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Politics and democracy in microstates. A comparative analysis of the effects of size on contestation and inclusiveness

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CHAPTER NINE

The Political Effects of Size

Conclusion

1. The Four Microstates: Similarities and Differences

The four case study-chapters have clearly exposed the many differences between the four microstates under scrutiny. On virtually all imaginable background characteristics, large differences can be observed between the cases that were analyzed. With its impressive political history, high level of economic development, and centuries-old political institutions, San Marino is clearly a member of the Western European continent. By comparison, St. Kitts and Nevis' status as a former sugar colony run by the descendents of slaves, combined with its Westminster institutions adapted to the political culture of the Caribbean and the extreme polarization between parties and islands appears to constitute a political environment that could not be more unlike than that of San Marino. If the more authoritarian features of Seychelles, and especially Palau's system with its traditional leaders and clan-oriented political dynamics are added to this list, it therefore definitely appears to be the case that the examined microstates are 'most different' from each other.

In line with the method of agreement, the four cases under scrutiny however do score relatively similar on two key variables of this study; their small size and their democratic political structures. However, even though all four of the cases have less than 100.000 inhabitants and are classified as electoral democracies by Freedom House, also concerning these two variables there are considerable differences between them. For example, as the smallest case in the sample Palau has a population size (21.000) that is more than four times smaller than that of Seychelles (89.000), the largest of the four microstates. In similar fashion, although they can both be identified as electoral democracies, the political environment of Seychelles clearly diverges more from the democratic ideal than that of San Marino. In addition, major differences exist between the political structures of the microstates, for example with regard to parliamentary versus presidential forms of government, the role and variety of political parties, and the degree of decentralization and federalism.

In light of the numerous historical, geographical, cultural, economical, and institutional differences between the four observed countries, one would also expect to find completely divergent political dynamics and practices. However, the analysis has demonstrated that the four microstates are marked by surprisingly similar political dynamics and patterns, which in the absence of other commonalities appear to be principally understandable on the basis of their small size. In this sense, the political effects of size therefore appear to surpass those of geographical location and economic development, and the smallness of the microstates moreover appears to render institutional differences between them obsolete, since the analysis has revealed that political institutions are commonly ignored or circumvented in microstates. Since several political features have surfaced in all four microstates, and also emerge in the case study-literature on other microstates that was discussed in chapter 3, it can quite safely be assumed that smallness is at the basis of these patterns.

In this final, concluding chapter of the dissertation, the findings of the four case studies are united, summarized, and evaluated. In the following section, the research question and accompanying expectations of the study are briefly recapitulated, after which the answers and findings that have emerged from the analyses are presented. More specifically, this section aims to make some cross-case comparisons between the four microstates with regard to the characteristics of contestation and inclusiveness, which in line with the method of agreement serves to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Subsequently, in section 3 the implications of these findings for the broader academic literature on size and democracy are outlined, and attention is also paid to a number of more methodological implications. In the final two sections, the societal and scientific relevance of the findings of this study are discussed, and a number of potential options and alternatives for future research are presented.

2. Recapitulation of the Findings

The aim of the present study was to examine the effects of size on politics and democracy. In this regard, the central research question that was presented in the introduction of this dissertation was formulated as follows:

“What are the consequences of a small population size for the nature of democratic contestation and inclusiveness?”

In order to find answers to this question, in chapters 2 and 3 the existing academic literature on the political effects of size was discussed. Whereas chapter 2 focused on the theoretical and variable-oriented literature on size, politics, and democracy, in chapter 3 attention was devoted to the more case-oriented, empirical literature on the characteristics of contestation and inclusiveness in microstates. On the basis of these two strands of literature, a number of expectations that together compose the theoretical model of this study were presented and discussed in chapter 4. These expectations accentuated the disparity between formally democratic structures and a more antidemocratic political reality that is also repeatedly observed in larger third wave-democracies. On the basis of the academic literature, it was theorized that the democracy-undermining political dynamics that plague many third wave-countries are further exacerbated by a limited population size. Regarding contestation, the primary expectations entailed that political competition is based on personalistic rather than programmatic or ideological differences, and that the executive branch of government assumes a dominant position in relation to other political and societal institutions. Concerning inclusiveness in microstates, it was expected that the proximity between citizens and politicians would primarily result in the development of particularistic role relationships, but would also generate higher levels of awareness, efficacy, and participation. In table 9.1, the expectations that were formulated as part of the theoretical model have been presented once more.

2.1. Characteristics of Contestation in the Four Microstates

On the whole, the theoretical model and accompanying expectations have been confirmed by the case study-analyses. With regard to the first sub-dimension, which measures the presence of political alternatives and a political opposition, in all four countries a tendency to personalistic instead of programmatic contestation was found, as a result of which the number of substantive, ideological, and programmatic political alternatives is inherently limited. In addition, in all four microstates a high degree of polarization between the different parties or factions was found, which suggests that personalistic competition can be more fierce than programmatic contestation, and which disconfirms the thesis of among others Katzenstein and Lijphart that small settings are characterized by increased consensus and accommodation (Lijphart 1977: 65; Katzenstein 1985: 87-94). Although two or three of the four

microstates¹ were found to have high levels of categorical homogeneity among the population, the analysis has shown that this does not generate higher levels of consensus. In all four microstates a political opposition can be identified in parliament, but in general it represents a personal rather than a substantive political or programmatic alternative.²

Table 9.1: Theoretical Model and Expectations of this Study

Sub-Dimension	Expectations
<i>1: Presence of Political Alternatives and a Political Opposition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater homogeneity of interests - Decreased number of factions and interests - Less political competition, weakened political opposition - Personalistic politics; strong person-based polarization
<i>2: Horizontal Balance of Power between Institutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Executive dominance in relation to other institutions (parliament, media, judiciary, and civil service) - Infrequent alternation of power - Circumvention or ignorance of institutional structures
<i>3: Relations between Citizens and Politicians</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased accessibility of politicians - Increased direct contacts and communication between citizens and politicians - Conflicts of interest due to multiple-role relations - Prevalence of clientelism, patronage, and nepotism
<i>4: Political Participation of Citizens</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased opportunities for participation due to closeness - Equal or lower turnout levels in relation to larger states (on the basis of case study-literature) - Decreased political role for minorities and opposition

In terms of the influence of size on the presence of political alternatives and a political opposition, the findings of this study therefore indicate that whereas multiple political alternatives are unquestionably present in microstates, the appearance of political parties and partisan contestation should not automatically be interpreted as indicative of ideological contestation as it occurs in (Western) consolidated democracies. Although political parties do contest national elections in San Marino, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Seychelles, the

¹ Seychelles is the exception, and Palau to a certain degree as well.

² To a certain degree Seychelles is an exception, since the opposition (SNP) here does represent an alternative in terms of the style and conduct of politics. However, since it has never been in power it is unclear to what extent this point would be realized if the SNP would be in office.

analysis has revealed that these parties essentially function as supporting vehicles of individual politicians, and that inter-partisan differences are based on personal rather than ideological variation. Whereas the number of relevant parties in these microstates varies, due to the prevalence of personalistic contestation these party-systemic differences do not have a significant influence on the nature of political contestation. In this regard, the complete absence of political parties in Palau most accurately illustrates the lack of programmatic competition in microstates.

Regarding the second sub-dimension of democracy, with the possible exception of San Marino the executive branch of government in microstates was to varying degrees found to dominate other institutions. More specifically, the lack of resources that result from smallness undermine the position of the judiciary and media, and as a result of government patronage the impartiality and autonomy of the civil service is in all four microstates affected. Furthermore, as a result of multiple-role relationships and the fact that government controls a majority of the available resources, the boundary between the private and public sector is in all microstates blurred, with conflicts of interest occurring constantly. As a result of government patronage, the public administrations of all four microstates are not only oversized and filled with government supporters and affiliates, but also largely incompetent and ineffective. Finally, the combination of executive dominance and person-oriented political competition entails that individual political leaders are often able to accumulate a large amount of power

This being said, notable differences were observed in the *extent* to which government was able to dominate other institutions in the four microstates, and *which* societal or political institutions were found to be subordinate to the executive. In this regard, only the Seychellois judiciary was found to be markedly influenced by the government, whereas the other judiciaries were largely free from government interference. Whereas a clear majority of respondents viewed the parliaments of St. Kitts and Nevis, Seychelles, and Palau as inferior to the executive, this was much less clear for San Marino. In general however, with concern to the influence of smallness on the horizontal balance of power between institutions it seems fair to conclude that a clear tendency to executive dominance can be observed, which stems from the lack of (financial) resources of other institutions, and the resulting dependency of these institutions on their government. In addition, the social intimacy that results from smallness also entails that institutional boundaries often become less relevant, since public officials from different institutional backgrounds often know each other in multiple societal roles.

2.2. Characteristics of Inclusiveness in the Four Microstates

With regard to the relations between citizens and politicians, the hypothesized physical and psychological closeness, opportunities for direct and open communication, and open access to politicians were indeed corroborated. However, as expected in all four countries under scrutiny citizens tend to primarily use these opportunities to demand personal favors from their representatives, and much less so to address substantive political or public concerns. In this sense, the closeness between citizens and politicians was mainly found to stimulate the development of patron-client relationships, and as a result of constant access and the increased significance of single votes, microstate-politicians generally appear to be more susceptible to these pressures. Furthermore, the absence of programmatic or ideological contestation on the political level appears to reverberate on the societal level, which also explains the absence of a public debate on substantive political issues. If citizens interpret politics as a personalistic competition for office, it is reasonable to assume that their voting behavior is also primarily driven by personal and particularistic motivations, and this was confirmed by most respondents in all four cases.

The political effects of size can arguably be most closely observed when it comes to this particular aspect of democracy. In all four microstates, citizens and politicians were in constant direct contact and reciprocal communication, and encountered each other in numerous occasions and circumstances. Politicians from all four microstates asserted that this not only generates increased pressures to comply with the expectations of voters, but they also indicated that a disproportionate amount of their time is spent on the maintenance of these contacts, which comes at the cost of the time they have to govern their country. Furthermore, the citizens of all four microstates expressed a lack of confidence in their elected politicians and blamed them for misconduct and corruption, whereas they paradoxically did expect politicians to bestow them with favors in exchange for political support. Seeing that such circumstances were observed in all four cases under scrutiny, it can be concluded that smallness does indeed lead to increased proximity between citizens and politicians, but that the consequences of this closeness are apparently have a more negative impact on the quality of democracy than most of the academic literature assumes.

The final sub-dimension on which the four microstates were examined is the political participation of citizens. In each of the four cases this analysis was much hampered by data restrictions, which means that the conclusions are in large part based on my own impressions and the information that respondents

provided during interviews. The available data on voter turnout revealed a comparatively high level of electoral participation in all microstates except St. Kitts and Nevis, where the picture was more mixed. Whereas no data was available on membership figures of political parties, which do not even exist in the case of Palau, in all four of the microstates participation in political activities such as demonstrations, electoral campaigns, and politically-oriented social media networks appeared to be quite high. However, according to most respondents and my own observations this participation was also primarily understandable on the basis of particularistic incentives, and not so much out of public concerns.

In table 9.2 (at the end of this chapter), the scoring of all four microstates on the fifteen indicators of democracy that were presented in chapter 4 has been presented. Whereas the table confirms the many similarities between the microstates that have been discussed above, it also exposes some of the differences between the cases. These differences are especially prominent with regard to the first sub-dimension, which captures the nature of political contestation. For example, whereas San Marino and St. Kitts and Nevis were found to have categorically homogenous populations, this does not apply to Seychelles and Palau. Furthermore, although alternation in office as a result of elections occurs frequently in San Marino and Palau, it occurs only rarely in St. Kitts and Nevis, and has until now never happened in Seychelles. Finally, it can be observed that whereas political parties are completely absent in Palau, there are mostly two of them in St. Kitts and Nevis and Seychelles, and more than five in San Marino. However, it can clearly be seen that these differences between the microstates are mostly institutional in nature, and the effective number of parties can for example in large part be explained on the basis of these microstates' respective electoral systems. With regard to the more informal nature of politics and contestation, political institutions do not seem to be very significant, and the microstates are clearly more similar in this respect.

In line with the method of agreement (or most different systems design) that this study employed, the similar political dynamics in the four microstates can not be explained by another factor than their size, because the microstates have been selected with the purpose to ensure variation on all other potential explanatory variables. As a result, these political dynamics can neither be explained by the level of economic development, the political and colonial history, the political-institutional structure, or the geographical location of the microstates, nor by their own individual idiosyncrasies. As a consequence, it is highly plausible that these findings are exclusively caused by size, and that

similar findings would be observed in other microstates. This means that the results of this study can be incorporated into a general and universally valid theory on the political effects of smallness, which would presumably be extendable and generalizable to all other microstates in the world. This suggestion is confirmed by the case study-literature that was discussed in chapter 3, in which similar findings emerged.

3. Implications of the Findings for the Debate on Size and Democracy

The findings of this chapter have a number of significant implications for the more general academic debate on size and democracy. In a way, the results of this study offer a path to bridge the apparent gap between the statistical correlation between size and democracy on the one hand, and the more pessimistic theories on democratic development in small states on the other. By emphasizing the disparity between formally democratic structures and a more antidemocratic political reality, it also becomes clear why scholars have until now not found a convincing explanation of the prevalence of democracy in microstates, and in my opinion the further pursuit of such an explanation is fruitless and doomed to fail. By contrast, it appears more useful to compare microstates with (other) new democracies, in which scholars have found a comparable fusion between democratic structures and antidemocratic practices (cf. O'Donnell 1994, 1996; Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002). In publications on the politics of many Latin American, Eastern European, African, and Asian democracies, more or less similar political patterns appear to surface as in the microstates that were examined in this study.

On the other hand, it can also be ascertained that their smallness does have a significant impact on microstate-politics, which in this sense renders microstates different from larger third wave-countries. The analyses in the case study-chapters have clearly revealed how size leads to a personalistic instead of ideological competition, and how the absence of resources that results from smallness generates executive dominance in these countries. In addition, these analyses have also shown how smallness creates a society characterized by intimacy and multiple-role relations, which in turn stimulates conflicts of interest, the circumvention or disregard of political institutions, and various forms of particularism. Therefore, it can unquestionably be asserted that size is at the root of most of the political dynamics that have been discussed in the case study-chapters. This contention is also supported by the fact that more or less similar political dynamics were observed in San Marino, which is certainly no

new democracy. The case-oriented literature discussed in chapter 3 has revealed that these patterns can also be observed in the other European microstates of Andorra, Liechtenstein, and Monaco.

As Jefferson and Mill have argued, in larger settings democracy is only possible in the form of representation, since direct, participatory democracy requires a limited population size. However, on the basis of the observations of the present study, this line of argument can be reversed for the contemporary small states. Whereas all small states now basically employ the type of representative institutions that were initially designed for larger settings, but have been either imposed or adopted from former colonial powers, it has become clear that such institutions often decrease the quality of politics and democracy in microstates. Therefore, the question can be posed to what extent representative democracy is appropriate for small states, and whether more direct and participatory forms of decision-making cannot be deemed more practicable. As other scholars have argued, Westminster institutions essentially exacerbate the democracy-undermining features of Caribbean politics, which this study has clearly confirmed for the case of St. Kitts and Nevis. In similar fashion, the federal, bicameral, and presidential institutions that Palau has copied from the United States primarily appear to decrease the quality and efficiency of politics in this microstate.

If it can be concluded that microstates are characterized by a discrepancy between formal and informal political features, the question why microstates have adopted and maintained democratic political structures remains relevant. As the case-study analyses have demonstrated, the likelihood that the prevalence and persistence of these institutions is a *direct* product of their smallness is quite small. For example, whereas several authors have assumed that the popular homogeneity of microstates can explain their democratic structures, the analyses have shown that microstates are often not really homogenous in the first place, and that the fierce personalistic competition in microstates can actually be perceived to impede on democratic development. Instead therefore, it is more plausible to assume that democratic institutions are an effect of variables with which size has been found to overlap. On the basis of the case studies, the factors of colonial history, geographical location, and international politics appear to offer the most convincing explanations in this regard. However, the significance of these variables has also been found to differ for the various microstates.

Whereas colonial history cannot explain San Marino's contemporary democratic structures, regional and diffusion effects appear to play a key role in the maintenance of democracy in this European microstate. Being completely

surrounded by Italy, and in a state of constant dependence on this larger neighbor, at several times in the Sammarinese political history the Italians have had a major influence on the composition and nature of Sammarinese politics. By contrast, the survival of democratic structures in St. Kitts and Nevis seems primarily explainable on the basis of the country's lengthy colonization and socialization in Westminster political institutions, the microstate's geographical location in the US-dominated Caribbean basin, and its military, economic, and political dependence on this larger superpower. Whereas it is clear that the international environment of Seychelles is less democracy-stimulating, this country also maintains close links with Western (European) democracies, which have played a crucial role in the archipelago's return to multiparty-democracy in 1993. For Palau, finally, the enduring American influence through the Compact of Free Association, and the strategic importance of the Pacific region and Micronesia to the United States in general appear to provide a strong incentive to continuing democratic government.

If the conclusions and implications of this study are amalgamated, it can be observed that this dissertation clearly concurs with earlier studies by Burton Benedict (1967b), Paul Sutton (1987, 2007a), Donald Peters (1992) and Charles Farrugia (1993). In line with these publications, this research has found smallness to principally result in a number of democracy-obstructing features, although the current study pays more attention to the convergence of these practices with democratic institutions. By contrast, the outcomes of this study are to a certain extent in conflict with some of the theories that have been put forward by not only the classic philosophers, but more recently by Dag Ankar (2002b) and Dana Ott (2000). Together with scholars like Katzenstein and Lijphart, Ankar and Ott have interpreted attitudinal homogeneity in microstates as an indication of more consensus-oriented and accommodative politics. However, the present study shows that homogeneity does not limit competition, but rather takes it to another level, which is personalistic and individual rather than programmatic and ideological. With regard to the greater degree of homogeneity and decreased number of political factions in smaller settings, the findings of this research are therefore basically in line with Madison's contention that democracy benefits from a greater number of political groups with diverging interests.

The greatest contribution of this study to the literature however, is probably its novel methodological approach. Whereas earlier studies generally 1) were primarily theoretical in nature, 2) existed of quantitative statistical analysis with no convincing explanations of the correlations, or 3) focused on

only one or a few microstate-cases without devoting further attention to the political effects of size, the current study is the first qualitative, comparative assessment of the political effects of smallness in microstates around the globe. Furthermore, due to the most similar systems design that this study has employed, the findings of this study appear to be extendable to other microstates around the globe as well, as a result of which they can be considered to be universally valid and applicable. Finally, it must be emphasized that the qualitative within-case analysis based on semi-structured interviews has strongly facilitated the observation and interpretation of less formal, more practical political dynamics, which would not have been discernible if the study was limited to an examination of formal political institutions.

As a final point, the results of this study also have implications for scholars who exclusively rely on aggregate indices of democracy such as Freedom House. As this study has demonstrated, as a result of such indices' bias towards formal aspects of democracy, the informal and practical features of politics are mostly not captured in their rankings, and therefore remain essentially concealed. Furthermore, whereas Freedom House does not allocate the most favorable scores of democracy to most larger third wave-countries, its categorization of St. Kitts and Nevis as an optimal democracy is at least somewhat questionable. This also applies to the European microstates of Liechtenstein and Monaco, which despite the obvious and strong political influence of non-elected monarchs are still classified as full-fledged democracies.³ In any case, scholars should realize that potential errors in these large-N databases and indices are automatically reproduced in their own analyses if these scores are not triangulated or substantiated on the basis of other sources.

4. Societal and Scientific Relevance of the Findings

In the introduction of this dissertation, the societal and scientific relevance of this study was shortly discussed. Specifically, the inherent scientific value of studying a hitherto strongly under-researched group of cases was highlighted, as well as the aim of this study to find out why smaller states are inclined to have democratic forms of government. From a more societal perspective, the relevance of this study with regard to the increasingly significant political and

³ As mentioned before, the position of the Liechtensteiner and Monegasque Princes is comparable to that of the monarchs of Jordan and Morocco (which are mostly classified as semi-constitutional monarchies). Whereas Freedom House points to the strong political influence of these monarchs in justifying the partially free status of these countries, Liechtenstein and Monaco are not treated in the same way.

public debate on the merits of further decentralization and devolution was stressed. Now that the analysis is finished and the results of this research are clear, the implications of this study for these points can indeed be reasserted. One of the central recommendations that follow from this study is that the virtual exclusion of microstates from comparative politics is regrettable and unwarranted, and that much information is lost by studying microstates with an exclusively quantitative and statistical approach. Since the present study has revealed that informal, practical political dynamics are much more informative and illustrative of microstate-politics than their formal institutional frameworks, it would be decidedly regrettable if future studies on small state-politics remain restricted to statistical and quantitative analyses.

Both in academia and in politics, discussions about the merits of decentralization and subsidiarity have become fashionable in recent decades. In particular, decentralization has been hailed as the cure for the perceived growing 'gap' between citizens and politicians and the increasing disenchantment and detachment from politics among voters in larger (Western) democracies. In an attempt to bring politics closer to the people, various countries have now transferred powers from the national government to sub-national jurisdictions such as federal states, regions, provinces, or municipalities, and in other countries an ongoing debate about political devolution is being held. This discussion is mirrored in academia, and various scholars have called for the increased decentralization of powers (cf. Diamond and Tsalik 1999; Weldon 2006). According to Diamond and Tsalik, who refer to the predominance of democracy in microstates in explaining their support for decentralization, "[o]nly if political power over certain issuers and government functions is devolved to lower levels of authority that are democratically elected can government be truly responsive, representative, and accountable" (1999: 159).

The results of this study indicate that the organization of politics on a small scale does not only have advantages. It is of course questionable to what extent local governments can be compared to microstates, but it can certainly be hypothesized that smaller, sub-national administrations are also marked by closer relations between citizens and politicians, more personalistic forms of competition, and a greater incidence of conflicts of interest. However, since sub-national units are often controlled by and accountable to national governments, and because the number of their tasks and competences is – even if increasing – still more limited than that of microstate-governments, factors like particularism and corruption can possibly be expected to play a lesser role in decentralized units than in microstates. Still however, the view that decentralization can cure

the ills of modern representative democracy is widespread, and the present study suggests that this is not always as unequivocally and universally accurate as many scholars and politicians believe.

The findings of this study are especially significant with regard to the debate about the quality of representation in smaller settings. The proximity between politicians and citizens in smaller polities has often been supposed to create better circumstances and opportunities for responsiveness and representation, and this study has indeed found that politicians and citizens of microstates are in constant and direct contact with each other. However, in contrast to Rousseau's theories, in general the electorate of microstates has not been found to exhibit greater levels of attachment to the public good or substantive political interest. In combination with the general absence of ideological competition in politics, representation primarily assumes the character of particularism and constituency service (cf. Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita 2006). In this sense, smallness therefore does not necessarily result in a higher quality of interest representation.

The greatest scientific relevance of this dissertation however, relates to its conclusions about the association between size and democracy. Whereas many scholars have pondered about explanations for the statistical correlation between these two variables, this study suggests that there is nothing intrinsically about size that produces a democratic political system, and that size actually creates a social and political environment that can in many ways be perceived to obstruct democratic development. At the same time, the prevalence and survival of democratic political institutions in microstates can be explained by factors with which size often (though not necessarily) co-varies, such as colonial history and international vulnerability and dependence. In any case, as with the contemporary optimism about the effects of decentralization on democratic performance, this study suggests that the overtly positive attitude of many scholars with regard to the incidence of democracy in microstates is often a little misplaced.

5. Avenues for Future Research

Although this study has aimed partially alleviate the lack of scholarly knowledge, as of yet microstates remain structurally under-researched cases in comparative political science. Mostly without convincing motivations, large-N comparative studies continue to exclude microstates, as a result of which the extent to which their size renders microstate-politics different from that of larger states remains

largely unclear. It actually often appears to be the case that scholars are unconscious about their exclusion of microstates, since most studies do not even devote attention to explaining the omission of these cases. As a first recommendation, I would therefore advise scholars of comparative politics to be aware of their general exclusion of microstates and its negative repercussions, and to clearly explain their choice to ban microstates from their analyses. Furthermore, if a choice is made to keep out microstates, in my opinion scholars should also explain and justify their threshold of exclusion, i.e. why countries below a certain size are less interesting cases of study than those that rank above this cut-off point.

By applying the scope condition of UN-membership, the present study examines the effects of size on politics by focusing exclusively on nation-states. As mentioned before, in several earlier publications their status as independent and sovereign states was deemed to have a significant influence on microstate-politics, for example because many microstates have been found to exchange their vote in international organizations for material benefits (in accordance with the international patron-client model; cf. Carney 1989). Since further research on this issue is however lacking, the degree to which a sovereign status makes a difference is as of yet unclear. In this regard, the question can be posed whether the political dynamics of non-independent small (island) jurisdictions in the Caribbean (e.g. Guadeloupe, Martinique, the Caymans, or Curacao) and the Pacific (e.g. the Pitcairn Islands, Wallis and Futuna, the Northern Marianas, or French Polynesia) are comparable to those of the independent microstates in this region. Although various case studies on these non-sovereign islands indicate that this is indeed the case, no broader comparative research on this issue has to my knowledge ever been conducted.

In addition to non-independent overseas territories of larger states, a comparison could also be made between microstates and similar-sized municipalities of larger countries. On the question of whether sub-national units and small nation states can be compared, Dana Ott argues that:

“Perhaps the greatest difference between small states and politically decentralized larger states is the question of mobility. It could be argued that the increased opportunity for mobility within a politically decentralized and larger state might prevent the formation of a social environment similar to that in small states” (Ott 2000: 208).

Indeed, it can be questioned whether the intimate social relationships and multiple-role relationships that characterize the societies of microstates would be mimicked in municipalities or other decentralized units. Since municipal

boundaries do not to a similar degree block the opportunities of citizens to move outside of their municipality and establish social relations elsewhere as in (island) microstates, the extent to which such settings are marked by comparable political characteristics is indeed questionable.⁴ In my opinion, this constitutes a puzzle that could very well be addressed in future studies.

The current study was organized along the lines of the method of agreement, or the most different systems design. In accordance with this approach, four cases were selected that scored relatively similar on the two variables of interest (size and democracy), whereas they ranked as dissimilar as possible on all other imaginable variables. On this basis, the similar political patterns that were observed across the four cases can most plausibly be attributed to their shared smallness. An alternative approach to studying the effects of size on politics, however, would be to create a focused comparison between at least one large and at least one small state along the lines of the method of difference (or most similar systems design). A possible example would be to compare Italy and San Marino, which differ a great deal in size but are otherwise similar on most (if not all) other background variables. Similar pairs of countries that can be compared in this way are Liechtenstein and Switzerland, France and Monaco, Jamaica or Trinidad and St. Kitts and Nevis, Madagascar or Mauritius and Seychelles, and Fiji or Papua New Guinea and Palau.

As the average size of countries around the globe continues to decrease, and in both larger and smaller countries a clear tendency towards decentralization and devolution of powers is observable, research on the political effects of size remains relevant and warranted. As this study demonstrates, such analyses should not be limited to the examination of formal structures and institutions, since the significance of size can generally not be observed in the character of institutional structures, but is particularly visible in more informal and practical political traditions, patterns, and dynamics. In my opinion, future studies should therefore devote more attention to precisely these non-institutional features of smaller settings that are caused by size. Since the informal political dynamics of larger countries have captured the attention of scholars for some time now, it is to be hoped that a similar development will occur in the field of small state research.

⁴ On the other hand, as a landlocked microstate the inhabitants of San Marino do have ample opportunities to visit Italy and meet with Italians, and in my experience they also do this constantly. Still however, the Sammarinese society was to a similar degree as other (island) microstates of this study characterized by intimacy and multiple-role relations.

Table 9.2: Scoring of the Four Microstates on the Indicators of Democracy

	San Marino	St. Kitts and Nevis	Seychelles	Palau
Free and Fair Elections	Present	Present, with minor limitations	Disputed; governing party has significant advantages	Present
Party System	Multiparty-system (ENP >5)	Two-party system on each island (ENP around 2)	Two-party system (ENP < 2); opposition virtually absent after 2011-elections	Not applicable
(Frequency of) Alternation in Office	Regularly	Sporadically	Never by peaceful means	Hard to measure exactly, but present
Interest Articulation by Parties	Does occur in manifestoes but voting behavior and political dynamics are person-oriented	Barely; parties primarily denounce the opposition	Does occur to some extent in manifestoes, but political dynamics are person-oriented	No parties, interest articulation by individual candidates minimal
Freedom to Support the Opposition	Present, but political branding is common	Has major negative consequences; victimization	Has major negative consequences; victimization and climate of fear hinders supporters of the opposition	Present, but political branding is common
Freedom of the Press	Press free (FotP-score 17), but weak and unprofessional	Press free (FotP-score 20), but weak, polarized, and unprofessional	Press partially free (FotP-score 56), weak and unprofessional	Press free (FotP-score 14), but weak and unprofessional
Status of the Legislature	Not really clear; different opinions among respondents	Largely ineffective, not autonomous from government	Largely ineffective, not autonomous from government	Largely ineffective, not autonomous from government

Status of the Judiciary	Impartial, but concerns about appointment procedures of judges; most judges foreigners	Impartial but sometimes pressured; mostly ECSC-judges	Not impartial, often pressured by government	Impartial, strong, and autonomous
Status of the Bureaucracy	Oversized and influenced by government due to patronage	Oversized, ineffective, and influenced by government due to patronage	Oversized and influenced by government due to patronage	Oversized and influenced by government due to patronage
Contact with and Access to Representatives	Continuous contact and access	Continuous contact and access	Continuous contact and access	Continuous contact and access
Nature of Contact between Citizens and Politicians	Particularistic and personalistic	Particularistic and personalistic	Particularistic and personalistic	Particularistic and personalistic
Political Awareness and Feelings of Efficacy of Citizens	No data, but appears to be high	No data, but appears to be high	No data, but appears to be high	No data, but appears to be high
Universal Suffrage	Present	Present	Present	Present
Turnout at Elections and other Plebiscites	(Very) high at elections, mixed at referendums	Mixed (between 60 and 80%)	(Very) high at elections	High at both elections and referendums
Party Membership	No data available	No data available	No data available	Not applicable; no parties
Participation in Political Activities	No data, but according to respondents seems to be high	No data, but appears to be high	No data, but especially high in Parti Lepep-activities	No data, but appears to be high (especially in social media)