark	<p>Index of:</p> <p>(1) Local politicians do not care much about the views of the people in this/my municipality.</p> <p>(2) Generally speaking, how much attention do you feel the mayor and local politicians in your municipality pay to what the people think when they decide what to do?</p>	External	Negative*	Af Ag De Ge Nm Oc Ts	900	Quasi-experiment. Regression-based DiD analysis on survey data from 60 stratified sample of residents from 60 municipalities. Conducted in 2001 and repeated in 2009.

Lassen & Serritzlew (2011)	Denmark	<p>Index of:</p> <p>(1) Sometimes local politics seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.</p> <p>(2) I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues facing our municipality.</p> <p>(3) I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in municipal politics.</p> <p>(4) I feel that I could do as good a job as a local councillor as most other people</p> <p>(5) How well would you say that you are informed about local politics in your municipality?</p>	Internal	Negative*	Af Ag Ed Ge Oc Nm	1255	Quasi-experiment. Regression-based DiD analysis on survey data from stratified sample of residents from 60 municipalities. Conducted in 2001 and repeated in 2007/8.
Larsen (2002)	Denmark	<p>Index of:</p> <p>(1) Local politicians generally do not pay enough attention to the citizens' opinions;</p> <p>(2) Local politicians do their best to make decisions that take the citizens' opinions into consideration.</p>	External	NS	Ag Ed Ts	50765	Cross-sectional. OLS regression on survey data from sample of residents from 38 municipalities, carried out from 1994–1997.
Denters (2002)	Netherlands	This local authority does not pay enough attention to what goes on in the minds of the people in this municipality.	External	Negative*	Ag Ed Ge	1520	Cross-sectional. Correlation analysis on survey data from 1993.

Soul (1999)	Australia	The local council does not care about the views of people like me.	External	Negative*		478	
		Measures are not provided in the paper. However, reviewing the survey instrument appended to the associated PhD dissertation ¹⁴⁹ , the questions appear to generally tap the external dimension of efficacy.	External	NS	Af Ed Oc	601	Cross-sectional. OLS regression conducted on survey data from a random sample of the most recent additions to the rate-payer rolls (i.e., residents who moved into the municipality within the past two years) in 4 purposively sampled municipalities, carried out in 1997.

* Significant at 0.05 or lower.

NS Non-significant relationship.

As determined by the present author.

Controls: Af [Measures of affluence/income]; Ag [Age]; Ap [Associational participation]; Ce [Number of constituents per elected member]; Cm [Commuter]; Co [Contextual variable/s]; De [Population density]; Ec [Level of electoral competition]; Ed [Education level]; Et [Ethnicity]; Ge [Gender]; In [Interest in politics]; Lr [Length of residence]; Mf [Degree of metropolitan fragmentation]; Nm [Non-merged municipalities as a control group]; Oc [Occupation status]; Pc [Concentration of population within a jurisdiction]; Pe [Level of political efficacy]; Ps [Parental status]; Pv [Propensity to vote]; Re [Religiosity]; Rs [Relationship status]; Ts [Tenancy status].

Table b. Systematic review of the effect of municipality population size on local political (electoral) participation

Publication	Participatory act	Country	Relationship	Controls	Sample size	Statistical method and data source
Heinisch et al. (2018)	Voting	Austria	Negative*	Af Ec Ed Nm Oc	287 (m)	Quasi-experiment. OLS regression conducted on aggregated electoral data (2010 and 2015) from all municipalities in the state of Styria.
Rodrigues & Meza (2018)	Voting	Portugal	Negative*	Nm	3014 (m)	Quasi-experiment. Regression-based DiD analysis conducted on aggregated Parish-level electoral data (2009 and 2013).
Lapointe, Saarimaa, and Tukiainen (2018)	Voting	Finland	Negative*	Nm	366 (m)	Quasi-experiment. Regression-based DiD analysis conducted on aggregated electoral data (2000 to 2017).
Zeedan (2017)	Voting	Israel	Negative*	Co Et	24 (m)	Quasi-experiment. OLS regression conducted on aggregated electoral data (1998 to 2013), for 24 amalgamated municipalities.
van Houwelingen (2017)	Voting	Netherlands	Negative*	Ag Ed Ge	5480	Cross-sectional. Logistic regression conducted on a dataset combining survey data from 1986, 1998 and 2002.

Koch & Rochat (2017)	Voting	Switzerland	Negative*	Nm	245 (m)	Quasi-experiment. OLS regression conducted on aggregated electoral data (1996 to 2012) for all municipalities within the canton of Ticino.
Voda, Svačinová, Smolková & Balík (2017)	Candidacy rate	Czech Republic	Negative*	Rs Et Cm Ed Os Ts	6124 (m)	Cross-sectional. Poisson regression conducted on aggregated candidate data from 2006 to 2014. (While the unit of analysis was sub-municipal settlement units, non-amalgamated municipalities were treated as single units, thus could be compared with other non-amalgamated municipalities of different sizes).
Gendźwiłł & Swianiewicz (2016)	Index of: (1) Meeting attendance. (2) Contacting local elected officials. (3) Discussions with neighbours.	Poland	Negative*	Af Ag Co Ec Ed Ge Lr	2972	Cross-sectional. MLA regression on survey data from stratified sample of residents from 243 municipalities, conducted in 2015.
Holbrook & Weinschenk (2014)	Voting	USA	NS	Af Ed Et Co	144 (m) (340 data points)	Cross-sectional. OLS regression conducted on aggregated electoral data (1996 to 2011) for a sample of the largest US municipalities, with populations ranging from 143,801 to 8,214,426.

			Norway			Negative*	Ts	1436	
			Denmark						
			Netherlands						
Cameron & Milne (2013)	Voting	South Africa		Negative^	-	226 (m)		Cross-sectional. Trend analysis based on descriptive statistics of aggregated electoral data (2011) for all municipalities.	
Tavares & Carr (2013)	Voting	Portugal		Negative*	Af Ag Co De Ec Et Re	278 (m)		Cross-sectional. OLS regression conducted on aggregated electoral data (2009) for all municipalities.	
Caren (2007)	Voting	USA		NS	Af Co Ec Ed Et Lr Ts	38 (m) (332 data points)		Cross-sectional. GLS random effects regression conducted on aggregated electoral data (multiple elections, 1979 to 2003) for a sample of US municipalities with populations above 500,000.	

Kelleher & Lowery (2004)	Voting	USA	NS	Af Co Et Mf Pc Pv	336 (m)	Cross-sectional. OLS regression conducted on aggregated electoral data (1999-2002) from a purposive sample of municipalities in 12 urban counties.
Rose (2002)	Attending a meeting regarding a local issue	Denmark	Negative*	Ag	629	Cross-sectional. Logistic regression conducted on survey data collected in each country during the 1990s.
		Netherlands	NS	Ap	807	
		Norway	Negative*	Ed	2019	
	Contacting an elected municipal politician	Denmark	NS	Ge	629	
		Netherlands	Negative*	In	807	
		Norway	Negative*	Lr	2035	
	Contacting a municipal civil servant	Denmark	Negative*	Oc	629	
		Netherlands	Negative*	Pe	807	
		Norway	Negative*		2025	
Larsen (2002)	Voting	Denmark	Negative*	Ag	50765	Cross-sectional. OLS regression conducted on survey data from sample of residents from 38 municipalities, carried out from 1994 to 1997.
	Contacting elected and non-elected officials	Denmark	Negative*	Ed	50765	
		Denmark	NS	Ts	50765	
	Meeting attendance	Denmark	NS			
Frandsen (2002)	Voting	Denmark	Negative^	-	-	
		Netherlands	Negative^			

	Norway	Negative^				Cross-sectional. Correlation analysis on aggregated electoral data (multiple elections, 1970 to 1997) from all municipalities.
	Switzerland	Negative^				
	UK	Negative^				
Ladner (2002)	Switzerland	Negative^	-	1335 (m)		Cross-sectional. Trend analysis based on descriptive statistics of aggregated data (multiple elections, 1988 and 1998).
	Switzerland	Negative^		~2000 (m)		Cross-sectional. Trend analysis based on descriptive statistics of aggregated electoral data (1998).
Oliver (2000)	USA	Negative*		2032	Af	
	USA	Negative*		1914	Ag Ed	
					Et	Cross-sectional. OLS and logistic regression
					Ge	conducted on survey data from stratified sample of citizens from across USA, conducted in 1990.
	USA	NS		2022	Et Lr Rs Ts	
Morlan (1984)	Denmark	Negative^				Cross-sectional. Trend analysis based on descriptive statistics of aggregated electoral data (multiple years, 1956 to 1979).
	Finland	NR^		-		
	Ireland	Negative^				
	Netherlands	Negative^				

Robbins (1978)	Voting		Australia (SA)	Negative [^]	-	286	Cross-sectional. Trend-analysis based on descriptive statistics of random survey of citizens listed on the South Australian electoral roll.
	Contacting local elected officials	Australia (SA)	Negative [^]				
	Contacting non-elected officials	Australia (SA)	Negative [^]				
Kesselman (1966)	Voting		France	Negative [^]	-	1810 (m)	Cross-sectional. Trend analysis based on descriptive statistics of aggregated electoral data (1959) at the commune level.

*Significant at 0.05 or lower

[^]Level of significance not provided or not tested

NS Non-significant relationship

NR No relationship evident

(m) Number of municipalities (rather than participants)

Controls: Af [Measures of affluence/income]; Ag [Age]; Ap [Associational participation]; Ce [Number of constituents per elected member]; Cm [Commuter]; Co [Contextual variable/s]; De [Population density]; Ec [Level of electoral competition]; Ed [Education level]; Et [Ethnicity]; Ge [Gender]; In [Interest in politics]; Lr [Length of residence]; Mf [Degree of metropolitan fragmentation]; Nm [Non-merged municipalities as a control group]; Oc [Occupation status]; Pc [Concentration of population within a jurisdiction]; Pe [Level of political efficacy]; Ps [Parental status]; Pv [Propensity to vote]; Re [Religiosity]; Rs [Relationship status]; Ts [Tenancy status].

Appendix 6.1. Survey responses by municipality

Table a. Detailed breakdown of responses per municipality						
Pop. quintile	Pop (2018)	Municipality	State	<i>n</i>	% of sample	% of general pop
1	1,721	Peppermint Grove	WA	6	14% (n=73)	4%
	7,811	East Fremantle	WA	6		
	7,944	Walkerville	SA	13		
	8,188	Cottesloe	WA	9		
	9,067	Mosman Park	WA	12		
	10,704	Claremont	WA	5		
	15,739	Bassendean	WA	2		
	17,106	Subiaco	WA	8		
	21,259	Prospect	SA	7		
	22,554	Nedlands	WA	5		
2	24,018	Gawler	SA	6	13% (n=72)	9%
	24,794	Adelaide	SA	8		
	27,762	Perth	WA	8		
	28,481	Cambridge	WA	4		
	30,868	Fremantle	WA	11		
	30,933	Serpentine Jarrahdale	WA	2		
	36,088	Vincent	WA	11		
	36,601	Victoria Park	WA	8		
	36,750	Norwood Payneham St Peters	SA	14		
3	37,032	Holdfast Bay	SA	9	18% (n=94)	14%
	39,139	Mundaring	WA	1		
	39,145	Unley	SA	18		
	41,510	Belmont	WA	4		
	43,511	Kwinana	WA	2		
	43,554	South Perth	WA	17		
	45,706	Burnside	SA	14		
	51,469	Campbelltown	SA	13		
	58,946	Kalamunda	WA	5		

	60,105	West Torrens	SA	11		
4	67,253	Mitcham	SA	14	22% (n=116)	25%
	68,232	Bayswater	WA	8		
	87,634	Armadale	WA	5		
	92,308	Marion	SA	18		
	92,965	Canning	WA	7		
	93,426	Playford	SA	14		
	99,694	Tea Tree Gully	SA	15		
	101,940	Melville	WA	21		
	112,165	Cockburn	WA	14		
5	117,382	Charles Sturt	SA	12	34% (n=182)	48%
	123,325	Gosnells	WA	9		
	126,120	Port Adelaide Enfield	SA	21		
	133,389	Rockingham	WA	16		
	142,555	Salisbury	SA	24		
	143,374	Swan	WA	11		
	160,031	Joondalup	WA	24		
	171,489	Onkaparinga	SA	16		
	203,679	Wanneroo	WA	13		
	220,249	Stirling	WA	36		
TOTAL				537		

Appendix 6.2. Final questionnaire

Survey questions, in their final wording and order, are provided below. Note, however, that the format of this version differs from that provided to participants, as the questionnaire was administered on a tablet, using specialised survey software (from Qualtrics).

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

The following information outlines a research project being conducted by **Joshua McDonnell**, PhD candidate at the **University of Western Australia**.

You have been selected to participate and your involvement is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the survey at any time. The questionnaire will require approximately **5 minutes to complete**.

If you agree to participate in the survey, please complete the questions that follow. The act of submitting your responses to this online survey will represent your implied consent to participate in this survey.

Your responses will be anonymous and will not be used individually. This means that once you press 'submit', it will also not be possible to remove your responses from the database should you wish to withdraw them later.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the email address provided below.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua McDonnell
joshua.mcdonnell@research.uwa.edu.au

ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS (must answer in the affirmative to be eligible to participate in the survey)

E1. This survey is open to persons aged 18 years and over. How old are you?
[18-24] [25-34] [35-44] [45-54] [55-64] [65-74] [75 or over]

E2. This survey is open to residents of Western Australia and South Australia. In which state do you currently live?
[Western Australia] [South Australia] [None of the above]

If answer is [no] to either question [E1] or [E2], survey will end.

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A1. What is your home postcode?

[Text Field]

A2. What is your home suburb?

[Text Field]

A3. Do you know the name of your local government area (council)?

[Yes] [No]

If answer is [no] to question A3, survey will move directly to question A5. If answer is [yes] to question A3, question A4 will be displayed.

A4. What is the name of your local government area?

[Text field]

A5. How long have you lived in your current local government area?

[Less than 1 year] [Between 1 and 3 years] [Between 3 and 6 years] [Between 6 and 10 years] [Over 10 years]

A6. What is your highest level of completed education?

[Did not complete high school] [Completed high school] [TAFE/Certificate/Diploma/Apprenticeship]
[Undergraduate (bachelor) university degree] [Postgraduate university degree]

A7. Which best describes your current employment status?

[Full-time] [Part-time] [Casual] [Not currently employed] [Full time student]

A8. What is your gender?

[Female] [Male] [Other]

SECTION B

The following questions are about your attitudes towards local (council-level) political participation, and your perceptions of your council's receptiveness to citizens' views.

Please tick the response that best fits your feelings towards the following statements. Please answer each of the following questions based on what you believe to be true, rather than what you think you should choose.

B1. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues facing my council/local government.

[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

B2. I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in local (council-level) politics.

[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

B3. I feel that I could do as good a job as a local councillor as most other people.
[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

B4. Generally, I feel that my local council pays attention to people's views when it decides what to do.
[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

B5. I feel that having elections makes mayors/shire presidents and councillors pay attention to what the people think.
[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

Please read the following statements carefully, as they are phrased differently to the previous statements. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

B6. Sometimes local (council-level) politics seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

B7. People like me don't have any say about what council/local government does.
[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

B8. I don't think mayors/shire presidents and local councillors care much what people like me think.
[Agree strongly] [Agree somewhat] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Disagree somewhat] [Disagree strongly]

Please read the following question carefully, as it is phrased differently to the previous statements.

B9. How well would you say that you are informed about local politics in your council/local government area?
[Highly informed] [Somewhat informed] [Neither informed nor uninformed] [Somewhat uninformed] [Strongly uninformed]

SECTION C

The following questions are about your participation in local affairs.

C1. Were you living at your current address at the time of the last council elections?
[Yes] [No] [Don't know]

If answer is [no] or [don't know] to question C1, survey will move directly to question C4. If answer is [yes] to question C1, questions C2 and C3 will be displayed.

C2. Did you vote in those elections?
[Yes] [No]

C3. Did you nominate/stand for election as either a councillor or mayor/shire president in those elections?

[Yes] [No]

The following questions ask about your participation in local affairs in your current local government area over the past two years. *If you have moved house from another local government area within the past two years, please only answer the questions in relation to the period you have been living at your current address. In addition, please remember that the questions are about your participation as a resident, not in any professional capacity (e.g. if you work for a council).*

C4. In the past two years, have you initiated contact with a councillor or mayor/shire president of your local council to present your views on an issue?

[Yes] [No]

C5. In the past two years, has a local councillor or mayor/shire president contacted you to seek your views?

[Yes] [No]

C6. In the past two years, have you initiated contact with any member of the state or federal parliament to present your views on an issue?

[Yes] [No]

C7. In the past two years, have you attended an official meeting of council (including a general council meeting or a committee meeting)?

[Yes] [No]

C8. In the past two years, have you received any request directed to you personally asking you to contact a local government official (either elected or staff) about a particular issue?

[Yes] [No]

C9. In the past two years, have you participated in a formal community consultation exercise run by council staff to gather community feedback on a particular issue (e.g. via surveys, workshops, street-corner meetings, etc.)?

The following questions are about your current level of knowledge and interest in local politics.

C10. How interested are you in the affairs of your local council?

[A lot] [A little] [Not at all]

C11. Do you know the name (first and/or surname) of your local mayor/shire president?

[Yes – if so, please type it here] [No]

C12. Do you know the name of the federal electorate in which you live?

[Yes – if so, please type it here] [No]

C13. Do you know the name (first and/or surname) of your electorate’s federal MP?

[Yes – if so, please type it here] [No]

C14. Are you currently a member of a political party (whether at local, state or federal level)?

[Yes] [No]

C15. Are you a member of a local club or not-for-profit group/ organisation? (Doesn’t have to be in your local government area). These may include sports clubs, arts/culture organisations, youth groups, seniors’ groups, environmental groups, emergency services, charities/welfare organisations, or religious institutions, but does not include political parties.

[Yes] [No]

C16. In the past year, have you done any voluntary work in the community, including for a local club or not-for-profit group/organisation (not including political parties)? (Doesn’t have to be in your local government area).

[Yes] [No]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Have a great day!

(If you were redirected here it is because this survey is open only to residents of Western Australia and South Australia, who are aged over the age of 18. Thank you for your understanding).

Appendix 6.3. Participant Information Form



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

Dr Kelly Gerard
School of Social Sciences M257
Political Science and International Relations
The University of Western Australia
35 Stirling Highway, Crawley WA 6009

Participant Information Form

Project title: Political alienation and municipality size: the effect of municipality size on levels of political efficacy and electoral participation.

Name of Researchers: Joshua McDonnell, PhD candidate, University of Western Australia.
(*Phd Supervisors: Dr Kelly Gerard; Associate Professor Jeannette Taylor*).

Invitation and aim of study:

I will be most grateful if you can agree to participate in my **PhD research study**, which seeks to understand whether the population size of a local government area has an effect on citizens' attitudes towards their local council, their belief in their own ability to effectively contribute to decision making, and ultimately, in their level of participation in local politics. Debate about council amalgamations is a common theme in Australian politics, yet most of the research into amalgamations relates to questions of economic efficiency. This study seeks to understand whether council size has any positive or negative effect on democracy. This question is particularly important in current times, when citizens are said to be becoming increasingly alienated from politics and are losing faith in democracy.

What does participation involve?

All I ask is if you could spare no more than **5 minutes** to complete a short online survey. The survey consists of several closed-ended questions, where you tick the most appropriate response.

Privacy, voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study

The survey is completely **anonymous**. No sensitive personal information is gathered, and no identifying information will be attached to your responses. Only I will have access to the research data, which will be stored in a secure site, as required by my university research ethical guidelines. In short, you will encounter **no risks** whatsoever by participating in this survey. Participation in the survey is completely **voluntary**. You may cease your participation at any time during the survey; no reason or justification for such a decision needs to be provided. **However, because the answers are anonymous, once you press the 'submit' button on the final page of the survey, your answers will not be able to be withdrawn from the database.**

Contacts and further information

For information relating to the study, participants and members of the public are invited to visit <http://www.socialsciences.uwa.edu.au/research/postgrad-research-profiles/profile?joshua.mcdonnell> (or: <https://bit.ly/2Mldu9D>). This webpage will contain all relevant contact details, a link to the online survey, updates on the study's progress/findings, and links to any resulting publications. If you would like to participate or to discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact Joshua at joshua.mcdonnell@research.uwa.edu.au

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Ethics office at UWA on (08) 6488 4703 or by emailing to humanethics@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

Appendix 6.4. Intercept survey sites

Map ref	Site name	Suburb	Municipality name	Land use type	Land use scale*	Proximity to civic centre^	Suburb SES status~	Date of visit	Time of visit	Number asked	Responses received
1	Adelaide University & Torrens Riverbank	Adelaide	Adelaide	Education & parkland	State	<1000 metres	76	21-Aug-18	2pm - 5:15pm	23	20
2	Walkerville Terrace and surrounds	Walkerville	Walkerville	Retail, residential & sports field	Local	<1000 metres	93	23-Aug-18	11:30am - 12:45pm	5	3
								29-Aug-18	3:30pm - 4:30pm	7	4
								7-Sep-18	1pm - 2pm	4	3
								8-Sep-18	4pm - 4:30	3	3
3	Prospect Road	Prospect	Prospect	Retail	Regional	<1000 metres	80	21-Sep-18	5:30pm - 6:30pm	3	3
								23-Aug-18	1pm - 1:30pm	6	0
4	Adelaide Parklands	North Adelaide	Adelaide	Parkland	Regional	>1000 metres	95	23-Aug-18	1:45pm - 2:45pm	5	4

13	Unley Oval & Unley Road	Unley	Unley	Unley	Retail & sports field	Local	<1000 metres	92	1-Sep-18	12noon - 12:40pm	4	4
13a	C F Page Memorial Park	Clarence Park	Unley	Unley	Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	84	22-Sep-18	5:20pm-6pm	6	4
14	King William Road	Hyde Park	Unley	Unley	Retail	Local	>1000 metres	97	1-Sep-18	6:05pm-6:30pm	3	3
15	Orphanage Park	Millswood	Unley	Unley	Park land & Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	99	1-Sep-18	12:45pm - 1pm	3	0
16	Mortlock Park	Colonel Light Gardens	Mitcham	Mitcham	Sports field	Local	>1000 metres	96	1-Sep-18	1:15pm - 2pm	5	4
17	Avenue Road Reserve	Cumberland Park	Mitcham	Mitcham	Sports field & skate park	Local	>1000 metres	89	1-Sep-18	2:20pm - 2:45pm	4	2
18	Oaklands Wetlands and Reserve	Oaklands Park	Marion	Marion	Parkland & Promenade	Regional	>1000 metres	18	1-Sep-18	2:55pm - 3:40pm	4	4
19	Point Malcolm Reserve	Semaphore Park	Charles Sturt	Charles Sturt	Parkland & Picnic spot	Local	>1000 metres	20	2-Sep-18	4pm - 5:30pm	6	6
20	Semaphore Foreshore	Semaphore	Port Adelaide Enfield	Port Adelaide Enfield	Beach foreshore	Regional	>1000 metres	66	2-Sep-18	12:30pm - 2:10pm	9	8
									30-Sep-18	2:20pm - 4pm	13	7
										1:20pm-3pm	14	11

21	Mawson Lakes	Mawson Lakes	Salisbury	Retail & park	Local	>1000 metres	79	7-Sep-18	5pm - 6:15pm	7	6
									12pm-12:45		
22	Billabong Oval	St Peters	Norwood, Payneham, St Peters	Sports field	Local	>1000 metres	97	8-Sep-18	4:40pm - 5:30pm	5	5
23	Glenelg	Glenelg	Holdfast Bay	Beach foreshore & parkland	Regional	>1000 metres	70	9-Sep-18	11:30am - 12:45pm	11	7
24	Brighton Beach Foreshore	Brighton	Holdfast Bay	Beach foreshore	Regional	<1000 metres	80	9-Sep-18	1pm - 2pm	10	7
								7-Oct-18	6:45pm- 7:45pm		
25	Hallett Cove Foreshore	Hallett Cove	Marion	Beach foreshore	Local	>1000 metres	75	9-Sep-18	2:30pm - 2:40pm	1	0
26	Christies Beach Foreshore	Christies Beach	Onkaparinga	Beach foreshore & parkland	Local	>1000 metres	12	9-Sep-18	2:50pm - 3:40pm	5	5
27	Jubilee Park	Port Noarlunga South	Onkaparinga	Parkland	Local	>1000 metres	44	9-Sep-18	4:50 - 5:25pm	4	4

28	Hazelwood Park	Hazelwood Park	Burnside	Parkland & picnic spot	Local	>1000 metres	97	12-Sep-18	5pm - 5:45pm	6	3
29	Civic Park - Modbury	Modbury	Tea Tree Gully	Parkland	Local	<1000 metres	28	13-Sep-18	5pm - 5:45pm	10	4
30	Bentley Reserve	Holden Hill	Tea Tree Gully	Sports field & Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	19	14-Sep-18	4:30pm - 5pm	5	5
31	Golding Oval	Para Vista	Salisbury	Sports field & Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	17	14-Sep-18	5:10pm- 5:20pm	1	0
32	Unity Park	Pooraka	Salisbury	Parkland & Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	13	14-Sep-18	5:25pm- 5:40pm	1	0
33	Rymill Park	Adelaide	Adelaide	Parkland & Picnic spot	Regional	>1000 metres	76	16-Sep-18	11:10am- 12:15am	4	4
34	Bonython Park	Adelaide	Adelaide	Parkland & Picnic spot	Regional	>1000 metres	76	16-Sep-18	12:30pm - 1:45pm	7	7
35	Carisbrooke Park	Salisbury Park	Salisbury	Parkland & Picnic Spot	Regional	>1000 metres	10	16-Sep-18	2:50pm - 4:15pm	8	6
36	The Vines picnic space	Waterloo Corner	Playford	Picnic Spot	Local	>1000 metres	11	16-Sep-18	6pm-6:20pm	2	2

37	Harold and Cynthia Anderson Reserve	West Beach	Charles Sturt	Beach foreshore	Local	>1000 metres	83	19-Sep-18	4:15pm - 4:45pm	3	3
38	Broadview Oval	Broadview	Prospect	Sports field	Local	>1000 metres	57	27-Sep-18	5:40pm-6:15pm	3	3
								30-Sep-18	11am-11:30am	4	3
39	Hazelmere Road Reserve	Glengowrie	Marion	Sports field	Local	>1000 metres	76	7-Oct-18	6pm-6:35pm	5	4
40	Minkarra Park	Happy Valley	Onkaparinga	Parkland & Skate park	Local	>1000 metres	62	10-Oct-18	4:40pm-5:10pm	5	4
41	Wilfred Taylor Reserve	Morphett Vale	Onkaparinga	Sports field	Local	>1000 metres	12	10-Oct-18	5:40pm-5:55pm	2	2
42	Symonds Reserve	Aldinga Beach	Onkaparinga	Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	20	10-Oct-18	6:55pm-7:05pm	2	1
43	Stebonheath Park	Andrews Farm	Playford	Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	8	11-Oct-18	5:45pm-6:15pm	2	2
44	Blake's Crossing Central	Blakeview	Playford	Sports field	Local	>1000 metres	27	11-Oct-18	6:20pm-6:40pm	3	2
45	Pooch Park	Blakeview	Playford	Dog park	Local	>1000 metres	27	11-Oct-18	6:45pm-7:15pm	3	2

Table b. Western Australian Intercept Survey locations – site details and map references

Map ref	Site name	Suburb	Municipality name	Land use type	Land use scale	Proximity to civic centre	Suburb SES status	Date of visit	Time of visit	Number asked	Responses received
1	Whitfords Nodes	Hillarys	Joondalup	Beach foreshore & Picnic spot	Local	>1000m	97	1-Dec-18	5pm-5:30pm	2	1
2	Kings Park	West Perth	Perth	Parkland & Picnic spot	State	>1000m	92	2-Dec-18	9:30am-3:30pm	50	37
								9-Dec-18	4:30pm-6:40pm	25	19
3	Carine Regional Open Space	Carine	Stirling	Parkland	Regional	>1000m	98	2-Dec-18	5:45pm-6:45pm	4	2
								3-Dec-18	12:45pm-2:30pm	13	7
4	UWA Campus	Crawley	Perth	Education	State	>1000m	80	12-Dec-18	12:15pm-12:55pm	8	3
								3-Dec-18	6pm-7:15pm	5	5

										16-Dec-18	4:35pm-6:05pm	14	9
										21-Dec-18	5pm-7:30pm	12	11
5a	Mosman Park-Peppermint Grove Foreshore	Peppermint Grove & Mosman Park	Peppermint Grove & Mosman Park	River foreshore & Promenade	Local	<1000m	100 & 97	12-Dec-18	2pm-3:20pm	10	6		
6	Central Park & Neil Hawkins Park	Joondalup	Joondalup	Parkland	Local	<1000m	73	4-Dec-18	4:45pm-6pm	5	4		
7	South Perth Foreshore	South Perth & Victoria Park	South Perth & Victoria Park	River foreshore & Picnic spot	Regional	>1000m	97 & 82	5-Dec-18	1pm-2:15pm; 3pm-6:30pm	30	20		
8	Lake Gwellup Reserve & Karrinyup Recreation Reserve	Gwelup & Karrinyup	Stirling	Parkland & Sports field	Regional	>1000m	98 & 96	6-Dec-18	4:30pm-6:15pm	12	11		

9	Fremantle Esplanade	Fremantle	Fremantle	Fremantle	Parkland	Regional	>1000m	84	8-Dec-18	1pm-3:20pm	20	15
									17-Dec-18	2:05pm-3:25pm	17	8
10	Monument Hill Memorial Reserve	Fremantle	Fremantle	Fremantle	Parkland	Local	<1000m	84	8-Dec-18	4:40pm-5pm	2	2
11	Frank Gibson Park	Fremantle	Fremantle	Fremantle	Sports field	Local	>1000m	84	8-Dec-18	5:10pm-5:20pm	2	0
12	Rockingham Foreshore	Rockingham	Rockingham	Rockingham	Beach foreshore & Picnic spot	Regional	<1000m	19	9-Dec-18	11:15am-3pm	34	18
13	Crawley-Dalkeith Foreshore	Crawley & Dalkeith	Perth & Nedlands	Perth & Nedlands	River foreshore, Parkland & Promenade	Local	>1000m	80 & 100	10-Dec-18	5:20pm-6:55pm	17	8
14	Hyde Park	Perth	Vincent	Vincent	Parkland & Picnic spot	Local	>1000m	92	11-Dec-18	4:15pm-5:55pm	20	12
15	Cottesloe Foreshore	Cottesloe & Swanbourne	Cottesloe & Nedlands	Cottesloe & Nedlands	Beach foreshore	Regional	<1000m	100 & 100	12-Dec-18	4:35pm-7pm	10	10

16	Quinns Rocks Foreshore	Mindarie	Wanneroo	Beach foreshore	Local	>1000m	96	13-Dec- 18	1pm- 2:15pm	5	4	1
17	Len Shearer Reserve	Booragoon	Melville	Parkland	Local	<1000m	95	13-Dec- 18	4:40pm- 5pm	4	2	2
18	Wireless Hill Park	Ardross	Melville	Parkland	Local	<1000m	97	13-Dec- 18	5:15pm- 5:30pm	1	1	1
19	Tompkins Park	Applecross	Melville	Parkland	Local	>1000m	99	13-Dec- 18	5:40pm- 6:10pm	3	2	2
20	Lake Monger Park	Wembley & West Leederville	Cambridge	Parkland & Picnic spot	Local	>1000m	96 & 98	14-Dec- 18	5:30pm- 6:30pm	5	5	5
21	Whiteman Park	Bennett Springs	Swan	Parkland & Picnic spot	Regional	>1000m	53	15-Dec- 18	10:45am- 12:25pm	16	10	10
22	Lilac Hill Park	Caversham	Swan	Parkland	Local	>1000m	78	15-Dec- 18	12:55pm- 1:25pm	3	2	2
23	Bayswater Riverside Gardens	Bayswater	Bayswater	Parkland & Dog park	Local	>1000m	80	15-Dec- 18	1:45pm- 3pm	13	6	6

											19-Dec-18	4:40pm-5:15pm	4	4	4
24	Manning Park	Spearwood	Cockburn	Parkland							15-Dec-18	5pm-6:05pm	7	6	6
25	City Beach Foreshore	City Beach	Cambridge	Beach foreshore							16-Dec-18	1pm-3:15pm	14	13	13
26	Tom's Reserve	East Fremantle	East Fremantle	Sports field							17-Dec-18	4:15pm-6:15pm	11	11	11
27	Centennial Pioneer Park	Gosnells	Gosnells	Parkland							18-Dec-18	12:20pm-1:30pm	7	5	5
28	Coker Park	Cannington	Canning	Sports field							18-Dec-18	2:40pm-3:15pm	2	1	1
29	Victoria Park-South Perth Foreshore	Victoria Park & South Perth	South Perth & Victoria Park	Parkland, Picnic spot & River foreshore							18-Dec-18	3:40pm-5:35pm	10	6	6
30	Coogee Beach Foreshore	Coogee	Cockburn	Foreshore							19-Dec-18	2:05pm-2:25pm	1	1	1
31	Woodman Point Park	Coogee	Cockburn	Parkland							19-Dec-18	2:30pm-3:15pm	4	4	4

32	College Park	Dalkeith	Nedlands	Sports field	Local	>1000m	100	19-Dec-18	6:10pm-6:45pm	3	3
33	Minnawarra Park	Armadale	Armadale	Parkland	Local	<1000m	5	28-Dec-18	2:15pm-2:55pm	4	3

*A subjective assessment of the site's catchment area.

^Distance from civic centre. This measure is based on the commonly accepted distance of maximum walkability being 800m (Daniels and Mulley, 2011).

~SEIFA IRSAD national percentile

Appendix 7.1: Correlations matrix and Harman Single Factor Test

Correlations matrix

The correlations matrix (Table a) is referred to in Chapter 7's discussion of the confirmatory factor analysis model re-specification. It is also referred to in the discussion on common method bias in that Chapter, where it is integral to conducting the *correlated marker variable* test of common method bias.

Table a. Correlations matrix with level of statistical significance – all Political Efficacy items

	COMPLEX	GOV RESP	ELEC RESP	NOSAY	NOCARE	UNDER STAND	SELFQUAL	PUBOFF	INFORMED
COMPLEX (IPE)	1.000								
GOVRESP (EPE)	-.006	1.000							
ELECRESP (EPE)	.072	.477**	1.000						
NOSAY (EPE)	.305**	.377**	.313**	1.000					
NOCARE (EPE)	.258**	.496**	.427**	.605**	1.000				
IUNDERSTA ND (IPE)	.183**	.190**	.196**	.146**	.130**	1.000			
SELFQUAL (IPE)	.165**	.054	.106*	.072	.008	.523**	1.000		
PUBOFF (IPE)	.137**	-.055	-.046	-.077	-.125**	.375**	.562**	1.000	
INFORMED (IPE)	.133**	.149**	.173**	.163**	.149**	.502**	.406**	.307**	1.000

** Significant at 0.01 level.

* Significant at 0.05 level.

Harman Single Factor Test

The Harman Single Factor Test is referred to in Chapter 7's discussion of common method bias. As outlined by Podsakoff et al. (2003), this test involves conducting an unrotated exploratory factor analysis (in SPSS), comprising all Likert survey items, to determine the amount of variance explained by a single factor (Table b). Common method bias is indicated if the first factor accounts for the majority (i.e., 50%) of variance in the items. Here it accounts for only 23% of variance, indicating absence of common method bias.

Items included: UNDERSTAND, SELFQUAL, PUBOFF, INFORM, COMPLEX, GOVRESP, ELECRESP, NOSAY, NOCARE.

Table b. SPSS Output – Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.807	31.186	31.186	2.070	22.997	22.997
2	2.100	23.338	54.524			
3	1.080	12.004	66.528			
4	.688	7.643	74.172			
5	.610	6.773	80.945			
6	.497	5.525	86.470			
7	.477	5.300	91.770			
8	.379	4.210	95.980			
9	.362	4.020	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Appendix 7.2. Size and Participation regression tables

This appendix presents the full regression output for the analyses of the relationship between municipality size and political participation. Model 4 in each of the tables corresponds to the results provided in Table 7.7.

Municipality size and voting

Table a. The effect of municipality size on voting, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (bivariate)	Model 3 (individual controls)	Model 4 (contextual controls)	Model 4a (mayor election held)
Size (log-n)		-.098 (.1010)	-.067 (.1077)	-.201 (.1238)	-.180 (.1254)
Age			.027 (.1451)	.045 (.1465)	.043 (.1468)
Residency length			-.039 (.1335)	-.029 (.1358)	-.029 (.1360)
Education level			.007 (.1079)	.053 (.1114)	.059 (.1117)
Gender (1 = F)			.344 (.2112)	.318 (.2143)	.323 (.2148)
Employment ^a					
Not employed			-.110 (.3720)	-.129 (.3768)	-.139 (.3772)
Casual			.160 (.363)	.137 (.3668)	.133 (.3680)
Part time			.246 (.3090)	.225 (.3141)	.216 (.3147)
Retired			.572 (.3914)	.552 (.3961)	.530 (.3977)
Student			.243 (.5012)	.258 (.5056)	.276 (.5073)
Suburb SES				-.237 (.1346)	-.232 (.1346)
LGA Pop Density				-.097 (.1302)	-.085 (.1306)
State (1 = WA ^b)				.174 (.2205)	.230 (.2280)
Mayoral election (1 = held)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	.219 (.2187)
Constant	.389 (.0993)***	.387 (.0994)***	.064 (.1722)	-.012 (.2096)	-.138 (.2450)
AIC^c	1798.938	1802.605	1795.668	1797.317	1799.743
ICC	.000				
N (individuals)	421	421	415	413	413
N (municipalities)	47	47	47	47	47

Note. Multilevel logistic regression. Standardised fixed coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. ^aReference category for employment status variables is ‘full time’.

^b WA denotes Western Australia

^cAIC (Akaike’s information criterion) is a measure of model fit for multilevel models. Lower values indicate relatively better model fit (Field, 2009: 304).

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Municipality size and candidacy

Table b. The effect of municipality size on candidacy, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (bivariate)	Model 3 (individual controls)	Model 4 (contextual controls)
Size (log-n)		-.050 (.1935)	-.193 (.2098)	-.172 (.2428)
Age			-.262 (.2952)	-.268 (.2968)
Residency length			-.023 (.2588)	-.035 (.2604)
Education level			-.132 (.2196)	-.133 (.2252)
Gender (1 = Female)			-.205 (.4211)	-.205 (.4249)
Employment status ^a				
Not employed			-.417 (.8648)	-.396 (.8665)
Casual			-.263 (.7550)	-.261 (.7614)
Part time			.712 (.5275)	.735 (.5327)
Retired			-.233 (.8721)	-.225 (.8769)
Student			-.357 (1.0212)	-.387 (1.0246)
Suburb SES				.032 (.2623)
LGA Pop Density				.023 (.2540)
State (1 = WA)				-.139 (.4342)
Constant	-2.657 (.1971)***	-2.659 (.1976)***	-2.613 (.3437)***	-2.538 (.4105)***
AIC	2317.316	2318.788	2260.611	2247.514
ICC	.000			
N (individuals)	420	420	414	412
N (municipalities)	47	47	47	47

Note. Multilevel logistic regression. Standardised fixed coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. ^aReference category for employment status variables is ‘full time’.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Municipality size and contacting

Table c. The effect of municipality size on contacting, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (bivariate)	Model 3 (individual controls)	Model 4 (contextual controls)
Size (log-n)		-.346 (.1013)**	-.285 (.1085)**	-.309 (.1312)*
Age			.295 (.1521)	.309 (.1536)*
Residency length			.482 (.1267)***	.479 (.1278)***
Education level			-.081 (.1123)	-.072 (.1164)
Gender (1 = Female)			.140 (.2255)	.149 (.2279)
Employment status ^a				
Not employed			-.377 (.4120)	-.380 (.4147)
Casual			-.138 (.3983)	-.123 (.4025)
Part time			-.361 (.3399)	-.345 (.3424)
Retired			.144 (.3854)	.126 (.3902)
Student			.399 (.5326)	.381 (.5371)
Suburb SES				-.163 (.1477)
LGA Pop Density				.099 (.1416)
State (1 = WA)				-.016 (.2431)
Constant	-1.092 (.1229)***	-1.139 (.1078)***	-1.231 (.1845)***	-1.228 (.2282)***
AIC	2397.711	2422.869	2469.000	2467.307
ICC	.055			
N (individuals)	531	531	522	520
N (municipalities)	48	48	48	48

Note. Multilevel logistic regression. Standardised fixed coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. ^aReference category for employment status variables is ‘full time’.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Municipality size and meeting attendance

Table d. The effect of municipality size on meeting attendance, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (bivariate)	Model 3 (individual controls)	Model 4 (contextual controls)
Size (log-n)		-0.582 (.1327)***	-0.543 (.1421)***	-0.545 (.1633)**
Age			.211 (.2281)	.207 (.2293)
Residency length			.311 (.1890)	.311 (.1895)
Education level			.028 (.1690)	.030 (.1741)
Gender (1 = Female)			.220 (.3313)	.210 (.3337)
Employment status ^a				
Not employed			.149 (.5450)	.149 (.5468)
Casual			-.527 (.6673)	-.489 (.6723)
Part time			-.269 (.4923)	-.271 (.4945)
Retired			-.262 (.5501)	-.236 (.5535)
Student			-.149 (.9464)	-.145 (.9468)
Suburb SES				.055 (.2335)
LGA Pop Density				-.080 (.1982)
State (1 = WA)				.053 (.3424)
Constant	-2.350 (.1542)***	-2.450 (.1689)***	-2.509 (.2807)***	-2.540 (.3355)***
AIC	2823.280	2849.247	2782.926	2772.749
ICC	.000			
N (individuals)	529	529	520	518
N (municipalities)	48	48	48	48

Note. Multilevel logistic regression. Standardised fixed coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses.

^aReference category for employment status variables is ‘full time’.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Municipality size and voter turnout – repeated measures (electoral data)

Table e. The effect of municipality size on voter turnout and candidacy, repeated measures mixed effects regression results

Independent variables	<i>Voter turnout</i>		<i>Candidacy rate</i>	
	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (all controls)	Model 1 (‘empty’)	Model 2 (all controls)
Size (log-n)		-0.452 (.0654)***		-0.847 (.0716)***
		[-2.548]		[-.633]
Municipality median age		.171 (.0700)*		.051 (.0740)
Municipality SES		-.039 (.0799)		-.044 (.0885)
Municipality pop. density		.165 (.0690)*		-.044 (.0781)
Mayoral election (1=held)		.547 (.1058)***		<i>n/a</i>
State (1 = WA)		.158 (.1656)		-.221 (.1641)
Constant	-.235 (.1062)*	-.570 (.1374)***	.036 (.1343)	.194 (.1216)
AIC	365.323	296.298	267.098	203.199
ICC	.357		.849	
N (municipalities)	48	48	48	48
N (time periods)	3	3	3	3

Note. Repeated measures mixed effects regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardised beta in square brackets for municipality size variable.

The SPSS default ‘diagonal’ covariance structure is applied for the repeated effects. Compared to other applicable covariance structures (as per Field, 2009: 738), this structure yielded a lower AIC value and thus a better model fit.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Appendix 7.3. Mediation analyses

This appendix provides all regression output for the mediation analyses, as summarised in Figures 7.3 and 7.4.

Internal Political Efficacy as mediating variable

Table a. Municipality size, IPE, and voting, multilevel regression results

	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
Independent variables	IPE	Voting
Size (log-n)	-.129 (.0460)** [β -.493, SE .1756]	-.160 (.1264)
IPE	N/A	.399 (.1201)** [β .106, SE .0320]
Age	.204 (.0557)***	-.025 (.1493)
Residency length	.148 (.0431)**	-.108 (.1399)
Education level	.182 (.0424)***	-.029 (.1161)
Gender (1 = Female)	.026 (.0826)	.269 (.2176)
Employment status ^a		
Not employed	-.164 (.1412)	-.073 (.3836)
Casual	-.347 (.1397)*	.331 (.3753)
Part time	-.105 (.1193)	.336 (.3211)
Retired	.029 (.1556)	.578 (.4002)
Student	-.591 (.1937)**	.591 (.5260)
Suburb SES	-.102 (.0511)*	-.192 (.1364)
LGA Pop Density	.002 (.0483)	-.113 (.1324)
State (1 = WA)	-.042 (.0841)	.203 (.2236)
Constant	.118 (.0800)	-.061 (.2128)
N (individuals)	524	413
N (municipalities)	48	47
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	$ab = -.052, SE = .0244, p = .032$	

Note. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors (SE) in parentheses. Unstandardised betas (β) and SEs provided for select variables for indirect effect calculation. Standard error and level of statistical significance of the ab coefficient derived from the Sobel Test.

^aReference category for employment status variables is 'full time'.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table b. Municipality size, IPE, and candidacy, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
	IPE	Candidacy
Size (log-n)	-.129 (.0460)** [β -.493, SE .1756]	-0.174 (.2452)
IPE	N/A	-.015 (.2287) [β -.004, SE .0609]
Age	.204 (.0557)***	-.265 (.2991)
Residency length	.148 (.0431)**	-.032 (.2621)
Education level	.182 (.0424)***	-.130 (.2300)
Gender (1 = Female)	.026 (.0826)	-.203 (.4262)
Employment status		
Not employed	-.164 (.1412)	-.398 (.8676)
Casual	-.347 (.1397)*	-.267 (.7660)
Part time	-.105 (.1193)	.731 (.5347)
Retired	.029 (.1556)	-.225 (.8767)
Student	-.591 (.1937)**	-.399 (1.0414)
Suburb SES	-.102 (.0511)*	.031 (.2628)
LGA Pop Density	.002 (.0483)	.023 (.2544)
State (1 = WA)	-.042 (.0841)	-.140 (.4345)
Constant	.118 (.0800)	-2.536 (.4111)***
<i>N (individuals)</i>	524	412
<i>N (municipalities)</i>	48	47
<i>Regression type</i>	ML linear	ML Logistic
<i>Indirect effect (unstandardised)</i>	<i>ab</i> = .002, SE .0300, p=.948	

Table c. Municipality size, IPE, and contacting, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
	IPE	Contacting
Size (log-n)	-0.129 (.0460)** [β -0.493, SE .1756]	-0.232 (.1299)
IPE	N/A	.818 (.1408)*** [β .218, SE .0375]
Age	.204 (.0557)***	.142 (.1630)
Residency length	.148 (.0431)**	.392 (.1303)**
Education level	.182 (.0424)***	-.216 (.1235)
Gender (1 = Female)	.026 (.0826)	.102 (.2359)
Employment status		
Not employed	-.164 (.1412)	-.285 (.4271)
Casual	-.347 (.1397)*	.160 (.4177)
Part time	-.105 (.1193)	-.141 (.3475)
Retired	.029 (.1556)	.191 (.4036)
Student	-.591 (.1937)**	.881 (.5678)
Suburb SES	-.102 (.0511)*	-.065 (.1509)
LGA Pop Density	.002 (.0483)	.092 (.1401)
State (1 = WA)	-.042 (.0841)	.005 (.2366)
Constant	.118 (.0800)	-1.441 (.2349)***
N (individuals)	524	520
N (municipalities)	48	48
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	ab= -.107; SE= .0425; p= .011	

Table d. Municipality size, IPE, and meeting attendance, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
	IPE	Attendance
Size (log-n)	-.129 (.0460)** [β -.493, SE .1756]	-485 (.1650)**
IPE	N/A	.477 (.1895)* [β .127, SE .0505]
Age	.204 (.0557)***	.103 (.2364)
Residency length	.148 (.0431)**	.244 (.1902)
Education level	.182 (.0424)***	-.063 (.1758)
Gender (1 = Female)	.026 (.0826)	.192 (.3349)
Employment status		
Not employed	-.164 (.1412)	.241 (.5458)
Casual	-.347 (.1397)*	-.329 (.6694)
Part time	-.105 (.1193)	-.174 (.4974)
Retired	.029 (.1556)	-.233 (.5588)
Student	-.591 (.1937)**	.153 (.9468)
Suburb SES	-.102 (.0511)*	.111 (.2347)
LGA Pop Density	.002 (.0483)	-.079 (.1974)
State (1 = WA)	-.042 (.0841)	.076 (.3414)
Constant	.118 (.0800)	-2.648 (.3447)***
N (individuals)	524	518
N (municipalities)	48	48
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	<i>ab</i> = -.063; SE= .0334; p = .061	

Table e. Municipality size, IPE, and overall participation, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
	IPE	Overall participation
Size (log-n)	-0.129 (.0460)** [β -0.493, SE .1756]	-0.188 (.0544)**
IPE	N/A	.315 (.0513)*** [β .078, SE .0127]
Age	.204 (.0557)***	.037 (.0660)
Residency length	.148 (.0431)**	.004 (.0613)
Education level	.182 (.0424)***	-.086 (.0505)
Gender (1 = Female)	.026 (.0826)	.072 (.0959)
Employment status		
Not employed	-.164 (.1412)	-.005 (.1703)
Casual	-.347 (.1397)*	.153 (.1673)
Part time	-.105 (.1193)	.140 (.1397)
Retired	.029 (.1556)	.155 (.1715)
Student	-.591 (.1937)**	.337 (.2278)
Suburb SES	-.102 (.0511)*	-.057 (.0598)
LGA Pop Density	.002 (.0483)	-.027 (.0581)
State (1 = WA)	-.042 (.0841)	.085 (.0981)
Constant	.118 (.0800)	-.205 (.0947)*
N (individuals)	524	411
N (municipalities)	48	48
Regression type	ML linear	ML Linear
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	<i>ab</i> = -.038; SE= .0151; p = .011	

External Political Efficacy as mediating variable

Table f. Municipality size, EPE, and voting, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Path a	Path b
	EPE	Voting
Size (log-n)	-.075 (.0504)	-.196 (.1243)
	β -.276, SE .1856	
EPE	N/A	.067 (.1002)
		β .018, SE .0276
Age	.107 (.0609)	.040 (.1467)
Residency length	-.037 (.0471)	-.028 (.1358)
Education level	.036 (.0464)	.050 (.1115)
Gender (1 = Female)	-.094 (.0904)	.328 (.2150)
Employment status ^a		
Not employed	.1532 (.1545)	-.139 (.3775)
Casual	-.078 (.1528)	.149 (.3673)
Part time	.179 (.1306)	.211 (.3148)
Retired	.325 (.1703)	.531 (.3974)
Student	.166 (.2119)	.248 (.5055)
Suburb SES	.052 (.0560)	-.239 (.1348)
LGA Pop Density	-.047 (.0528)	-.096 (.1303)
State (1 = WA)	.037 (.0920)	.175 (.2207)
Constant	-.055 (.0876)	-.011 (.2096)
N (individuals)	524	413
N (municipalities)	48	47
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	$ab = -.005$; SE = .0083; $p = .550$	

Note. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors (SE) in parentheses. Unstandardised betas (β) and SEs provided for select variables for indirect effect calculation. Standard error and level of statistical significance of the ab coefficient derived from the Sobel Test.

^aReference category for employment status variables is 'full time'.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table g. Municipality size, EPE, and candidacy, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
	EPE	Candidacy
Size (log-n)	-.075 (.0504) [β -.276, SE .1856]	-.160 (.2418)
EPE	N/A	.122 (.2092) [β .034, SE .0577]
Age	.107 (.0609)	-.277 (.2973)
Residency length	-.037 (.0471)	-.036 (.2601)
Education level	.036 (.0464)	-.138 (.2266)
Gender (1 = Female)	-.094 (.0904)	-.184 (.4254)
Employment status		
Not employed	.1532 (.1545)	-.411 (.8664)
Casual	-.078 (.1528)	-.239 (.7618)
Part time	.179 (.1306)	.706 (.5330)
Retired	.325 (.1703)	-.263 (.8791)
Student	.166 (.2119)	-.407 (1.0259)
Suburb SES	.052 (.0560)	.029 (.2620)
LGA Pop Density	-.047 (.0528)	.026 (.2552)
State (1 = WA)	.037 (.0920)	-.141 (.4338)
Constant	-.055 (.0876)	-2.538 (.4125)***
N (individuals)	524	412
N (municipalities)	48	47
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	<i>ab</i> = -.009; <i>SE</i> = .0171; <i>p</i> = .584	

Table h. Municipality size, EPE, and contacting, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
	EPE	Contacting
Size (log-n)	-.075 (.0504) [β -.276, SE .1856]	-0.318* (.1335)
EPE	N/A	-.081 (.1066) [β -.022, SE .0294]
Age	.107 (.0609)	.319 (.1542)*
Residency length	-.037 (.0471)	.474 (.1281)***
Education level	.036 (.0464)	-.071 (.1166)
Gender (1 = Female)	-.094 (.0904)	.142 (.2287)
Employment status		
Not employed	.1532 (.1545)	-.363 (.4155)
Casual	-.078 (.1528)	-.130 (.4032)
Part time	.179 (.1306)	-.331 (.3434)
Retired	.325 (.1703)	.154 (.3926)
Student	.166 (.2119)	.391 (.5377)
Suburb SES	.052 (.0560)	-.163 (.1484)
LGA Pop Density	-.047 (.0528)	.095 (.1429)
State (1 = WA)	.037 (.0920)	-.016 (.2463)
Constant	-0.055 (.0876)	-1.233 (.2299)***
<i>N</i> (individuals)	524	520
<i>N</i> (municipalities)	48	48
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	<i>ab</i> = .006; SE= .0091; p= .504	

Table i. Municipality size, EPE, and meeting attendance, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i> EPE	<i>Path b</i> Attendance
Size (log-n)	-.075 (.0504) [β -.276, SE .1856]	-.575 (.1663)**
EPE	N/A	-.255 (.1523) [β -.070, SE .0420]
Age	.107 (.0609)	.231 (.2283)
Residency length	-.037 (.0471)	.301 (.1905)
Education level	.036 (.0464)	.039 (.1729)
Gender (1 = Female)	-.094 (.0904)	.172 (.3350)
Employment status		
Not employed	.1532 (.1545)	.194 (.5483)
Casual	-.078 (.1528)	-.512 (.6695)
Part time	.179 (.1306)	-.213 (.4957)
Retired	.325 (.1703)	-.166 (.5553)
Student	.166 (.2119)	-.105 (.9420)
Suburb SES	.052 (.0560)	.061 (.2350)
LGA Pop Density	-.047 (.0528)	-.100 (.1972)
State (1 = WA)	.037 (.0920)	.056 (.3437)
Constant	-.055 (.0876)	-2.558 (.3346)***
N (individuals)	524	518
N (municipalities)	48	48
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	ab= .019; SE= .0174; p= .267	

Table j. Municipality size, EPE, and overall participation, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	<i>Path a</i>	<i>Path b</i>
	EPE	Overall participation
Size (log-n)	-0.075 (.0504) [β -.276, SE .1856]	-0.210 (.0536)***
EPE	N/A	-0.014 (.0438) [β -.004, SE .0121]
Age	.107 (.0609)	.088 (.0647)
Residency length	-.037 (.0471)	.061 (.0597)
Education level	.036 (.0464)	-.022 (.0489)
Gender (1 = Female)	-.094 (.0904)	.108 (.0946)
Employment status		
Not employed	.1532 (.1545)	-.047 (.1681)
Casual	-.078 (.1528)	.003 (.1638)
Part time	.179 (.1306)	.062 (.1377)
Retired	.325 (.1703)	.140 (.1699)
Student	.166 (.2119)	.087 (.2216)
Suburb SES	.052 (.0560)	-.087 (.0588)
LGA Pop Density	-.047 (.0528)	-.018 (.0574)
State (1 = WA)	.037 (.0920)	.059 (.0969)
Constant	-0.055 (.0876)	.892 (.0934)***
N (individuals)	524	411
N (municipalities)	48	47
Regression type	ML linear	ML Logistic
Indirect effect (unstandardised)	<i>ab</i> = .001; SE= .0034; p= .747	

Appendix 7.4. Supplementary analyses

This appendix provides all regression output corresponding with the abbreviated results provided in Table 7.9.

Table a. The effect of municipality size on councillor-initiated contact and participation in community consultation exercises, multilevel regression results

Independent variables	Participated in community consultation exercise	Contacted by mayor/councillor
Size (log-n)	-0.210 (.1351)	-0.351 (.1271)**
Age	.385 (.1636)*	-.251 (.1604)
Residency length	.350 (.1348)	.175 (.1236)
Education level	.183 (.1257)*	-.038 (.1193)
Gender (1 = Female)	.428 (.2429)	.233 (.2319)
Employment status ^a		
Not employed	-.025 (.4064)	-.231 (.4207)
Casual	-.658 (.4954)	-.106 (.3984)
Part time	.085 (.3286)	.446 (.3162)
Retired	-.207 (.4122)	.753 (.4188)
Student	-.620 (.7902)	-.506 (.5965)
Suburb SES	.018 (.1611)	-.049 (.1458)
LGA Pop Density	.011 (.1489)	-.074 (.1366)
State (1 = WA)	.549 (.2678)*	-.182 (.2332)
Constant	-1.878 (.2617)***	-1.502 (.2319)***
N (individuals)	519	520
N (municipalities)	48	48

Note. Multilevel logistic regression. Standardised coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses.

^aReference category for employment status variables is 'full time'.

Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$