

Gerring, J. & Veenendaal, W. (2020). *Population and politics: The impact of scale*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 508pp. pbk. ISBN: 978-1-1087-1396-2. £26.99.

The role of size has become an increasingly prominent topic in political science. This is to a considerable degree thanks to the pioneering work of John Gerring and Wouter Veenendaal. Their recent collaboration *Population and Politics* summarizes, synthesizes, and advances several ongoing debates. The authors' goal is to investigate the role of size, which they refer to as scale, on several political outcomes. The first part of the book presents their analytical framework. In a second part, which is the heart and main body of the book, they summarize existing studies and present new empirical evidence on the effect of size on more than ten central political outcomes. The third part presents a synthesis and conclusion.

The first part of the book skillfully discusses the characteristics of size as a sluggish, continuous variable that leads to difficulties in identifying its effects. Importantly, the authors conceptualize size as population size, a continuous variable that changes slowly but varies enormously. Scale effects should occur and be observable at the national level (i.e., countries) and at the subnational level (e.g., municipalities, regions, the US states). In this sense, scale is used as an abstract concept to subsume arguments stemming from the decentralization literature and the literature on small states. Furthermore, the authors use a logarithmic transformation of population size because they expect size effects to be strongest at small levels. Readers interested in the empirical evidence may skip the first part of the book, but this would be unfortunate. The conceptualization of size and the explanation of the analytical strategy is sophisticated, yet accessible; it should be essential reading for scholars of small states and territories.

The second part consists of an extensive summary of theoretical arguments and empirical evidence. Each chapter in this section explores scale effects on a specific outcome: societal cohesion, the number of representatives, representativeness, particularism, participation, contestation, institutionalized succession, professionalism, institutional concentration, policy intervention, power, civil conflict, and others. For each outcome, the authors first discuss the theoretical arguments and potential causal mechanisms behind the effect. Then they move to the empirical evidence, for which they summarize existing studies and provide new empirical insights. The authors' grasp of a large literature on each outcome is impressive.

For their own empirical analyses, Gerring and Veenendaal combine quantitative and qualitative data. They conduct statistical analyses for national and sub-national level indicators, including data from new sources, such as *Varieties of Democracy* or the *Global Leadership Project*, which have not been used before to answer questions related to size. To analyze the effect of population size on these outcome variables, they estimate various models ranging from single and multiple regressions to instrumental variable analyses. The latter attempts to minimize endogeneity problems and strengthen the robustness of the results. This clean-cut, multi-step approach to statistical testing has advantages and disadvantages: On the one hand, the approach is transparent and increases confidence in the findings because the same statistical tests and specifications are applied for all outcome variables, which minimizes the risk of p-hacking or a biased reporting of only those models that support the argument. On the other hand, however, readers may perceive this transparent, replicable approach as monotonous and technical since every chapter repeats the same steps in the same order. The statistical analyses are complemented with insights from qualitative fieldwork in small states (defined as those below 1 million population). Interview extracts enrich the chapters, but they are used less consistently than the statistical analyses. Moreover, it is not entirely clear whether they serve

as mere illustrations of the theoretical arguments or stand-alone empirical evidence. In any case, the interview data contributes to a comprehensive discussion of scale effects that convincingly shows that size matters for a variety of outcomes.

One chapter is dedicated to outcomes for which a clear size effect is yet to be established: regime type (such as democracy and autocracy), social inequality, economic development, and public service quality. The fact that the authors include and discuss the inconclusive evidence on these aspects complements the previous chapters. By highlighting non-findings, they also leave room for future studies to interrogate these unsettled questions or to explore why size plays no role, or why it is difficult to detect, for these important outcomes.

The third part takes a step back and considers the bigger picture. It discusses the trade-offs of scale effects, implications for policy and institutional reform, and whether smaller or larger units are preferable overall. It is inevitably difficult to wrap up the impressive collection of theoretical and empirical aspects presented in the book. As a result, the third part is less straightforward and more speculative than the second, but it is also ambitious and thought-provoking. Based on their empirical findings, Gerring and Veenendaal argue that scale leads to a series of coordination dilemmas for political units: The larger a community, the more coordination is necessary between citizens and between citizens and government; and this greater need for coordination is likely to require more formal coordination mechanisms, for example, formal rules, specialized procedures and government organizations. Large size leads not only to increased formalization and institutionalization but also to looser bonds between citizens and their representatives. These abstract arguments advance our theoretical thinking about scale, whether at the subnational or national level, or even beyond that (the authors mention the example of the European Union). The normative question about the optimal size is answered with a series of trade-offs; these trade-offs illustrate that small and large size both have advantages and disadvantages, for example with regards to efficiency, power, and freedom. Ultimately, the authors leave answers about optimal size to the readers and their subjective judgment and weighting of different values.

In sum, *Population and Politics* makes an outstanding contribution to the study of size effects on political outcomes and provides valuable starting points for future research. It will surely become a new standard reference for the study of size and small states.

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