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Kraaykamp, G.; Dam, M. van; Toonen, T.

Citation

Kraaykamp, G., Dam, M. van, & Toonen, T. (2001). Institutional Change and Political Participation: The Effects of Municipal Amalgamation on Local Electoral Turnout in The Netherlands. *Acta Politica*, 36: 2001(4), 402-418. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450781>

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Institutional Change and Political Participation: The Effects of Municipal Amalgamation on Local Electoral Turnout in The Netherlands

Gerbert Kraaykamp

University of Nijmegen

Marcel van Dam

Research Department, Municipality of Haarlemmermeer

Theo Toonen

University of Leiden

Abstract

In the Netherlands, amalgamation of municipalities is an ongoing process. Amalgamation generally leads to a substantial increase in the size of municipalities. Critics therefore claim this has had negative effects on local electoral participation. Using data on five subsequent elections for all Dutch municipalities, we considered the short-term, medium-term, and long-term effects of amalgamation on electoral turnout. Our analyses reflect the results of actual voting, in contrast to other studies, which are based on self-reported voting behaviour in questionnaires. Contrary to conventional wisdom, we found that the effects of amalgamation, if any, were small compared to the steady autonomous decline in turnout that the general figures expressed. Moreover, these small amalgamation effects fade as time passes. In sum, our results indicate only small and temporary disruptions in electoral participation as a consequence of the amalgamation of municipalities.

1 Introduction: local electoral turnout and size

Election turnout is an intriguing topic. As a democratic right, voting is a cornerstone of modern society. Countries that do not periodically hold general and fair elections are pressed to provide people with the opportunity to participate in political processes. At the same time, we observe that in those countries where voting is a right, this right is not necessarily used. Voting abstention differs from country to country and from election to election, and varies according to the administrative layer at stake. As voting is the most

important democratic legitimization of any government and its policies, low turnout figures are worrying. Attempts to explain differences in electoral participation between political units generally focus on personal, contextual and institutional factors. One important institutional factor is size. In their classic study *Size and Democracy*, Dahl and Tufte (1973) examine the relationship between size and participation and report no clear relationship. Two opposite tendencies seem to play a role. First, the larger a political system is, the less the relative weight of each participant's contribution, implying a negative incentive to vote. Second, the closer the balance of power in a system is, "the greater the chance that a citizen's act of participation will have an impact on the outcome" (Dahl & Tufte 1973: 44). The authors conclude that these effects more or less cancel each other out both on a national level (based on a cross-country comparison) and on a local level (based on a comparison between large and small municipalities).

Several studies that deal with the local level support Dahl and Tufte's conclusions, but there are exceptions. Hoffmann-Martinot et al. (1996) found no relationship between size and democracy for local election turnout in France, but did conclude that there was a clear negative relationship for local British elections. Based on a study of Danish municipalities, Mouritzen (1989) reported a negative association between size and electoral participation. In Spain, Justel (1995) found a negative, yet weak, relationship. Some Dutch studies have also shown small, negative relationships between size and turnout (Berghuis et al. 1995; Denters & Geurts 1998). Examining the results of an Italian study, Corbetta and Parisi (1995) conclude that the relationship is ambiguous. There is a substantial difference in voting abstention between municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and those with less, but within the latter category no differences can be found. Finally, according to Verba and Nie (1972) not size, but relative isolation and boundedness are important factors.

The aforementioned Dutch studies are of particular interest here as they play an important role in discussions on municipal amalgamation in the Netherlands. As a result of an ongoing amalgamation policy, the number of municipalities is steadily declining, although political scientists contest the arguments underlying this policy on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Amongst other things, it is claimed that the institutional process of municipal amalgamation has negative consequences for electoral turnout. In the context of a relatively low and declining turnout (compared to other countries and national elections), it is claimed that these institutional changes, resulting in larger political systems, strengthen the general decline in electoral participation. Yet, until now, systematic empirical research into the effects of municipal amalgamation is scarce. Besides, there are no turnout studies known to us in which size effects and amalgamation effects are analysed

simultaneously. Most studies confound the effects of size and amalgamation. In doing so, researchers implicitly assume that an independent growth of a municipality has a comparable effect on electoral turnout to the amalgamation of municipalities resulting in the same size. Furthermore, existing empirical studies do not take into account the effects of time. If amalgamation of municipalities has (negative) consequences on electoral turnout, how do these effects evolve over time? Such an institutional change may have consequences directly after implementation ('shock effects') but is it also the case in the long run? Finally, existing studies on size and turnout seldom employ municipalities as units of analysis, but are mainly based on large-scale research into voting behaviour on the individual level (Denters & Geurts 1998). However, as both the dependent variable (electoral turnout) and the main independent variables (size and amalgamation) are at the municipal level, a micro-level design is suboptimal. Note that information on the municipal level has some additional advantages with respect to selectivity, social desirability and sample size.

This article aims to analyse the effects of municipal amalgamation on electoral turnout controlled for size effects. We start with a description of the Dutch amalgamation policy, to be followed by some theoretical insights and general figures. In the empirical section, we present the data and an outline of our analyses. In the concluding section, we report the main findings and discuss the effects of institutional change on political participation.

2 Amalgamation of Dutch municipalities

The amalgamation of municipalities is an evergreen in Dutch politics. Since 1830, municipalities have frequently been subjected to mergers, which have resulted in a steady decline in the number of municipalities. In 1870 there were 1,133 municipalities; in 1900 1,121; in 1960 994; in 1990 672; and the figure in 1998 (the year in which the last local elections were held) was 548. At the time of this article (2001) the number is just 504. In the last decades, the number has declined faster than ever, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Partly as a consequence of this ongoing amalgamation of Dutch municipalities, the average size in terms of inhabitants has increased steadily. In the last decades, the average number of inhabitants rose from 9,879 in 1950 to 28,566 in 1998, which is an increase of 189 %, whereas the total population in the Netherlands only grew by 56 % in the same period. Not surprisingly, it was mainly small municipalities that disappeared. In Table 1 the relevant data are summarized.

Figure 1 Number of municipalities in the Netherlands

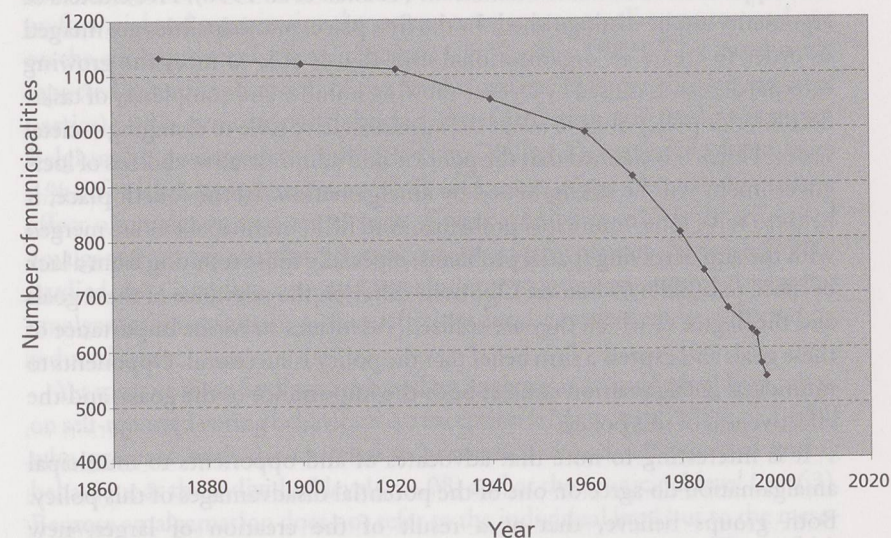


Table 1 Distribution of municipalities in population classes, mean size and number of municipalities

Municipal size	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1998
less than 5,000 inhabitants	61.5 %	55.9 %	44.5 %	30.3 %	15.8 %	4.4 %
5-20,000 inhabitants	30.9 %	34.6 %	42.6 %	50.2 %	57.0 %	54.9 %
20-50,000 inhabitants	5.2 %	6.1 %	8.5 %	14.1 %	19.3 %	30.1 %
50-100,000 inhabitants	1.3 %	1.9 %	2.8 %	3.3 %	5.4 %	6.0 %
more than 100,000 inhabitants	1.1 %	1.4 %	1.5 %	2.1 %	2.5 %	4.6 %
total	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %
mean size	9879	11486	14192	17375	22153	28566
total population size (*1000)	10027	11417	12958	14091	14887	15654
number of municipalities	1015	994	913	811	672	548
Source	Statistics Netherlands					

Although the amalgamation policy is a constant factor in sub-national government reforms, the arguments supporting it vary over time and have been applied in different combinations (Toonen et al. 1998). Five clusters of arguments can be distinguished. In the first place, municipalities are merged in order to create an organizational unit that is able to meet the growing external demands caused by an ever-growing number and complexity of tasks. Second, this policy aims to adapt the administrative scale to changing societal scales. Third, it is claimed that the political and administrative abilities of local government will be strengthened by amalgamation. In the fourth place, it helps to solve inter-municipal problems. And fifth, municipalities are merged with the aim of solving spatial problems, especially those resulting from a lack of space to build new houses. Opinions differ on the relevance of these goals and the degree to which they are realized. Advocates stress the importance of these goals and express a firm belief that the policy is successful. Opponents to municipal amalgamation contest both the importance of the goals, and the effectiveness of this policy.

It is interesting to note that advocates of and opponents to municipal amalgamation do agree on one of the potential disadvantages of this policy. Both groups believe, that as a result of the creation of larger, new municipalities, the distance between voters and elected officials increases, which in turn may lead to a higher level of political alienation, reflected by lower electoral turnout figures. Empirical research into voting behaviour in the Netherlands indeed reports a (weak) negative correlation between the size of municipalities and electoral turnout (Denters, De Jong & Thomassen 1990; Denters & Geurts 1998; Herweijer 1998). Note that in this research size effects and amalgamation effects are confounded.

Compared to the relatively large number of studies into the effects of municipal amalgamation in the Netherlands, this issue has received far less attention in other countries. This has probably to do with the fact that nowhere is municipal amalgamation so persistent a policy as in the Netherlands. In many countries, the number of local authorities has hardly or not changed in the last decades. Moreover, in those countries where the number of municipalities has declined drastically in the past, merging municipalities is no longer on the political agenda (as in the UK and Sweden), or it has been an unique event (as in Belgium and Denmark where large scale amalgamation processes occurred in the early seventies), or it has taken place on a non-systematic basis mainly in urban areas (for instance in Canada, where amalgamation has taken place around Toronto and Halifax). Studies in international journals on the effects of amalgamation are therefore scarce, and research that empirically examines the effects on electoral turnout is, as far as we know, almost non-existent.

A major exception is in the Belgian Journal for Political Science, *Res Publica*. In 1982 it published a special issue that examined the consequences of large-scale amalgamation in the 1970s. Most of the studies in this issue concentrated on financial and organizational consequences, some on policy matters and one on the consequences for local elections (DeWachter 1982). This latter study reported a 'nationalization' of the local elections (a larger role for national parties) and a stronger politicization. Brief attention was paid to turnout. Belgium has a compulsory voting system. Voting abstention declined from 7% before the amalgamation to 5.5% afterwards, suggesting a slight positive effect of amalgamation on turnout. Other studies, in which the effects of amalgamation are scrutinized, concentrate on cost aspects. Sancton (1996) studied the Canadian case and concludes that it is very doubtful whether amalgamation results in a more efficient local government as reflected by reduced costs.

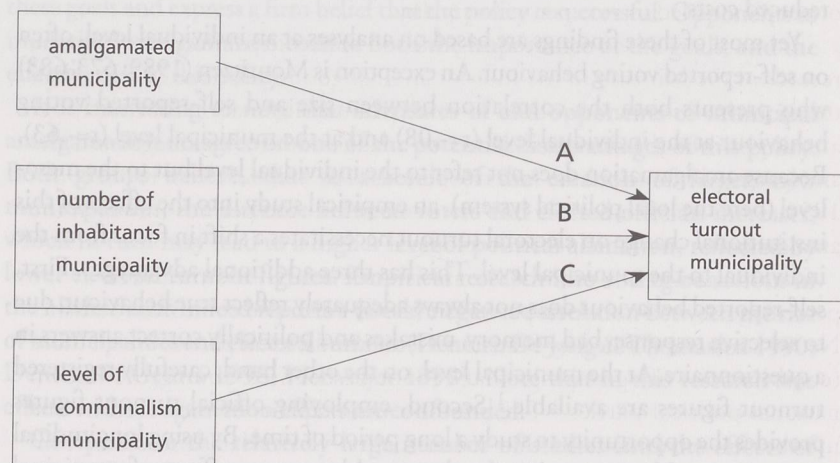
Yet most of these findings are based on analyses at an individual level, often on self-reported voting behaviour. An exception is Mouritzen (1989: 673-683) who presents both the correlation between size and self-reported voting behaviour at the individual level ($r = -.08$) and at the municipal level ($r = -.63$). Because amalgamation does not refer to the individual level but to the meso-level (here the local political system), an empirical study into the effects of this institutional change on electoral turnout necessitates a shift in focus from the individual to the municipal level. This has three additional advantages. First, self-reported behaviour does not always adequately reflect true behaviour, due to selective response, bad memory, mistakes and politically correct answers in a questionnaire. At the municipal level, on the other hand, carefully registered turnout figures are available.¹ Second, employing official turnout figures provides the opportunity to study a long period of time. By using longitudinal data, we are able to examine the short and long-term effects of municipal amalgamation. And third, data on the municipal level allows us to examine the scope of the effects. In this article, we will present an analysis of Dutch municipal data. These data are available for the Netherlands, where local elections are held every four years on a fixed date that is the same for all municipalities. The elections are based on a system of proportional representation in which each municipality is a single district in electoral terms.

3 Research design and data

To examine the effects of amalgamation on electoral turnout, a model is estimated as is depicted in Figure 2. It contains the direct effect of amalgamation on turnout (arrow A), controlled for the effects of municipal size (arrow B) and the level of communalism (arrow C). The latter aspect refers

to the local character of the elections, which in turn indicates to what extent inhabitants are involved in the political affairs of their community. This aspect is included because there are indications that the level of communalism is positively related to electoral turnout; people's involvement in local affairs increases the incentive to vote. For instance, Hoffmann-Martinot et al. (1996) reported a positive correlation between communalism and turnout for local elections in France. The number of inhabitants is probably negatively related to the level of communalism (Depla & Tops 1998). However, this is not a problem here because we are primarily interested in the amalgamation effects, and we include both aspects as control variables in our model.

Figure 2 A schematic representation of the research model



Analysis of the model is done by an OLS-regression equation separately for each local election. We estimate the effects of amalgamation on electoral turnout, controlling for size (population) and level of communalism. In order to examine the effects of municipal amalgamation on electoral turnout, we employ data on electoral turnout per municipality, on the 'amalgamation-record' of a municipality (has it been involved in an amalgamation process and, if so, in which year?), on the number of inhabitants in a municipality, and on the level of communalism. The basic outline for the analyses is straightforward. For each election, we have compared the turnout results for municipalities that were not involved in an amalgamation with those for amalgamated municipalities.

In the Netherlands, electoral turnout figures are available for municipal elections, which are held every four years. Until 1970, voting was obligatory

in the Netherlands, so an analysis of the turnout for any election before this period is not very informative. Electoral information was directly available for all elections since 1990. Data from earlier years had to be entered manually. As this turned out to be a rather time consuming activity, we decided to restrict our analyses to the elections since 1982, and consequently we analysed five consecutive elections. Given that our list of amalgamation occurrences starts in 1979, this implies that for the elections of 1982 we can only consider short-term effects (1 to 4 years ago). For the 1986 elections we can study both short-term and medium-term effects (5 to 8 years ago). For the 1990, 1994, and 1998 elections, we are able to examine the short-term, medium-term and long-term effects (more than 8 years ago) of amalgamation on turnout. The source for the turnout data of these five election years is Statistics Netherlands (CBS). Turnout is defined as the number of votes cast as a percentage of the number of people entitled to vote per municipality.

Information concerning the amalgamation of municipalities came from the records of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. We listed all the municipalities that have been involved in an amalgamation process. To get an insight into the duration effects of amalgamation, we categorized the amalgamated municipalities into five periods (1979-1982, 1983-1986, 1987-1990, 1991-1994 and 1995-1998). These reflect the periods in which the amalgamation of municipalities took place.

Communalism is a control variable in our study. It is measured as the percentage of votes for a local party. The relevant data also come from Statistics Netherlands. As defined by Statistics Netherlands, local parties are all those (combinations of) groupings that cannot be counted among the known national political parties.² The size of a municipality is measured by the number of inhabitants in that municipality. These data also stem from Statistics Netherlands.

All municipalities are included in our analyses. In other words, we have not taken a sample but have studied the full population. This means that we do not need to ask ourselves whether we can generalize our findings and consequently do not need to worry about the statistical significance of parameters. The estimated unstandardized coefficients are by definition the actual parameters in the population. Because standard errors provide us with some information on the range of an independent feature, we nevertheless present them here.

4 Analyses

4.1. Descriptive analyses

Before turning to the multivariate analyses, we present an overview of the number of municipalities that was involved in an amalgamation in the research period.³ The relevant information is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Number of municipalities involved in an amalgamation process in the period 1979 until 1998

Time period	Number of amalgamated municipalities	Percentage amalgamated municipalities in the period
1979-1982	40	4.8%
1983-1986	37	4.8%
1987-1990	24	3.4%
1991-1994	24	3.7%
1995-1998	49	7.7%
total number	174	24.1%

Source Statistics Netherlands

With the exception of the last period, in each period around 4 % of all Dutch municipalities was involved in an amalgamation. The doubling of this figure in the last period corresponds to the pattern in Figure 1. One caveat must be made. When an amalgamation takes place, in most cases extra elections for the new municipal council are held. If these extra elections occur shortly (within a year) before or after a regular four-year election, the regular elections are cancelled. This means that the number of recently amalgamated municipalities in an election is somewhat lower than the figures in Table 2 suggest. For four of the five elections we examine, the differences are small, being only two or three cases. However, the 1998 elections were held in only seven of the recently amalgamated municipalities. And although this is the full population, we should be careful with conclusions that are only based on these last elections.⁴

In Table 3 bivariate relationships for electoral turnout with amalgamation and size are presented. The general pattern shows a clear decline in voting; the turnout figures fall from 76.6 per cent in 1982 to 66.0 per cent in 1998, although the 1986 elections, and to a lesser extent the 1994 elections, weaken this trend. This still means a decline in turnout between 1982 and 1998 of almost 14 per cent or 10.6 percentage points.⁵ Interestingly, with this trend the Netherlands is no longer an exception in an international perspective. For

the 1970 to 1990 elections for different governmental layers, Denters (1995: 119) observed that the Dutch turnout rates did not decline, in contrast to many other countries. The negative trend we find holds both in municipalities that have been amalgamated and in those that have not been amalgamated. Surprisingly, turnout in the latter group is slightly lower than in the former, suggesting a weak positive association between amalgamation and turnout. Because predominantly small communities have been subject to amalgamation processes, this positive association may be an effect of size. That municipal size is related to turnout is also illustrated in Table 3. On average, turnout figures are about 15 per cent higher in small municipalities than in municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. In other words, we can find a clear negative relation between size and electoral participation. Moreover, these differences seem to be more or less stable over time.

Table 3 Cross tabulation of election turnout by amalgamation and municipal size (1982-1998)

Year of election	Election turnout (percentage)							total
	Amalgamation		Municipal Size * 1000					
	yes	no	0-10 inhab.	10-20 inhab.	20-50 inhab.	50-100 inhab.	>100 inhab.	
1982	77.4	76.6	80.3	75.3	70.7	64.7	60.4	76.6
1986	80.1	79.4	82.2	79.1	76.3	70.7	66.6	79.4
1990	70.5	69.9	74.8	70.2	65.8	57.6	53.4	70.0
1994	70.9	70.4	74.2	71.2	67.4	61.9	59.7	70.5
1998	67.2	65.6	70.6	68.0	63.3	56.8	54.2	66.0

Source Statistics Netherlands

4.2 Multivariate analyses on electoral turnout

To analyse variances in turnout per municipality, a regression-equation is estimated for each election with turnout as the dependent variable and amalgamation, size and level of communalism as independent variables. The effect of amalgamation is studied using dummies for the five periods of amalgamation and the period before amalgamation as reference category. To provide a test for non-linearity, municipal size (the number of inhabitants) is included in a curvilinear form. This is done by including both size and size squared in the equation. Both size-terms are rescaled: divided by a thousand and minus 20 to provide that the constant of our regression model refers to a population size of 20,000 (close to the mean) and regression coefficients are calculated on thousands. Finally, communalism is rescaled in such a way that

the constant refers to a level of communalism of 20 per cent (close to the mean). The regression estimates for each election are summarized in Table 4. The explained variance in each equation is satisfactory, ranging from 35 to 43 per cent. As we have included the full population in our analyses, we do not need to discuss statistical significance. We concentrate on the non-standardized coefficients, as we wish to examine the magnitude of the effects: does amalgamation matter?

Table 4 Regression on electoral turnout of amalgamation, size and communalism; standard errors between brackets

	Non-standardized coefficients				
	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998
Not amalgamated	ref	ref	ref	ref	ref
Amalgamated 1979-1982 (0-1)	.932 (.992)	.653 (.869)	1.329 (1.064)	1.238 (.883)	.017 (1.071)
Amalgamated 1983-1986 (0-1)		1.046 (.925)	1.662 (1.090)	.718 (.892)	.666 (1.061)
Amalgamated 1987-1990 (0-1)			-3.331 (1.463)	-.062 (1.097)	.332 (1.281)
Amalgamated 1991-1994 (0-1)				-3.857 (1.169)	.391 (1.340)
Amalgamated 1995-1998 (0-1)					-.913 (2.314)
Size (1000 inhabs., 0=20)	-.197 (.011)	-.142 (.009)	-.189 (.012)	-.122 (.009)	-.152 (.011)
Size (1000 inhabs., 0=20; squared)	.0003 (.000)	.0002 (.000)	.0003 (.000)	.0002 (.000)	.0002 (.000)
Level of communalism (0=20%)	.060 (.008)	.053 (.009)	.090 (.012)	.130 (.013)	.063 (.015)
Constant	75.655 (.228)	79.016 (.210)	69.421 (.283)	70.507 (.233)	66.189 (.339)
R-square adjusted	41%	35%	43%	39%	35%

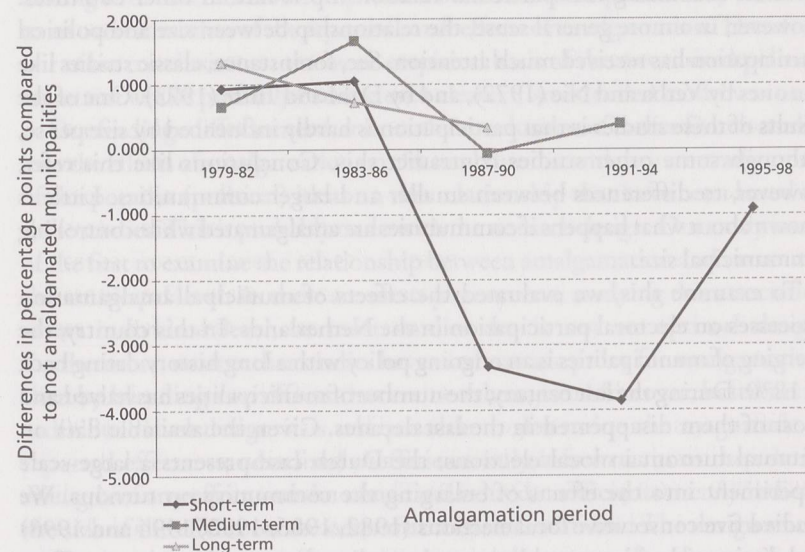
The coefficients of the amalgamation dummies in Table 4 must be interpreted as differences in percentage points. Thus, the turnout in 1990 in municipalities that were involved in an amalgamation process in the years 1987-1990 is 66.1 per cent (69.4-3.3). The 'constant' refers to municipalities that were not involved in an amalgamation process, with 20,000 inhabitants and 20 per cent of votes for local parties. The coefficients reveal that the effect of amalgamation on turnout in the five elections is generally rather small,

approximately 1 percentage point. Large negative effects only occur in the 1990 and 1994 elections for the 1987-1990 amalgamation period ($b=-3.3$), and the 1991-1994 amalgamation period ($b=-3.9$).

Regarding size, we find the expected negative effects, which are more or less stable over time. These effects of municipal size on turnout are substantial. In almost all elections, an increase in the size of the population with 10,000 inhabitants diminishes the turnout by approximately 1.5 per cent. For example, the turnout level for the 1998 elections in a municipality with 100,000 inhabitants is expected to be 10.9 per cent lower than in a municipality with 20,000 inhabitants, all other things being equal ($[100-20] \cdot -.152 + [100-20]^2 \cdot 0.0002 = -10.88$). Indeed, the effect of municipal size is curvilinear; the decline is flattened when municipalities increase in size.

In three of the five elections, communalism has a small effect of around $b=.06$, implying that to see a 1 per cent rise in the turnout level, a 17 per cent rise in the level of communalism is needed ($1/.06=16.66$). The magnitude of this effect becomes clear when we realize that the average level of communalism in these periods is approximately 20. In the 1990 and 1994 elections the effect of communalism is remarkably stronger, a finding that is hard to explain. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the effect is rather small, even in these elections, especially when compared to the overall decline in turnout levels.

Figure 3 Short-term, medium-term and long-term effects of amalgamation on electoral turnout



To gain some insight into the short-term, medium-term and long-term effects of amalgamation on turnout, we plotted the parameters of dummies for amalgamations that took place one, two and three periods before the elections respectively for each election. Given the available data, this means that we have information on five short-term, four medium-term and three long-term effects. These are graphically presented in Figure 3. The effects are presented for each period of amalgamation.

As we mentioned before, the effects of amalgamation on electoral turnout are not clearly positive or negative. This applies especially to the short-term effects: three out of five effects are negative, and two positive. Three of the four medium-term effects and all three long-term effects are positive. But in most cases the magnitude of these effects is small: only a few percentage points. Furthermore, from Figure 3 it can be concluded that the medium and long-term effects are smaller than the short-term effects. So, if amalgamation has an effect on turnout, this effect fades as time passes.

5 Conclusion and discussion

In this paper we have examined the effects of a major institutional change, the enlargement of the size of the political community through amalgamation, on political participation in the form of electoral participation in local elections. Although this relationship has received some attention in Dutch literature, research examining this particular relationship is rare in other countries. However, in a more general sense, the relationship between size and political participation has received much attention. See, for instance, classic studies like the ones by Verba and Nie (1972), and by Dahl and Tufte (1973). One of the results of these studies is that participation is hardly influenced by size *per se*, although some other studies contradict this. Conclusions like this refer, however, to differences between smaller and larger communities. Little is known about what happens if communities are amalgamated while controlling for municipal size.

To examine this, we evaluated the effects of municipal amalgamation processes on electoral participation in the Netherlands. In this country, the merging of municipalities is an ongoing policy with a long history dating back to 1830. During the last century, the number of municipalities has halved and most of them disappeared in the last decades. Given the available data on electoral turnout in local elections, the Dutch case presents a large-scale experiment into the effects of enlarging the community on turnout. We studied five consecutive local elections (1982, 1986, 1990, 1994 and 1998) and distinguished between short-term, medium-term and long-term effects of amalgamation on turnout. It was found that the effects of amalgamation, if

any, are small compared to the steady autonomous decline in turnout that the general figures show. In so far as effects can be traced, these are mainly negative. Yet, such effects are only traceable for a short period after amalgamation. After the next election, they more or less disappear.

With respect to size, we find a moderate negative relationship to turnout. The effect is clearly negative, but to evaluate it, one must take into account the size of Dutch municipalities. Almost 60 per cent of these municipalities have 20,000 or less inhabitants and 90 per cent have less than 50,000 inhabitants. Comparing two cases, one with 10,000 and the other with 50,000 inhabitants therefore means comparing extreme cases. And yet, the predicted turnout difference for the 1998 elections is only 5.9 percentage points (67.7 per cent versus 61.8 per cent, all else being equal), a difference only slightly larger than the autonomous decline in turnout. Therefore, we qualify this negative effect as moderate.

We made a straightforward analysis to examine the effect of amalgamation on turnout with municipalities as the units of analysis. The assumed negative effect plays an important role in the political debate on amalgamation policy. We only found small effects of amalgamation. We did not intend to explain differences in turnout between municipalities as such. For such a project, it would be necessary to include variables that reflect the composition of municipalities in terms of, for example, age, education and church membership, as these variables are known to have a substantial effect at the individual level on the decision of Dutch citizens to vote (cf. Aarts 2000). Not dealing with differences in composition between municipalities may even lead to an overestimation of the reported small effects of amalgamation. Therefore, our main conclusion on the weak empirical basis of the scrutinized political argument would probably become even clearer if an extended model was used.

Our findings differ somewhat from the conclusions of earlier Dutch studies into the effects of amalgamation on electoral turnout and they contradict most of the popular (political) ideas on this relationship that have been based on these studies. This is probably to do with the research design. Our study is one of the first to examine the relationship between amalgamation and turnout at the municipal level. As these are meso-phenomena, studying this association at an individual level, as most studies do, is not an optimal design. Furthermore, most earlier studies have used size as a proxy for amalgamation, thereby blending two effects that are not the same. Moreover, based on an individual-level design it is not possible to determine the magnitude of reported effects: standardized coefficients only inform us as to the relative strength of any effect and the non-standardized coefficients merely indicate the size of the effects on the odds that someone will vote. The design of our study overcomes these weaknesses and, as we did not need to draw a sample, we were able to estimate the 'true' population coefficients.

With respect to the international literature, we feel that our results do not so much contradict earlier findings, as refine these conclusions. Our contribution is that the strength of the relationship between size and participation depends on the scale: differences between communities of say 15,000 and 40,000 inhabitants can be expected to be larger than differences between communities of 75,000 and 100,000, although in both cases we should expect the differences to be modest. Furthermore, if the scale is deliberately manipulated through an amalgamation, one may expect some negative consequences of an enlargement for the turnout especially when it concerns a major enlargement. However, such effects do not last long.

It is interesting to see that changes in such a striking characteristic of a community have but little influence on political participation. In a sense, this takes us back to the observation of Dahl and Tufte (1973: 135) that size is not that significant for the way democracies work: "[r]ather than conceiving of democracy as located in a particular kind of inclusive, sovereign unit, we must learn to conceive of democracy spreading through a set of interrelated political systems." This could mean that other institutional changes, such as the reshaping of intergovernmental relationships or alterations in the interactions between a local government and its population, might have a substantial effect on electoral turnout. These kinds of changes may or may not accompany an amalgamation and their effect on turnout is probably larger than the enlargement of the municipality as such.

Acknowledgements

We thank Remon Lemmens for his assistance in gathering the data. We also thank the two anonymous reviewers of Acta Politica for their comments.

Notes

1. In contrast to some other countries like Great Britain (see Denver 1995: 184), electoral registers are very accurate in the Netherlands.
2. In the period under examination, the CBS slightly changed its definition of local parties after 1986, however, that mainly affected the internal classification of the different local groupings. As we are interested in the percentage of votes of all groupings in total, we may ignore this change in definition.
3. Between 1979 and 1998 three municipalities were involved in two amalgamation processes. These have been classified only once, namely in the last process.
4. Inputting the results of the non-regular elections for the other 42 amalgamated municipalities as a proxy is not an option. The very fact that such elections take place

in only a few municipalities results in substantially lower turnout figures, often below 50 per cent. These extremely low turnout figures are not so much the result of the amalgamation process, but of the low attention of the media and national politicians who normally play an active role in promoting the local candidates of their own party.

5. Note that these averages are calculated on a municipal level. The average turnout for these elections is calculated on an individual level, i.e., all votes cast as a percentage of all people entitled to vote for the whole country are 68.3, 73.2, 62.3, 65.3 and 59.9 per cent, respectively.

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Book Reviews

Jan-Erik Lane, *New Public Management*. London: Routledge, 2000, 256 p., ISBN 0-415-21387-6, £ 19.99.

The basic conception of this book is a sound one and the author is a well-known academic and experienced writer. His essential premises are that there is something that is widely referred to as 'new public management'; that this has been of great interest to public sector policy professionals and has contributed in many systems to a comprehensive programme of public sector reform; and that political scientists have not tackled the topic systematically enough, particularly those concerned with public policy analysis. The premises are clearly valid and the author's aim is to produce a book on the subject that can serve the dual purposes of being a student text and a contribution to a higher-level intellectual debate. All of this is very promising.

The book begins with a review of traditional public administration theory and goes on to a series of chapters looking at recent criticisms of the theory and practice of public sector management. This part of the text includes discussions of matters such as X-inefficiency, the role of the public enterprise, the trade-off between efficiency and equity, and the distinction between welfare states and welfare societies. By the end of these chapters students will have a good grounding in the debates about the public sector that culminated in Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite attacks on the post-war welfare state in Europe. These discussions will be useful for both students and public sector professionals who are studying this topic academically for the first time. Indeed, the text reads very much like the write-up of a lecture series given by the author. It has something of a 'top-level' feel to it and thus, for example, we are likely to be referred to literature reviews rather than original sources during discussions of the origins of some of the modern movements in public sector governance.

Lane then moves on to discuss the various contractualist arguments and arrangements that have followed on the heels of this debate. Again the argument is put forward at what we might think of as a rather general level, and there are many points that would need to be more closely argued and documented before they could be taken as serious contributions to the research literature in this field. That, of course, is not the author's purpose, but the naïve reader will sometimes be left wondering how much of what he or she is reading is part of the mainstream literature, and how much is a product of a particular case being argued by the author. So there is thus something of