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POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL BIAS IN AMALGAMATED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL BIAS IN AMALGAMATED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Introduction

Political representation is a cornerstone in modern democracy. Consequently, a vast amount of research has addressed questions of how different dimensions of the electorate, such as gender, class, and age, are represented in the legislatures elected to make decisions on the electorate's behalf (e.g., Cotta and Best 2007; Norris 1985; Rao 1998). Geography, in particular the tension between center and periphery, is an important political cleavage, and a traditionally important political question is how different geographical areas in a political jurisdiction are represented (De Maesschalck 2011; Thomassen and Andeweg 2004; Valen, Narud, and Hardarson 2000). The center-periphery pattern has been observed *between countries* (Galtung 1971) as well as *within countries* (Rokkan and Urwin 1983). In this article we argue that the center-periphery cleavage exists at an even lower geographical level, namely *within municipalities* and that we should pay attention to the geographical representation within local councils. When we study national parliaments, we often evaluate the MPs based on which part of the country they come from; when we study local councils, we should also pay attention to which part of the municipality the councilors come from.

At first, this call for focusing on a geographical dimension, such as the center-periphery divide, might seem a little out of step with the times. In recent years, the tendency has been if not to find geography irrelevant then at least to point to processes of deterritorialization (Appadurai 1996) as making geography less interesting. However, geography has turned out to be quite tenacious as a political cleavage. Applying the center-periphery concept to local

governments might still seem to take it a bit far. In some municipalities, the geographical distance from center to periphery is minimal and it may seem exaggerated to talk about a center and a periphery. We argue that in some countries the geographical dimension of political representation has become increasingly relevant in connection with local governments due to the global, and especially European, trend of amalgamating municipalities (Baldersheim and Rose 2010; Sancton 2000; Zimmerbauer and Paasi 2013). Obviously, this means that the size of the municipalities increases, *ceteris paribus* making the center-periphery differences more distinct (not least since urban and rural areas are often merged). Even more importantly, case studies have demonstrated that geographical redistributive games are “unleashed” when municipalities are amalgamated (Elklit and Pedersen 2006).

Amalgamation of political jurisdictions involves a classic political challenge, namely integration. In this case integration of different institutions, organizations, identities, and special interests of the former jurisdictions, which now become local geographical areas in the amalgamated municipality.¹ The former jurisdictions are likely to become an important frame of reference along with the four most cited driving forces in local politics – race, class, ideology, and partisanship (Hajnal and Trounstein 2014, 66) – in the political life of the new jurisdictions, particularly in the formative years right after the amalgamation. It is therefore crucial that the populations of each former jurisdiction are politically represented in the new council in order to influence the design and construction of the amalgamated municipality.

In this article, we will take the center-periphery dimension of political representation to the local level and apply it to amalgamated municipalities. Since not all municipal mergers are alike, we will pay close attention to the type of center-periphery relation created by an amalgamation. Each of the former jurisdictions in an amalgamation had its own political center, but after the amalgamation, the smaller of the former jurisdictions (in terms of

population size²) are likely to become the periphery of the new jurisdiction if they are amalgamated with a larger city that is a natural center candidate. Will the large city, as the natural frontrunner for center, dominate the new council? Or are the smaller of the former jurisdictions (the likely periphery of the new jurisdiction) able to bring politicians from their areas into the new councils to represent their interests? As detailed below, the argument of this study is that when an amalgamation creates a strong center-periphery dimension (i.e., a relatively large city is amalgamated with smaller jurisdictions), it will cause an overrepresentation of the peripheral areas (i.e., the smaller of the former jurisdictions). The potential mechanisms driving this overrepresentation of the periphery are mobilization of periphery voters and politicians caused by fear of being dominated by the new center and parties' favorable nomination of periphery candidates. In cases where the former jurisdictions are relatively equal in size, that is, an obvious center-periphery relation is missing, high but fairly even mobilization pressure from each of the former jurisdictions is expected, but the even pressures will not cause representation bias.

First, the arguments about representation of center and periphery in post-amalgamated jurisdictions are outlined. Second, the large-scale amalgamations of municipalities in Denmark in 2005 are used to empirically examine representation bias in amalgamated local governments. This provides an excellent test case as half of the new 66 amalgamated municipalities were formed around a center in the form of a very dominant city (i.e., the amalgamation created a strong center-periphery relation between the former municipalities), and the other half of the amalgamated municipalities were formed by more equally sized jurisdictions. Thus, the reform in 2005 produced a number of comparable amalgamations with center-periphery dimensions of varying strength.

It will be examined how the former municipalities are represented in the amalgamated municipalities on three dimensions of representation: the proportion of seats in the

amalgamated council, the proportion of mayors, and the advancement of local area interests by politicians from the former municipalities. The data includes coding of the geographical background and personal votes of all 1,852 and 1,786 councilors of the amalgamated municipalities in the election terms 2006-2009 and 2010-2013 respectively – the formative years of the new, enlarged jurisdictions. Furthermore, a survey of all council members in 2012 reveals the extent to which elected council members attempt to advance the interests of their local area.

The next section defines the forms of political representation to be examined and summarizes the importance of geographical representation and the center-periphery dimension. The theoretical arguments on representation in amalgamated political jurisdictions are outlined, and the empirical case, data and measures presented. This is followed by the results and a concluding discussion.

Geographical representation in political jurisdictions

The concept of political representation is multifaceted and includes different dimensions (Pitkin 1967). In the present study, representation is examined in two classic forms. First, how well the characteristics of the political representatives – in our study, geographical affiliation – resemble, or ‘mirror’, the characteristics of those they represent. This is sometimes referred to as descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967) and has been subject to extensive research, especially with regard to gender, minorities, and geographical affiliation (e.g., Cotta and Best 2007; Latner and McGann 2005; Norris and Franklin 1997). Second, the extent to which the elected politicians seek to advance interests of their local geographical area, that is, substantive or ‘acting for’ representation (Pitkin 1967), will be examined.

Geographical representation constitutes a traditionally important dimension of representation as there are most often strong special interests and identities attached to different areas of a political jurisdiction (Converse and Pierce 1986; Latner and McGann 2005; Pitkin 1967). Especially in election systems where geographical representation is not secured by institutional design (e.g., most types of proportional representation systems), different geographical areas of a jurisdiction may be unequally represented, which can mean an unequal representation of interests (Powell 2004).

The center-periphery dimension of jurisdictions is essential for our understanding of the geographical element of politics (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Mair and Garvin 1997; Rokkan and Urwin 1983; Valen, Narud, and Hardarson 2000). Although the distinction between center and periphery is not clear-cut, this dimension may be perceived as including spatial aspects as well as aspects related to identity, culture, and economy. In geographical terms, ‘the center represents the seat of authority, and the periphery those geographical locations at the furthest distance from the center, but still within the territory controlled from the center’ (Rokkan and Urwin 1983, 2). However, the center also differs from the periphery with regard to economics, culture, and identity (Valen, Narud, and Hardarson 2000) as it is characterized as holding a relatively large concentration of the jurisdiction’s financial and cultural activities. In the vast majority of cases, the center – whether it is defined by the formal seat of authority or financial and cultural activities – is located in the most populated area in the jurisdiction, so the relative population size of cities or areas in a jurisdiction is a good indicator of center and periphery (Rokkan and Urwin 1983, 8-9).

Center-periphery representation in amalgamated political jurisdictions

Major amalgamations of local governments have been implemented recently in Europe, for example in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Baldersheim and Rose 2010; Zimmerbauer and Paasi 2013) as well as elsewhere, such as for instance in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Israel, Japan, and New Zealand (Reingewertz 2012; Sancton 2000).

The amalgamation trend has important consequences for geographical representation, as the affected jurisdictions change from separate political systems to geographical areas in a new amalgamated jurisdiction. The former jurisdictions may have been used to having their own service budget, tax level, city hall, and their own way of organizing services, not to mention their own practices in political life and decision-making. The citizens of the former jurisdiction may also have developed identities related to this former jurisdiction. Moreover, strong special interests are often connected to the former jurisdictions. Unifying all these elements creates winners and losers in relation to the previous system. Some political centers in the former jurisdictions lose their status; other centers are expanded. Amalgamations of relatively large and relatively small jurisdictions in terms of population size are likely to create a strong center-periphery dimension in the amalgamated jurisdiction, i.e., the smaller jurisdictions are likely to become the periphery whereas the larger jurisdictions are natural candidates for center and thereby experience an expansion of territory.

In sum, amalgamations of political jurisdictions entail changes in power, and a great deal is at stake when the new jurisdiction is designed. Therefore, it is very important how the area and population of each former jurisdiction is represented in the new council, especially in the formative years after an amalgamation when the new jurisdiction is shaped. Will politicians from the smaller of the former jurisdictions (the likely new periphery) be elected to the new council or will the center be overrepresented?

It can be argued that when an amalgamation creates a strong center-periphery dimension, two mechanisms will cause overrepresentation of the periphery to counteract the influence of the new dominant center: mobilization and institutional path-dependence caused by the political parties. Below, these mechanisms are presented in a theoretical perspective; note, however, that the empirical study does not explicitly examine the mechanisms but rather the expected implication of the mechanisms.

First, the mobilization mechanism points to mobilization of the periphery, of voters and politicians of the smaller former jurisdictions, when a strong center-periphery dimension is created and former service and tax standards, norms, decision making, and political center are threatened. As the center has a large population, power, and organization to handle a large jurisdiction, the amalgamated jurisdiction will most likely develop around the standards, norms, and interests of the center. The ensuing centralization of public services and administration means fewer jobs in the peripheral areas. Thus, the fear of being dominated by the center may mobilize the periphery to place its own representatives as political decision makers in the amalgamated jurisdiction and periphery politicians to advance local area interests (Valen, Narud, and Hardarson 2000, 111). In contrast, the center population is not likely to experience threats of potential domination, and therefore less mobilization among voters and politicians is expected. As Hajnal and Trounstein (2014, 68) put it: '[L]arger out-groups can represent a greater threat that spurs greater action'. In an amalgamated jurisdiction, the center will not be an out-group, and even though the citizens there will not feel that they are living in the center of the world, they will most likely see themselves as living in the center of the new municipality. Several studies have shown that citizens in smaller cities tend to participate more in local politics than citizens in larger cities, and this may reinforce mobilization in the periphery. For example, Oliver (2000) and Oliver and Ha (2007) show that people from smaller cities are more likely to contact local officials, know a

council candidate, attend community board meetings, be recruited for political activity by neighbors, and that they are more interested in local politics. Citizens in smaller communities are more used to a shorter distance between them and their politicians and are more likely to have personal ties to one or more local candidates. Even though they now live in a larger amalgamated municipality, their higher level of political involvement might not converge to the level in the larger cities overnight, and they will potentially be easier to mobilize. Mobilization of the periphery may manifest itself by periphery citizens being more inclined to vote for candidates from their local area and run for candidacy than center citizens.

The other mechanism that may cause overrepresentation of the periphery is institutional path-dependency originating from the nominating organizations, i.e., the local branches of the political parties. National parties are important actors in the modern local government setting (Kjaer and Elklit 2010), and they are crucial in terms of nominating candidates. The local parties are also challenged when local jurisdictions are amalgamated because they have to adjust and develop their *modus operandi* for nominating candidates in a new structure. In-depth case studies of how local parties adjust to municipal amalgamations demonstrate that even though the local parties in most cases follow suit and merge with each other copying the municipal merger, traces of the old structure survive (Elklit and Pedersen 2006). Therefore, former branches of the party are likely to agree that the candidate positions on the ballot should be somewhat fairly distributed among the former jurisdictions (instead of ranking them according to the size of the former jurisdictions). At least in the Danish case this seems to have been a widespread norm (Elklit and Pedersen 2006) illustrating that merging municipalities involves a lot of feelings among councilors and voters, and that some people have wanted the new unit to start off on the right foot. Having candidates from all former jurisdictions at the top end of the party list might also ensure votes from all parts of the amalgamated jurisdiction, and it benefits periphery candidates.

In sum, an overrepresentation of the periphery can be expected when an amalgamation creates a strong center-periphery dimension. When the new center-periphery dimension is weak or unclear, for example if the former jurisdictions are more even in size, a substantial representation bias is not expected. In such cases, the former jurisdictions all face more or less the same risk of being dominated by the others and are therefore equally anxious to secure their representation.

The geographical dimension will not erase the importance of political parties, which are still likely to be a main focal point of representation, but it is intensified by an amalgamation, particularly in the years immediately after. The influence of the geographical dimension will in many cases work through the political parties, for example as politicians work to incorporate local interests into party standpoints or agreements.

Another important point is that studies usually mention the periphery in the singular. However, the periphery is not one unit with shared interests. The different peripheral areas, or former jurisdictions, are likely to have different interests, so a majority of periphery politicians in a council does not necessarily mean a united adoption of ‘periphery politics’. Instead, different peripheral areas benefit from overrepresentation by having their politicians positioned in the political bodies to lobby their interests and make a fuss if they are neglected.

To study empirically the argument about center-periphery representation as formulated above requires a number of amalgamations that vary in terms of the strength of the new center-periphery dimension. In order to compare cases of strong and weak center-periphery dimension, we need amalgamations that occur simultaneously in similar institutional settings. Additionally, the empirical study requires data on the geographical background of the amalgamated jurisdictions’ political representatives and the extent to which they seek to advance the interests of their local area. The large-scale reform of the Danish municipalities decided upon in 2005 and the following elections for the new enlarged municipalities in 2005

and 2009 meet these demands and offer an excellent opportunity for studying geographical representation in amalgamated jurisdictions.

The Danish amalgamations of municipalities

Danish municipalities administer about half of the public spending, including key public services such as education and unemployment services. Each municipality is run by a local government for which politicians are elected every fourth year by a proportional representation electoral system. Parties are important actors in local government, and most elected politicians are members of a nationwide party (Kjaer and Elklit 2010). Voters can vote for a candidate or a party list without specifying a preferred candidate. The entire municipality constitutes one electoral district, which means that geographical representation is not built into the electoral system. Usually, the voter turnout is about 70 percent. The mayor is appointed by the council members by simple majority voting. Political decisions are made by the council (which consists of 9-55 members). Apart from minor changes, the geographical structure of the municipalities was fixed between 1970 and 2007. In 2007, the number of municipalities was reduced from 271 to 98 when 239 municipalities were amalgamated into 66 new municipalities, and 32 municipalities continued in their existing form. The political part of the reform took place in 2005 as the first elections of the amalgamated municipalities were held in November 2005 (for the 2006-2009 term). The administrative part of the reform was implemented as of January 2007.

The decision to amalgamate the municipalities was made by the national parliament and municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants were asked to arrange amalgamations with neighboring municipalities. Generally, the amalgamations were undramatic and

arranged by the municipalities themselves (Blom-Hansen, Elklit, and Serritzlew 2006, 17-18). The amalgamations included between two and seven (pre-reform) municipalities (see Table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

In sum, the reform produced 66 amalgamated municipalities created at the same time in similar institutional settings and representing different types of center-periphery relations. In some amalgamations, a significant difference between the largest and the other former municipalities created a clear and strong center-periphery relation. In other amalgamations, a more similar size among former municipalities created a much weaker center-periphery relation. In sum, the reform offers substantial variation in the strength of the center-periphery dimension.

To investigate the outlined argument, the representation of center and periphery in the wake of the amalgamations is examined, specifically the representation after the first two post-amalgamation elections. The elections were held in 2005 and 2009 and encompass the formative years of the newly constructed municipalities.

Measures and data

Identification of the expected center and periphery as well as the strength of the center-periphery dimension in the new amalgamated municipalities is based on Rokkan and Urwin's (1983) argument that the relative size in terms of inhabitants of the areas within a jurisdiction is a simple and solid indicator of center and periphery. The coding of the center-periphery

relations in the 66 amalgamated municipalities followed two steps. First, center and periphery for each of the amalgamated municipalities are coded. Thus, the largest of the former municipalities was coded as the expected center and the remaining of the former municipalities as the expected periphery. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the new municipality of Viborg, created through the amalgamation of six former municipalities: the former Viborg, Bjerringbro, Tjele, Møldrup, Fjends, and Karup. The borders of the former municipalities are illustrated by the thin lines; the number of inhabitants in each of the former municipalities (2005) is shown in parentheses; urban areas are indicated by the grey color. As the largest of the former municipalities in terms of population size, the former Viborg municipality was coded as the center and the other former municipalities as the periphery.

[Figure 1 here]

Second, the strength of the center-periphery relation in the amalgamated municipalities is coded. In our case, a distinction can be made between three amalgamation types in terms of the strength of the center-periphery dimension (see Table 2). The most common amalgamation type, labelled *one large*, is a relatively large municipality, including a larger city, amalgamated with a number of smaller and more rural municipalities. This entails a strong center-periphery dimension. Specifically, this amalgamation type is defined as cases where the largest of the former municipalities is more than twice as large as the second largest (this corresponds to Rokkan and Urwin's [1983, 8-9] categorization of a strong center-periphery relation). The formation of Viborg municipality (see Figure 1) is an example of this amalgamation type.

[Table 2 here]

The amalgamation type labelled *mixed* consists of a mix of smaller and larger former municipalities, but without one large former municipality that substantially dominates the others. Our coding definition of this amalgamation type is amalgamations where the largest of the former municipalities is more than twice the size of the smallest but less than twice as large as the second largest. The center-periphery relation is not clear-cut.

Finally, in some cases, more equally sized municipalities were amalgamated. This type, labelled *equal*, is defined as amalgamations where the largest of the former municipality is less than twice as large as the smallest municipality. The center-periphery dimension in this type is weak.

The categorization of amalgamated municipalities into the three types (or strength of center-periphery relation) is chosen because it describes the types of amalgamations in the case very well and because it is akin to Rokkan and Urwin's (1983, 8-9) categorization of center-periphery strength. However, it is sensitive to the categorization thresholds, which are inevitably arbitrary, so an alternative operationalization of amalgamation type was made for robustness analyses. This approach operationalizes amalgamation type (i.e., the strength of the center-periphery relation) as the difference in inhabitants between the largest and the second largest of the former municipalities. Thus, a large difference indicates a strong center-periphery relation, and a small difference a weak relation. The difference measure does not have the same theoretical and interpretive advantages as the categorization, but it is not sensitive to the setting of a threshold. On the other hand, it is far more sensitive to outliers in the amalgamation type than the categorization approach. The difference measure lies between 13 and 64,165 in 65 of the 66 amalgamated municipalities. One municipality has a difference of 151,780 (this outlier is dropped from the analysis when the alternative measure of

amalgamation type is used). The robustness analyses are summarized in the text along with the main analyses.

To measure representation of center and periphery in terms of mayors and seats in the council (i.e., descriptive representation), we follow Norris and Lovenduski (1995, 96) and Latner and McGann (2005, 716), who calculate the representation of a group by dividing its proportion of the representatives by its proportion of the electorate. Hence, representation of the periphery in the form of seats in the council is calculated by:

$$\textit{Periphery Representation Index} = \frac{\textit{Proportion of the councillors living in the periphery}}{\textit{Proportion of the electors living in the periphery}}$$

The periphery is underrepresented if the index value is less than 1 and overrepresented if the index value is above 1. For example, if the index value is 0.90, the periphery is only obtaining 90 percent of the seats that it would obtain if there were no representation bias (in that case the index would equal 1). Representation in the form of seats in the council was calculated for each of the 66 amalgamated municipalities. Representation by mayors was also calculated using the periphery representation index, but based on the entire population of mayors and electorate of the amalgamated municipalities (the index cannot be calculated for each of the amalgamated municipalities). The councilors' geographical background was obtained via register data from Statistics Denmark (data on the electorate was obtained from KMD, www.kmdvalg.dk).

The councilors' tendency to advance the interests of their local area, or substantive representation, is analyzed using a survey distributed to the 1,786 council members of the amalgamated municipalities in 2012 (51 percent responded). An important advantage of using survey data is the ability to obtain the information about advancement of local interest directly from those who perform this representation: the politicians. However, it is also

important to keep the limitations of survey data in mind when interpreting the results. Survey data measures what the politicians indicate they do (which is not necessarily what they actually do) and thus only indirectly measures their behavior related to substantive representation.

An additive index of the politicians' advancement of local interests (*Local Interest Index*) was constructed based on five items (see Table 3). The items were constructed to include different aspects of politicians' advancement of local interests, such as placing local issues on the agenda and actively advancing them and providing information to the council about their local area. Furthermore, to obtain a nuanced measure, the items consisted of statements where agreement implies a strong tendency to advance local interests (e.g., item 1; see Table 3) as well as statements where agreement indicates a weaker tendency to advance local interests (e.g., item 3). Each item was constructed to reduce social desirability responses. Specifically, wording that might portray politicians who advance/do not advance local interests as "good" or "bad" were left out.

[Table 3 here]

In general, the variation in responses to the items indicates that respondents were able to distinguish between politicians who tend to advance local area interests and those who do not. A factor analysis supports the claim that the items measure one dimension (the rotated factor loadings are listed in Table 3).³ Cronbach's Alpha of the index is 0.78. The index ranges from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating a higher tendency to advance local interests. The mean is 4.57 and the standard deviation 1.83. Since the factor loadings of items 3 and 4 (see Table 3) are smaller than the loadings of the other three items, a short version of the index including only items 1, 2, and 5 was constructed for robustness analysis of the

results in Table 7. The robustness analysis is summarized in the text along with the main analyses.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of the key variables of the study. Since the calculation of representation by mayors was based on the entire population of mayors and the entire electorate of the amalgamated municipalities, it has no meaningful standard deviation and range. The next sections present the analyses of the descriptive representation in terms of seats and mayoralities and of substantive representation.

[Table 4 here]

Representation by seats and mayoralities

First, the argument is examined by reporting how center and periphery are represented by seats and mayors in the amalgamated councils. Representation by seats is examined in Table 5, which shows the distribution and mean of the amalgamated municipalities on the periphery representation index for the 2006-09 and 2010-13 election terms (the median is also reported to account for any outliers). The periphery representation index is calculated for each amalgamation type (*one large*, *mixed*, and *equal*) and across types.

[Table 5 here]

From the distributions and index means across all amalgamation types in Table 5 (see the total column) it can be observed that the periphery (or the smaller of the former municipalities) is clearly overrepresented in the amalgamated councils in both the 2006-09

and 2010-13 terms. In the 2006-09 term, the periphery was overrepresented in almost eight out of ten (79 percent) of the amalgamated municipalities. The average index value is 1.17, which is statistically significant from 1 ($p < 0.001$). How strong is an average overrepresentation of 1.17? To exemplify, let us assume a council with 29 seats (which is very common in the present case) and that the periphery makes up 36 percent of the electors (which is the periphery's share of the electors in the *one large* municipalities). If no representation bias exists, the periphery will obtain 10 seats in the council ($29 \times 0.36 \approx 10$). However, an overrepresentation of 1.17 means that candidates from the periphery will conquer 12 seats ($29 \times 0.36 \times 1.17 \approx 12$), or 117 percent of the seats they would have if there was no overrepresentation. This is a substantial overrepresentation. The tendency for the periphery to be overrepresented continues in the 2010-13 term, but with a little less strength.

In accordance with our argument, the periphery overrepresentation is much stronger when the amalgamation created a strong center-periphery dimension, that is, in the *one large* amalgamated municipalities. In the 2006-09 term, the index mean is 1.27 (i.e., a very strong overrepresentation of the periphery) for the *one large* municipalities and 1.05 and 1.09 for the *equal* and *mixed* municipalities, respectively. The difference between the *one large* municipalities and other municipalities is significant at the 0.05-level. The same pattern is observed in the 2010-13 term and again the difference is statistically significant at the 0.05-level. Examining the index medians instead of the means does not substantially change the results. In both election terms, the representation bias in *one large* municipalities is a little weaker when we use the median (1.24 in 2006-09 and 1.14 in 2010-13) than the means (1.27 in 2006-09 and 1.18 in 2010-13). However, the observed representation bias in *one large* municipalities is also strong when the median is applied as measure; thus, the argument is supported.

Two robustness analyses of the results in Table 5 were performed. The first consists in regression analyses examining the effect of amalgamation type on periphery bias while controlling for potential confounders in the form of population density, party competition (defined as effective number of parties, see Laakso and Taagepera 1979), and the number of municipalities in the amalgamation. The regression analyses show that the difference in periphery bias between the one large and the equal municipalities is 0.22 in 2005 and 0.17 in 2009 (which is about the same as in Table 5). The second robustness check is regression analyses in which the difference measure was used as an alternative way of operationalizing amalgamation type. In 2006-09, an increase of 1,000 people in the difference (between the largest and second largest of former municipalities) increases the expected periphery bias by approximately 0.008 ($p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.43$). Since the difference measure ranges from 13 to 64,165, this is a substantial effect size. In 2010-13, the effect is approximately 0.01 ($p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.44$). In sum, the robustness analyses support the results of Table 5 and thus the argument of the article: when a strong center-periphery dimension is created, an overrepresentation of the periphery can be observed.

An overrepresentation of seats does not necessarily mean that the periphery has the majority of seats in the council. Thus, in the *one large* municipalities, the periphery councilors constitute the majority in 30 and 36 percent of the amalgamated municipalities in the 2006-09 and 2010-13 terms, respectively. On average, the periphery has 46 (2006-09) and 43 (2010-13) percent of the seats in the *one large* municipalities.

Representation by mayors is examined in Table 6, which shows the periphery representation index calculated for each of the three amalgamation types. Across all amalgamation types, the periphery is slightly overrepresented (see total in 2006-09 and 2010-13). However, the periphery representation is contingent on amalgamation type. That is, in amalgamated municipalities with a strong center-periphery dimension, the periphery is

underrepresented with regard to mayors in both 2006-09 and 2010-13, which is in contrast with the initial expectation of periphery overrepresentation. One explanation might be that center politicians are positioned as leading candidates since they are supposed to have greater name recognition at the center with the large concentration of voters. Another explanation could be that the different peripheral areas (i.e., the smaller former jurisdictions) may be unable to agree on an alternative to the center politician as a leading candidate. However, the mayoral recruitment process is complicated and the selection of mayor is dependent also on for instance the leadership record and the coalition formation skills of prospective candidates. Therefore, until the suggested explanations have been empirical supported, it is probably most safe to say that for this very specific executive office geographical affiliation is not the only important candidate characteristic.

[Table 6 about here]

Substantive representation

Based on the theoretical outline, the periphery politicians are expected to be more prone to use their positions to advance geographical interests of their local area (i.e., a substantive representation of local area). This is examined in Table 7 in which two regression analyses estimate the effect of the councilors' geographical affiliation (periphery=1, center=0) on their statements about advancing geographical interests of their local area. Fixed effects models are used to hold constant the characteristics of the amalgamated municipalities. Furthermore, the regression analyses control for a number of individual councilors characteristics.

[Table 7 about here]

In Model I, Table 7, the effect of being a periphery politician (versus a center politician) on the advancement of local area interests is measured across the different amalgamation types. The effect is 0.63, which corresponds to 0.34 standard deviations of the dependent variable. However, as expected, the effect is stronger in the amalgamated municipalities with a strong center-periphery dimension as shown in Model II where the periphery variable is interacted with the amalgamation type (the constitutive terms of the amalgamation type are not included because of the fixed effects model, see Allison 2009). The *one large* amalgamations constitute the reference category of the amalgamation type; consequently, the periphery variable shows the effect of the periphery in the *one large* municipalities. The effect is 0.90, or about half a standard deviation of the dependent variable. This is a substantial effect, even when compared with the individual characteristics. The effect of male (vs. female) councilors is 0.33, and the largest significant effect of party affiliation is -0.78 (there are ten party variables). Councilors with secondary education as highest education level score between 0.72 and 1.13 higher on advancement of local interests than the other education categories. The largest difference between the remaining education categories is 0.41. Unsurprisingly, mayors are less prone to indicate that they advance local area interests (the effect of being mayor is -1.54); a finding that confirms the hypothesized broader representational focus among mayors than among other councilors (Kjaer 2015).

A robustness analysis using the difference measure as an alternative operationalization of amalgamation type reinforces the results of Table 7; as the difference between the largest and the second largest of the former municipalities increases, the effect of periphery on advancement of local interests increases (the interaction between periphery and difference is significant at the 0.05-level). Moreover, a robustness analysis using a short version of the Local Interest Index also reinforces the results of Table 7 (in this analysis the effect of the

periphery variable in the *one large* municipalities is 0.96 compared to 0.90 in the main analysis, table 7). In sum, periphery councilors are substantially more inclined to indicate that they represent local geographical interests than center councilors. Furthermore, the effect of periphery is particularly strong in amalgamated municipalities with a strong center-periphery dimension.

Discussion

We base this article on the classic center-periphery distinction often identified between countries and within countries (between municipalities) and apply it to local governments by claiming a center-periphery cleavage within municipalities. Especially when local jurisdictions are merged, such center-periphery cleavages can be expected to be reinforced; the municipalities become larger and the structural change and the establishment of new local government units open a geographical redistributive game. In addition, both the descriptive and the substantive political representation can be affected by the mergers.

More specifically, the empirical analyses in this article strongly support the claim that the struggle for representation in amalgamated municipalities is affected by the center-periphery relations created by the relative sizes of the former jurisdictions. When strong center-periphery relations are created, there will be mechanisms causing overrepresentation of the smaller former jurisdictions, that is, the likely periphery of the amalgamated jurisdiction. This is strongly supported when the representation by seats in the amalgamated councils and substantive representation is examined. However, the periphery is underrepresented with regard to mayors, which entails a modification of the main argument.

The arguments behind the representation bias – such as mobilization of the periphery because of fear of being dominated – are general in the sense that they are not developed specifically for the empirical case used in the present study, and they should be expected to hold also in different local government settings. This is also the case for the argument on appointment of center politicians as leading candidates outlined above. However, some scope conditions must be present for the arguments to be relevant. First, the arguments are developed to explain representation in a representative democratic context; that is, political representatives are elected by citizens voting for candidates. Second, the arguments presume a substantial element of proportional representation in the election procedure. However, even when representation of geographical areas is built into the election system it may still be relevant to examine if the periphery is more likely to mobilize and put pressure on its local politicians to secure specific area interests in the council.

Furthermore, the argument on mobilization of the periphery can be expected to be a general mechanism, which is also present in jurisdictions not included in an amalgamation. However, the mobilization mechanism is most likely amplified considerably in amalgamated jurisdictions, especially in the first years after, and part of the representation bias can be expected to decrease over time. In the Danish case study, the representation bias decreased at the second election in the new municipalities compared to the first, indicating that it is important to evaluate the center-periphery cleavage over a longer time span. The geographical cleavage will not necessarily be institutionalized in the minds and the behavior of the nominating local branches of the political parties and of the voters, and therefore the overrepresentation by the periphery might evaporate after a number of electoral terms. However, to be able to conclude on the long term effects we need data from more future elections.

Mobilization can also be expected when jurisdictions of similar size amalgamate (e.g., the *equal size* amalgamated municipalities here), but in contrast to amalgamated jurisdictions with a strong center-periphery dimension, the different jurisdictions' degree of mobilization is more equal in such cases. Thus, less representation bias is created.

As mentioned, it is important to keep in mind that the periphery cannot be regarded as a single, united entity with similar interests or a shared identity. The different areas and, in case of amalgamation, former jurisdictions have their own special interests, and even if the majority of the council consisted of periphery politicians, they would not necessarily agree on a shared political program. Moreover, parties are still expected to be the main reference point even after amalgamations. Instead, overrepresentation benefits the peripheral areas by placing more of their representatives in the council to lobby, incorporate local interests to party standpoints and negotiations, and bringing the local interests to the council's attention. This is confirmed by the analysis of substantive representation, which showed that periphery politicians were particularly aware of advancing local interests.

Notes

¹ The terms "amalgamated jurisdiction" and "new jurisdiction" denote jurisdictions created by amalgamation of several former jurisdictions. "Former jurisdiction" denotes the jurisdictions functioning before the amalgamation.

² The terms "small" or "large" define the size of jurisdictions or municipalities in terms of population size, not area size.

³ The factor analysis used maximum likelihood as extraction method and oblimin rotation. Inspection of screenplot and eigenvalues (applying Kaiser's criterion) supports the claim of one factor.

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