

**The Temple Municipal Governance Survey: How Pennsylvanians View  
Their Local Governments**

*(Including Comments on the Results of Allegheny County's Deliberative  
Democracy Poll)*

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## Introduction and Brief Summary of Methodology

The Temple University Municipal Governance Survey consists of phone interviews of 1462 Pennsylvania residents between June 9 and 20, 2010. The Temple survey was coordinated with the Deliberative Democracy Poll conducted September 25, 2010, in Pittsburgh by Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and the Coro Center for Civic Leadership. The Deliberative Democracy Poll was part of a project undertaken by the Pittsburgh Foundation in cooperation with the University of Pittsburgh's Institute of Politics to improve local government in Allegheny County, which has 130 municipalities and is one of the nation's most fragmented counties. Participants in the Deliberative Democracy survey were asked a number of the same questions as in the Temple survey, given additional information and a chance to deliberate, and then polled again to see if their views had changed.

*Unlike respondents to the Temple survey, the 183 Deliberative Democracy participants do not represent a random sample of Allegheny County's adult population, but their views do reflect the impact of education and deliberation on a large and diverse group of citizens, much like a giant focus group. This report notes findings from the Deliberative Democracy Poll (also called the CMU poll) in italics.*

The Temple survey over-sampled residents of Allegheny County (501 respondents) and the five Southeastern counties (a total of 504 respondents in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia) to improve the accuracy of the analysis for these urban areas. This report divides the state into three regions with roughly equivalent sample sizes, the two large urban areas plus what we call the Rest of Pennsylvania (457 interviews). The samples were carefully weighted to produce accurate representations of the adult population within each region and across the state as a whole. As a unique feature of this project, all respondents also were identified by municipality of residence, allowing analysis by such features as size of municipality, whether residents receive protection mainly from the state police or municipal forces, and whether their municipalities are fiscally distressed.<sup>1</sup> A deeper analysis of Allegheny County opinion by types of municipalities, produced by Dr. David Y. Miller of the University of Pittsburgh, is in Appendix A. Background on municipal governance issues and debates is in Appendix B. More information on methodology is in Appendix C.

## Highlights of Findings

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<sup>1</sup> A note on language in the survey and the report: In Pennsylvania law and in this report, first, second, and third class cities; first and second-class townships; boroughs; and the state's sole town are defined as "municipalities." Most survey questions used the terms "your city, town, or borough" to refer to municipalities. County governments were identified as such. In reporting responses to questions that asked about a combination of municipal and county services or taxes, the report will use the term "local." The survey did not deal with public opinion about school districts, which raise and spend the largest share of local revenues in most of the state, nor did it deal with the other form of local government, public authorities.

Despite a recession that has depressed state and local revenues, Pennsylvanians are generally satisfied with their municipal governments but may underestimate the challenges local officials will face in maintaining the quality of public services in the future. Ninety-one percent of Pennsylvanians feel local services have remained about the same or gotten better rather than worse in the last few years, and 81 percent expect services to remain the same or get better in the next few years. These expectations are probably unrealistic, given the fiscal challenges facing the new governor, new legislature, and municipal officials. A recent Pennsylvania Economy League report found, for example, that five million residents, or 40 percent of the state's population, live in distressed municipalities. Many municipalities face pension costs that are being subsidized by the state, are being postponed, or both, which may help explain the disparity between perception and reality.

Elected officials, municipal unions, and reformers who favor municipal boundary consolidations or cost-sharing can find in the survey support for changes they favor, but also openness to changes they oppose. As opposed to raising taxes or cutting services, two thirds of statewide respondents said local officials should make combining resources with other municipalities a top priority, although they split on whether improving services or reducing costs should be the main consideration. Majorities of all size municipalities prefer combining resources to higher taxes or service cuts. Ironically, in a state with 2,562 municipalities, almost 80 percent of which have populations smaller than 5,000 where economies of scale might be expected, it was residents of larger cities who were generally more supportive of cost-sharing. Pennsylvanians were a bit more willing to raise taxes for police services and a bit less in favor of combining resources with other police departments.

Temple respondents opposed reducing pensions for new government workers, turning police services or land-use policies over to county governments, and requiring towns receiving full or part-time state police protection (more than half of all municipalities) to reimburse the Commonwealth. They favored requiring binding arbitrators to consider the financial impact of police and fire labor contracts. If taxes had to be raised, they preferred a county sales tax, followed by a higher municipal service fee or income tax, with much less support for property tax hikes. They trusted municipal officials more than state or county officials to make tax and spending decisions. Republicans were more resistant to higher taxes, somewhat more open to cutting services, and somewhat less supportive of combining resources than Democrats and Independents, but on many local issues, respondents did not differ much by party.

*As noted above, the Temple survey was designed in coordination with a Deliberative Democracy Poll of 183 Allegheny County residents conducted September 25 by Carnegie Mellon University and the Coro Center for Civic Leadership as part of the Pittsburgh Foundation's Allegheny Forum project. This large and diverse group of citizens responded to some of the same questions asked in the Temple poll, spent a day learning and deliberating about the issues, and were polled again. The poll found that deliberation made citizens somewhat less optimistic that services would get better, more thoughtful in their assessment of gains from municipal cooperation, more resistant to raising taxes for police services, more amenable to higher municipal fees than a sales tax if new revenues were needed, more trustful of municipal governments, and more committed to civic engagement.*

Together, the two surveys argue strongly for greater efforts to educate and engage the public as the fiscal challenges facing state and local officials are addressed.

### **How Residents View Their Local Taxes and Services Statewide and in the Three Regions**

Pluralities of Pennsylvanians feel their local taxes are about right (46 percent) as opposed to high (37 percent), very high (13 percent), low (5 percent) or very low (1 percent). Although these percentages do not appear to reflect a brewing tax revolt, they do suggest that the public will be resistant to solutions to municipal governance problems that involved new or higher taxes. Surprisingly, a majority of Allegheny County residents (54 percent) said their taxes are about right, as opposed to 42 percent who responded very high (13 percent) or high (29 percent). *Deliberative Democracy participants closely matched these percents and did not change them significantly after deliberation.* Low income residents (below \$40,000 a year) in all three regions were more likely to say their taxes were high or very high, as were Republicans (53 percent high or very high) compared to Democrats (38 percent high or very high). Forty percent of Pennsylvania Republicans and 56 percent of Democrats said their taxes were about right.

Similarly, 70 percent of Pennsylvanians feel that in recent years their local public services have “stayed the same” and 21 percent say they have “gotten better,” compared to only 9 percent who say services have “gotten worse.” Looking ahead to the next few years, 59 percent of state residents expect services will stay the same, 22 percent expect them to get better, and 19 percent expect them to get worse. The views of respondents in the three regions are similar on these two questions. Within the Southeast, however, 27 percent of Philadelphia residents say their services have gotten worse, compared to only 6 percent in the suburbs, while 58 percent say services have remained the same, versus 74 percent in the suburbs. Similarly, 40 percent of Philadelphians expect services to get worse, compared to 11 percent in the suburbs.

*CMU’s Deliberative Democracy participants were somewhat more pessimistic about the future quality of services than Temple’s Allegheny County respondents: 31.3 percent of CMU participants expected services to get worse, compared to 19 percent in the Temple poll. Deliberation did not change the get-worse response, but it did reduce those saying services would get better from 22 to 15.4 percent and it increased those choosing stay the same from 46.6 to 54.4 percent.*

Asked to choose, 67 percent of residents statewide would prefer to maintain current service levels as opposed to raising taxes to improve services (18 percent) or lowering taxes even if that required cutting services (15 percent). Differences among the regions were not large, except that Southeast residents were somewhat more willing to raise taxes (22 percent) and somewhat less favorable toward maintaining the current level of taxes (63 percent).

*Compared to Temple’s Allegheny County respondents, Deliberative Democracy participants were more likely to support raising taxes (30.2 to 18 percent of Temple respondents), about as supportive of cutting taxes even if it meant service reductions (13.6 to 14 percent), and less supportive of maintaining the status quo (56.2 percent compared to 71 percent of Temple respondents). Deliberation did not change their views significantly.*

Statewide Republicans generally were less supportive of raising taxes (12 percent) to improve services than Democrats (25 percent). Higher percentages of residents in cities above 50,000 population (27 percent) than in smaller municipalities favored raising taxes to improve services, and that pattern also was evident in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

By one measure at least, the recession appears to be having some effect on public satisfaction with local government. Those who answered yes to the question of whether they had been laid off in the previous 12 months were much more likely than those who answered no to say their taxes were high (54 percent to 35 percent) and far fewer were likely to say their taxes were about right (30 percent to 48 percent). On the other hand, similar majorities of both groups agreed that services have stayed the same in recent years and expect them to stay the same in the next few years, although on another question, those laid off were much less satisfied with police protection, rating it as 6.63 on a scale from 0 to 10 as opposed to 7.38 for those not laid off. Those who had been laid off were more in favor of reducing taxes and accepting service cuts (21 percent versus 14 percent for those not laid off).

Asked to rate police protection on a scale of 0 (very unsatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied), statewide residents on average rated police services as 7.31, compared to 7.76 in Allegheny County, 7.70 in the Southeast, and 7.03 in the Rest of Pennsylvania. *CMU participants rated police services at 7.66 before deliberation and 7.4 afterward.* Across the state, residents of municipalities above 50,000 in population rated police protection lower (6.74) than the state average, as did residents of municipalities of 5,000 and below (6.79). Within the Southeast, suburban residents rated their police protection at 8.45 versus 6.39 for Philadelphia residents. Most Pennsylvanians said they feel very safe (62 percent) or somewhat safe (27 percent) being out alone at night, compared to only 5 percent who felt unsafe and 5 percent very unsafe. Sixty-seven percent in the Rest of Pennsylvania reported feeling very safe, compared to 55 percent in Allegheny County and the Southeast. Statewide, only 26 percent in cities above 50,000 said they feel very safe (24 percent in Philadelphia and 27 percent in Pittsburgh). In contrast, statewide, 74 percent in municipalities between 5,000 and 20,000 and 70 percent in municipalities below 5,000 said they feel very safe at night. Not surprisingly, men are substantially more likely to report feeling safe than are women (79 to 55 percent). Similarly, 69 percent of statewide residents feel crime in their neighborhood has stayed the same, compared to 23 percent who say it has increased and 8 percent who say it has decreased. Thirty-one percent of Southeast residents, but only 18 percent in the Rest of Pennsylvania, said crime has increased. Within the Southeast, however, 55 percent of Philadelphia residents say crime has increased, while the suburban counties mirror the statewide average of 18 percent.

### **How Residents View the Levels of Government across the State and in the Three Regions**

Asked what definition of community was most important to them in their role as citizens, most Pennsylvanians chose their neighborhoods (34 percent), followed, surprisingly, by the state (30 percent),

their municipality (20 percent), their county (11 percent), and the region of the state (5 percent). If the responses for neighborhood, municipality, and county are combined into a single measure, local attachments would surpass the combined state and region-of-the state attachments by 65 to 35 percent. In a related question, more Pennsylvanians trust municipal governments to make the best tax and spending decisions (47 percent) than trust the county (27 percent) or state government (26 percent). Municipal government ranks highest in all three regions and particularly high in Allegheny County (54 percent).

*Fifty-one percent of Deliberative Democracy participants trusted municipal decision-making most, and that percentage jumped to 65.6 percent after deliberation. Trust in state government as the best decision-maker declined from 17 to 13.1 percent, and in county government from 32 to 21.3 percent, after deliberation.*

County government ranks higher in the Rest of Pennsylvania (32 percent) than in the other two regions, and state government ranks higher in the Southeast (also 32 percent) than in the other two regions. As we shall see in discussing proposed policy changes below, the public does not support turning police or land-control functions over to counties, although county sales taxes lead other alternatives if new revenues have to be raised.

### **Public Attitudes toward Proposals Advocated by Reformers and Local Officials**

By more than 2-1 (67 percent), Pennsylvanians across the state say local public agencies should make it a top priority to combine resources if necessary to avoid higher taxes or reduced services. Pennsylvania Democrats are more supportive of making the combining of resources a top priority (75 percent) than Republicans (61 percent), and the pattern holds across all three regions. Also in all three regions, substantially more women than men answer that it should be a top priority. Support for such steps is highest in the Southeast (77 percent), strong in Allegheny County (66 percent), and somewhat lower but still strong in the Rest of Pennsylvania (61 percent). In all three regions, majorities in all sizes of municipalities support combining resources as a top priority, but paradoxically support is higher among residents of municipalities with 20,000 to 50,000 residents and with more than 50,000 residents than it is in smaller municipalities where economies of scale might be expected. The exception is in Allegheny County, where it is also higher than average (72 percent) among residents of municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents.

*Deliberation reduced support in the CMU poll for local officials making it a top priority to combine resources from 71.2 to 57.3 percent and increased responses that it should not be done from 4.1 to 14.6 percent. Asked how important it was for state legislators to encourage municipalities to combine with counties or other municipalities, fewer CMU participants said somewhat or very important after deliberation (from 80.5 before to 67.9 percent after) and more said a little important (8.9 before to 21.5 percent after). The Temple survey did not ask the question about state legislators' priorities.*

Pennsylvanians are almost equally divided on whether local officials, in considering combining resources, should put more emphasis on improving the quality of services (45 percent) as opposed to

reducing their cost (47 percent). Respondents in the three regions do not differ by much on these questions.

*Compared to Temple's Allegheny County sample, CMU participants were about as supportive of improving quality (49.4 percent of CMU participants to 46 percent of Temple respondents), less supportive of reducing costs (24.1 percent for CMU to 38 percent for Temple), and more supportive of other unspecified steps (26.5 percent to 16 percent for Temple). Deliberation increased support for improving quality to 56.6 percent of CMU participants and reduced support for other steps to 17.9 percent.*

In response to increasing budget pressures, local officials generally support policies that would increase their revenues or give them greater ability to control costs. Pennsylvania citizens statewide and in all three regions would prefer to maintain the current level of services (67 percent) to increasing taxes (19 percent) or cutting services (15 percent). In Allegheny County, 15 percent preferred raising taxes, 14 percent cutting services, and 71 percent maintaining current service levels.

*CMU participants were more willing to increase taxes (30.2 percent) and less supportive of maintaining service levels (56.2 percent), and deliberation did not significantly change their views.*

If new revenues had to be raised, Pennsylvania citizens would prefer a new or increased county sales tax (37 percent) to increases in local income taxes (24 percent), municipal service fees (also 24 percent) or local property taxes (16 percent).

*Compared to Temple's Allegheny County sample, CMU participants were more likely to support increases in the income tax (32.1 percent to 24 percent of Temple respondents), about as supportive of a municipal service fee increase (25 percent for CMU compared to 23 percent for Temple), less supportive of a property tax increase (7.7 for CMU participants versus 16 percent for Temple), and about as supportive of an increase in the county sales tax (35.3 percent for CMU participants versus 37 percent for the Temple respondents). Deliberation increased support for a higher municipal service fee to 36.7 percent and dropped support for the sales tax to 27.8 percent.*

#### Proposals Affecting Police Services

As noted earlier, municipalities have the option of eliminating their police forces, thereby obligating the state police to serve them. Asked which government provides most of the police service where they live, 56 percent responded that it was their local municipality; 19 percent, a regional police force; and 25 percent, the state police. Fewer in Allegheny County (6 percent) than in the Southeast (11 percent) and the Rest of Pennsylvania (37 percent) thought the state police were providing most of their services. This pattern is broadly consistent with the role that state police play in the three regions, although there were clear examples of misunderstandings. Ten percent of Philadelphia residents and 6 percent of Allegheny County residents said the state police provide most of their protection; accurate responses would have been zero for Philadelphia and fewer than one percent for Allegheny County.

*Because very few Allegheny County residents are protected by the state police, CMU poll participants were not asked which department protects them, but their responses to a related question reflected clear learning. Initially, only 27.4 percent of participants said they understood that Pennsylvania municipalities are not required by state law to provide services like police, garbage collection, and fire protection, but that jumped to 55.2 percent at the end of the day. As noted elsewhere, few participants supported turning over police patrol services to the state even when such service would be, in a sense, free, when that choice was explained to them as an option.*

On the question of how satisfied they were with police protection, where 10 is very satisfied, those reporting that most of their protection came from the state police gave an average rating of 6.35, well below the 7.75 average for those protected by municipal police. On the other hand, higher percentages of those who said they were protected by state police said they felt very safe out alone at night (72 percent versus 63 percent for those reporting municipal police coverage) and lower percentages said crime had increased (14 percent versus 25 percent). This might indicate that although response times are longer, residents in these communities don't feel they need as much police protection.

An analysis of state data from previous years by Temple University's Metropolitan Philadelphia Indicators Project (<http://www.temple.edu/mpip>) showed that in the four suburban Philadelphia counties, municipalities opting for state police coverage had on average stronger tax bases but lower crime rates than municipalities employing their own departments.

In an interesting test of whether citizens are willing to support redistribution of resources advocated in the cause of fairness, virtually identical 2-1 majorities in the state and all three regions of the state oppose a requirement that taxpayers in municipalities without police forces be required to reimburse the Commonwealth for state police coverage. Legislation to require reimbursement is advocated by metropolitan core municipalities that argue that outlying communities can offer residents and businesses lower taxes because they don't support a police force. Not surprisingly, opposition to a requirement to reimburse the Commonwealth was particularly strong among residents who said the state police provide most of their protection (74 percent to 25 percent). Perhaps surprisingly, those whose household includes a government employee were more in favor of requiring municipalities to reimburse the Commonwealth for state police coverage (49 percent in favor, 51 percent opposed). In Allegheny County, where few municipalities benefit from state police coverage, those with at least a college degree were more supportive of the reimbursement requirement (50 percent), whereas in the Southeast and Rest of Pennsylvania, where more municipalities have state police coverage, even college-or-more educated respondents were opposed (64 percent and 62 percent, respectively).

Asked to choose between options for maintaining current police services if their community lacked sufficient funds, 24 percent statewide favored increasing taxes, 8 percent cutting police services, 56 percent combining police resources with those of other municipalities, and 12 percent having the county take over police services. (Philadelphians were not given the choice of the county taking over police services, as the city and county are consolidated.) Support for increasing taxes to maintain police services was higher in Allegheny County (33 percent) and support for combining police resources was

higher in the Southeast (61 percent). Democrats and Republicans did not differ much on their responses to these options.

*Deliberative Democracy participants were asked three somewhat different but related questions. Asked to choose simply between increasing taxes or reducing services if there was not enough money to maintain police services, 81.8 percent of CMU participants said increase taxes, but that dropped to 63.8 percent after deliberation. Reducing police services rose from 18.2 to 36.3 percent after deliberation.*

*CMU participants also were asked whether in order to avoid an increase in taxes or reduction in patrol services they would support joining a regional police force of two or more municipalities, turning patrol services over to Allegheny County, or turning such services over to the state police. Deliberation increased support for joining a regional force from 49.4 to 66.3 percent and reduced support for turning such services over to Allegheny County from 24.7 to 14.5 percent. Support for the state police option increased only slightly (from 6.5 to 7.2 percent).*

*Finally, asked whether in order to avoid reducing specialized police services, such as conducting investigations, they would support joining a regional police force, turning services over to Allegheny County, or turn to the state police, deliberation decreased support for a regional solution (from 31.4 to 23.2 percent) and for relying on the state police (from 17.4 to 12.5 percent) and increased support for relying on Allegheny County (from 41.3 to 56.0 percent). CMU poll participants thus seemed to have learned to make fairly sophisticated and rational distinctions based on characteristics of the service.*

With respect to policies advocated by local officials as a means to control costs, the record is mixed. The public supports by huge margins (71 percent statewide and similar percentages in each of the regions) a state requirement that binding arbitrators consider the fiscal condition of municipalities in deciding contracts for police officers and firefighters. Republicans and Democrats support such a change by similar margins. Despite relatively extensive coverage in the news media about the huge unfunded liabilities facing public pension plans in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, by roughly 60-40 margins, the public statewide and in each of the regions does not support offering future government workers less expensive pension benefits than current workers have been promised. Pennsylvania Republicans are more supportive of reducing pension promises to future employees (47 percent) than are statewide Democrats (26 percent). Men in all three regions were more likely than women to support less expensive pensions than women, although only men in Allegheny County narrowly favored the less expensive option (51 to 49 percent). In all three regions, those with at least a college education were more supportive of reducing pension promises to future workers (50 percent in Allegheny County, 48 percent in the Southeast, and 53 percent in the Rest of Pennsylvania).

#### Land Use Policies

Despite arguments that municipal control of land use policies is inefficient, Pennsylvanians oppose giving counties more control over land use planning and zoning (63 to 37 percent). The regions do not differ by much on this question. Philadelphia residents were not asked this question because the city and county are the same. Pennsylvania Democrats were somewhat more supportive of giving counties

control of land use and zoning (43 percent) than Republicans (36 percent). Residents of municipalities below 5,000 population (44 percent) and above 50,000 population (also 44 percent) were more supportive of this step than residents of municipalities between 5,000 and 50,000. *Deliberative Democracy participants were not asked about land-use policies.*

### **Discussion of Findings: Caveats and Observations**

Elected officials, municipal unions, and reformers who favor municipal boundary consolidations or cost-sharing can find in the survey support for changes they favor but also openness to changes they oppose. As explained more thoroughly in Appendix B, local officials generally favor increased local revenues, fewer state mandates, and more state aid; municipal unions support more local revenues but resist radical pension and collective bargaining constraints; and municipal reformers and some economists favor consolidation or cost-sharing among the state's 2,562 municipal governments, 78 percent of which have fewer than 5,000 residents. Public choice economists argue, on the other hand, that decentralized government is more efficient than consolidated government, allowing voters to shop for their preferred mix of taxes and services and thereby help hold down the cost of government through competition.

Readers should keep in mind the limitations of any such public opinion data. Respondents can only be provided with very broad and limited information in questions asked during a 10-minute phone interview. Even questions that are carefully constructed to avoid influencing respondents in one direction or another might have such subtle effects. As an example, the Temple poll and a recent Commonwealth Foundation poll both asked respondents how they feel about pension reform. The two surveys evoked very different responses because they asked different questions. The Temple survey asked this:

“Some people think that in order to avoid overburdening future generations, state and local governments should offer new employees less expensive pension benefits than their current workers and retirees are entitled to receive. Others say that if the pensions paid to government workers are cut, well qualified people will be less willing to work for the state and local governments. What do you think? Should newly hired state and local government workers be offered less expensive pension benefits, or should they be promised the same benefits as current workers and retirees?”

The Commonwealth Foundation commissioned a survey of 700 Pennsylvanians registered to vote in April 2010, conducted by Susquehanna Polling and Research Company (<http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/research/detail/poll-shows-voters-support-pension-reform-ir-and-spending-limits> ). Among the questions asked was this one:

“Most government employees—including teachers, state workers, judges, and legislators—receive a pension plan which provides a guaranteed annual payment upon retirement. There is legislation to move all new government employees to a 401(k) type plan, similar to what many employees in the private sector receive. Generally speaking, do you favor or oppose this legislation?”

A change in policy that would provide government employees with pension benefits “similar to what many employees in the private sector receive” garners substantially more support than a change that would offer government employees “less expensive pension benefits”: 54 percent favored the legislation described in the Commonwealth Foundation survey, while just 35 percent supported the change described in the Temple survey. Compared with a plan to “move” new government employees to a new plan, a proposal to “cut” benefits for new government employees is more controversial in another sense: Democrats and Republicans are much more divided in their opinions about whether to reduce benefits to new workers than in their opinions about whether to move new workers to 401(k) plans. It is worth noting, however, that in the Temple survey, those with at least a college education were more supportive of reducing pension promises to future government workers than those with less than a college degree. In all three regions, nearly half, or slightly more than half, of these college-educated respondents supported reducing future benefits, about the same percentage that favored defined contribution plans in the Commonwealth Foundation poll. Presumably, these respondents know more about the unfunded liability problems facing municipal systems.

Similarly, respondents across the state, in each of its regions, and even in its largest cities, opposed requiring taxpayers in municipalities served by the state police to reimburse the state. If the question had included the information that some relatively large and prosperous municipalities are benefitting from state police coverage, it might have evoked a different response. Previous efforts to limit unreimbursed state police coverage to very small municipalities have failed to win legislative support, however.

There is plenty of evidence that survey respondents will often express support for general propositions that have a “motherhood-and-apple-pie” ring, while citizens often oppose specific measures that have a direct and material effect on them. Voters have turned down most efforts to consolidate municipalities, and perceived public opposition often causes elected officials to back away from proposals to share costs with other municipalities or to form regional police forces. Statewide and regional respondents overwhelmingly said local officials should make combining resources with other municipalities a top priority, for example, but experience shows that citizens often strongly oppose plans to consolidate or enter cost-sharing agreements with neighboring jurisdictions. Similarly, although respondents said they would prefer combining resources with other municipalities to preserve police services, as opposed to raising taxes, cutting police services, or having the counties take over police services, specific sharing arrangements often fail to win support and sometimes are even reversed after a trial period.

*Deliberation reduced the percentages of CMU participants who said local officials and state legislators should make combining resources a top priority, although strong majorities continued to support this approach. Deliberation also increased the percentage who said that improving the quality of services, as opposed to reducing their cost, should be uppermost when considering whether to combine resources. These changes may reflect that participants heard from expert panelists that combining resources can increase the cost of government for some residents in the short run, as services are raised to the level of the more expensive municipality. Expert panelists also noted that the success of consolidation or cost sharing is highly dependent on the nature of the service, with life-style services more likely to meet*

*resistance than system-maintaining services.<sup>2</sup> Participants may thus have been reflecting less optimism about the political feasibility of this route rather than its long-term policy effects.*

Finally, not surprisingly, on a number of issues raised in the survey, elected officials seem to be ahead of the public in understanding the current and looming costs of Pennsylvania's current complex system of municipal governance. The General Assembly enacted legislation to deal with looming municipal pension costs last year, although the House did not approve the Senate bill's more aggressive provisions to contain those costs. The General Assembly also recently approved legislation that extends by five years the full retirement age for future state employees and school teachers, limits state contributions, and requires future state employees and school teachers to increase their own contributions to their pensions or to accept less expensive benefits than current employees have been promised. Both of these bills have been criticized, however, for extending amortization periods to avoid spiking pension costs without sufficient structural changes to reduce those costs.<sup>3</sup>

A Philadelphia police contract decided by binding arbitration requires future officers to choose a defined contribution pension or to make higher contributions to the existing defined benefit system. (Philadelphia's FOP leaders have said they will discourage new members from choosing the defined contributions option.) As noted above, the public does not support this option, at least in the way the question was worded in this survey. As noted earlier, however, the fact that those with at least a college education are more supportive of reducing benefits for future workers suggests that providing the public with more information might change views.

*The Deliberative Democracy Poll did not ask this specific question. Asked what cuts they would make to avoid reducing police services, 64.2 percent said cut other municipal services and 26.4 percent said cut police pensions and other benefits. Deliberation did not significantly affect their views.*

Although Governor Rendell has not made changes in municipal governance a top priority for his administration, his state planning board has developed and secured bipartisan sponsorship for comprehensive legislation that could be considered again in the next session of the legislature. Working in commendable bipartisan and bicameral cooperation, House and Senate Local Government Committees have held hearings on these and other bills dealing with issues and problems raised in this survey.<sup>4</sup> This may reflect the reality that on many of the questions asked in this survey, Democrats and Republican respondents did not differ by much. Advocates for change, whether reformers or local

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<sup>2</sup> The author of this report was one of the expert panelists.

<sup>3</sup> In a particularly harsh criticism, the Commonwealth Foundation, for example, called the state and school district bill "generational theft," arguing that future citizens will eventually pay unacceptably high costs.

<sup>4</sup> The House Local Government Committee recently took the rare step of holding hearings on legislation introduced by the chairman of the Senate Local Government Committee even before the Senate held hearings on the legislation. The House committee is controlled by the Democratic Party and the Senate Committee by the Republican Party.

officials, should recognize, however, a need to educate the public if they hope to significantly alter current policies and arrangements.

*Optimists may take heart in the demonstrated ability of Deliberative Democracy participants to make thoughtful distinctions, such as, for example, opposing the option of turning patrol services over to Allegheny County but supporting this option for investigative services. Likewise, most Deliberative Democracy participants did not reflexively choose to turn police services over to the “free” option of the state police, preferring instead a regional solution. Citizens do not always opt to be “free riders.” Further, Deliberative Democracy participants showed impressive learning on some issues and said the process had made them more willing to participate in civic life.*

Advocates for change, whether reformers or local officials, should also acknowledge the logical possibility that even if economically inefficient, Pennsylvania’s current system and policies may be democratically efficient, that is, they may be a roughly accurate reflection of citizen preferences under current circumstances. Perhaps even if ignorant about details, citizens do intuitively and conceptually understand that there are costs and service-quality consequences to our current municipal governance system and yet are willing to bear those costs and consequences in the cause of such values as preserving a small-town or rural way of life, supporting a stable and qualified municipal workforce, or assuring a measure of equity in under-served parts of the state. This survey, and the Allegheny Forum project and its Deliberative Democracy Poll cannot provide definitive answers to these larger questions. The two coordinated surveys represent modest contributions to the beginning of a civic conversation about the issues that only Pennsylvania’s elected state and local officials and the citizens they represent can resolve. That important work should begin.

## Pennsylvania Opinions on Local Government Issues by Region<sup>5</sup>

Question	Response	Allegheny County (unweighted N=501)	Southeast PA (unweighted N=504)	Rest of PA (unweighted N=457)	State (unweighted N= 1462)
Thinking about the public services you have, such as garbage collection, police protection, fire protection and public works, do you feel taxes where you live are very high, high, about right, low, or very low?	Very High	13%	15%	11%	13%
	High	29%	37%	38%	37%
	About right	54%	46%	45%	46%
	Low	3%	2%	5%	4%
	Very Low	1%	1%	1%	1%
Which of the following definitions of community is most important to you in your role as a citizen: your neighborhood; your city, town, or borough; your county; your region of the state; or the state as a whole?	Neighborhood	38%	37%	31%	34%
	City, town, or borough	24%	19%	20%	20%
	County	8%	12%	11%	11%
	Region of the state	7%	3%	6%	5%
	State	23%	28%	32%	30%
In your mind, how much of a priority should it be that local public agencies such as police, fire, emergency medical services, and public works take steps to combine resources in order to provide services to you?	Top priority	66%	77%	61%	67%
	Lower priority	21%	13%	21%	18%
	Not a priority	5%	7%	7%	7%
	Should not be done	8%	3%	11%	8%

<sup>5</sup> Percentages are weighted to reflect population accurately; unweighted N is provided only to indicate statistical precision of estimates.

Question	Response	Allegheny County (unweighted N=501)	Southeast PA (unweighted N=504)	Rest of PA (unweighted N=457)	State (unweighted N= 1462)
Many local officials are now considering different ways of combining resources with other local governments to provide these same services. What is the most important value that you think local officials should keep in mind as they consider whether or how to combine resources to deliver services?	Improving the quality of services	46%	48%	43%	45%
	Reducing the cost of services	38%	44%	50%	47%
	Other (specify)	16%	8%	7%	8%
Would you favor or oppose allowing more decisions about land use planning and zoning to be made by your county government rather than the government in your city or town or borough?	Favor	31%	39%	38%	37%
	Oppose	69%	61%	62%	63%
How satisfied are you with police protection in_? Now I'd like you to rate your police protection on a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means you are very satisfied and 0 means you are very dissatisfied.	Mean	7.76	7.70	7.03	7.31

Question	Response	Allegheny County (unweighted N=501)	Southeast PA (unweighted N=504)	Rest of PA (unweighted N=457)	State (unweighted N= 1462)
Which government provides most of the police service where you live?	Your city town or borough	76%	69%	45%	56%
	Your city/town/borough and some other cities or towns	18%	20%	18%	19%
	The State Police	6%	11%	37%	25%
If the police who serve your community didn't have enough money to maintain its current service, which of these choices would you support?	Increasing taxes to maintain police service	33%	27%	20%	24%
	Cutting police service	6%	6%	10%	8%
	Combining your department's resources with the resources of the department in another city or town	49%	61%	55%	56%
	County taking over the service	12%	5%	15%	12%
Would you favor or oppose a requirement that taxpayers in these communities reimburse the state for their police coverage?	Favor	39%	33%	35%	35%
	Oppose	61%	67%	65%	65%

Question	Response	Allegheny County (unweighted N=501)	Southeast PA (unweighted N=504)	Rest of PA (unweighted N=457)	State (unweighted N= 1462)
Would you favor or oppose adding a provision to state law that explicitly requires arbitrators to consider the financial impact on local government?	Favor	69%	67%	74%	71%
	Oppose	31%	33%	26%	29%
Should newly hired state and local government workers be offered less expensive pension benefits, or should they be promised the same benefits as current workers and retirees?	Less expensive	42%	34%	38%	37%
	Same	58%	66%	62%	63%
Over the past few years, would you say local public services, such as police, fire protection, emergency medical services, and public works in your community overall have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed the same?	Gotten better	19%	18%	23%	21%
	Gotten worse	10%	14%	6%	9%
	Stayed the same	71%	68%	71%	70%
And what about the next few years--do you think the public services in your community overall will get better, get worse, or stay the same?	Get better	24%	22%	21%	22%
	Get worse	19%	21%	18%	19%
	Stay the same	57%	57%	61%	59%

Question	Response	Allegheny County (unweighted N=501)	Southeast PA (unweighted N=504)	Rest of PA (unweighted N=457)	State (unweighted N= 1462)
If you had to choose, which of the following would you favor?	Better public services, even if that meant taxes would have to be raised	15%	22%	17%	19%
	Lower taxes, even if that meant public services would have to be cut	14%	15%	15%	15%
	Maintaining the current level of taxes and public services	71%	63%	68%	67%
If taxes had to be raised in order to maintain local public services, which would you prefer be raised?	Local income taxes	24%	26%	23%	24%
	A municipal services tax or fee	23%	20%	26%	24%
	Local property taxes	16%	15%	16%	16%
	A county sales tax	37%	38%	36%	37%
Which level of government do you trust to make the best tax and spending decisions?	Your state government	19%	32%	24%	26%
	Your county government	27%	18%	32%	27%
	The government in your city or town or borough	54%	50%	44%	47%
How safe do you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night?	Very safe	55%	55%	67%	62%
	Somewhat safe	28%	32%	24%	27%
	Somewhat unsafe	10%	6%	4%	5%
	Very unsafe	6%	6%	5%	5%

Question	Response	Allegheny County (unweighted N=501)	Southeast PA (unweighted N=504)	Rest of PA (unweighted N=457)	State (unweighted N= 1462)
Over the past two years, would you say that crime in your neighborhood has increased, decreased, or stayed the same?	Increased	24%	31%	18%	23%
	Decreased	8%	11%	7%	8%
	Stayed the same	68%	58%	75%	69%

*Notes: Southeast PA includes Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Percentages are weighted to accurately reflect adult population of the state and each region. Unweighted N provided to indicate rough precision of estimates. Some questions and responses were condensed for tables.*

## **Appendix A Additional Analysis of Allegheny County Respondents to the 2010 Temple Municipal Governance Survey**

By David Miller, PhD, Associate Professor and Director of the Innovation Clinic, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

This analysis is a more detailed look at the response of the 501 Allegheny County residents who participated in the poll. For purposes of this more localized analysis, respondents were grouped by those who live in the City of Pittsburgh (city), those who live in the 35 municipalities that share a common border with the City (also-urb), and those who live in the balance of Allegheny County outside the urban core (suburb). Except as noted, percentages exclude those who said “Don’t Know” or refused to answer.

### **Issues of Trust and Community**

When asked which level of government they trust to make the “best tax and spending decisions,” 54 percent of respondents identified their city, town or borough as most trusted. County government was identified by 27 percent of the respondents and state government by 19 percent. City residents were more apt to identify with the state and county governments than were also-urb and suburb respondents. Specifically, local government was identified by 38 percent of city residents compared to 49 percent of also-urb respondents and 57 percent of suburb respondents.

Respondents were also asked to identify whether their “most important sense of community” was: their neighborhood; their city, town, or borough; their region; or the State of Pennsylvania. Just under 38 percent selected their neighborhood followed by their city, town or borough (24 percent) and the state (23 percent). The county (8 percent) and the region (7 percent) were well down the list. City respondents (48 percent) were more apt to mention their neighborhood while also-urb respondents and suburb respondents were not necessarily connecting with their city, town or borough. Only 20 percent of also-urb respondents and 29 percent of the suburb respondents identify their local government as their most important sense of community. Even though their local government is most trusted, it is not necessarily the most important.

### **Taxes and Service Levels**

Overall, 54 percent of respondents thought the taxes they pay to support the public services (garbage collection, police protection, fire protection, and public works) they receive were “about right” while 42 percent thought they were “high” or “very high.” Only 4 percent saw those taxes as “low” or “very low.” City and also-urb respondents were less apt to see taxes as “high” or “very high” than suburban respondents.

To further explore citizen attitudes on taxes, respondents were asked to choose between “better services even if it meant taxes had to increase,” “lower taxes even if that meant public services would have to decrease” or “maintaining the current level of taxes and services.” Overall, 71 percent of respondents chose maintaining current service levels and tax efforts and that was consistent across the three groups of city, also-urb and suburb respondents. The groups differed significantly on the other two strategies. City respondents were much more likely to select “better services” (18 percent) to “lower taxes” (5 percent) whereas suburb respondents were more apt to select “lower taxes” (21 percent) to “better services” (11 percent). Like city respondents, also-urb respondents were more apt to select “better services” (20 percent) than “lower taxes” (9 percent).

On the question of “if taxes had to be raised in order to maintain local public services,” 37 percent of respondents preferred a county sales tax. Other options selected include: “local income taxes” (24 percent) and “municipal service tax or fee” (23 percent), and “local property taxes” (16 percent). When “Don’t Know” or refused to answer responses are included in the totals, together they outpolled local property taxes.

### **Attitudes on Service Sharing**

When asked how much of a priority it should be for “local public agencies such as police, fire, emergency medical services, and public works” to combine resources to provide services, 66 percent of respondents said it should be a “top priority” whereas only 8 percent said it “should not be done.” City residents (80 percent) were much more apt to see such service combining as a top priority, but 62 percent of also-urb respondents and 54 percent of suburban respondents said service sharing was a top priority.

When asked the primary reason for such service sharing, the two most frequently mentioned goals were “improving the quality of services to taxpayers” (46 percent) and “reducing the costs of services to the taxpayers” (38 percent). Suburban respondents were split between cost reduction (39 percent) over improved services (41 percent) as the primary reason. City respondents (by 46 to 33 percent) and also-urb respondents (by 49 to 33 percent) were more interested in improved service over cost reduction .

Using police services as an example, respondents were asked what strategy their local government should take in the event it “didn’t have enough money to maintain its current service?” The most frequently mentioned strategy (49 percent) was “combining your department’s resources with another” followed by “increasing taxes to maintain police services” (33 percent). Turning the function over to county government was preferred by only 12 percent of the respondents while “cutting police services” was identified by 6 percent of respondents.

### **More Specifics on Police**

On a scale of 1-10 where 10 represents “very satisfied” and 1 “very dissatisfied,” respondents were asked to rate the “police protection” they currently are receiving. Overall, 63 percent of all respondents rated that service an 8 or above with 36 percent rating their service as a 10. Satisfaction was highest in the suburbs where 88 percent of respondents and 67 percent of also-urb respondents rated their police service an 8 or above compared to 39 percent of city respondents.

On the question of how “safe you feel being alone in your neighborhood at night,” 55 percent of respondents felt “very safe” while 6 percent felt “very unsafe.” Suburb respondents (69 percent) and also-urb respondents (56 percent) were much more likely to feel “very safe” compared to 27 percent of city respondents.

### **Current and Future Expectations**

Respondents were asked, over the past several years, whether core services (police, fire, emergency management services (EMS) and public works) had “gotten better,” “gotten worse” or “stayed the same.” The most frequently mentioned opinion was “stayed the same” (71 percent), whereas 19 percent thought things had gotten better compared to 10 percent who thoughts things had gotten worse. Approximately 30 percent of city residents thought things had gotten better. When asked the same question about the next several years, most respondents expect things to stay the same (57

percent). That said, 24 percent (32 percent of city residents) expect things to get better compared to 19 percent of the respondents who think things will get worse.

### **State Policy Issues**

Respondents were asked a series of four questions about a variety of state policy issues that have received interest as potential changes that could be made. The first issue was whether land use planning and zoning decisions should be handled more at the county level as opposed to the current law which concentrates those decisions at the local level. Overall, 69 percent of respondents favored local decision making while 31 percent favored (40 percent of city respondents) shifting decision making to the county.

A second question dealt with the current state policy of providing (at no cost to the municipality) state police coverage to those smaller, rural municipalities that do not have a police department. The question was whether those municipalities should be charged for the service. Overall 39 percent favored charging those municipalities while 61 percent opposed such a charge. Opposition was highest in the suburbs (66 percent).

The final two questions dealt with local government employees. The first asked whether newly hired employees should receive a different and less costly (to the employer) pension plan than that received by the government's current employees. Forty-two percent of respondents favored the different plan whereas 58 percent thought new employees should receive the same plan as existing employees. The second issue related to whether neutral arbitrators in contract negotiations between local governments and their public safety union employees should be required to take into account the financial condition of that local government in making contract awards. Overall, 69 percent of respondents (55 percent in the city) favored such a requirement compared to 31 percent who opposed such a requirement.

### **Where Allegheny County Respondents Differ From the Other Parts of the State**

The following areas represent the most significant places where Allegheny County respondents differ from respondents in other parts of the state:

- Allegheny County respondents are more likely to think current tax levels are about right (54 percent);
- They are less likely to favor a stronger role for county government in land use planning and zoning decisions;
- They are much more likely to be served by a local police department;
- They are less likely to trust state government and more likely to trust local government.

### **Differences in Allegheny County Respondents Based on Demographics**

- Age: Under 35 respondents are more likely to trust county and state government than local government;
- On the question of most important community, non-white respondents are much more apt to identify state government (35 percent) or local government (31 percent) whereas white respondents identified most with neighborhood (43 percent);
- Non-white respondents are much more likely to trust state government;

- Non-white respondents are also much more apt to think public services have gotten better (25 percent) in the last several years and are optimistic those services will get better (42 percent) in the next several years;
- Female respondents are more likely to consider current taxes too high and much more likely to place a “top” priority on combining services than male respondents. They are more likely to see “improving the quality of services” as the goal of service combining whereas male respondents are more apt to see the primary goal as “reducing the costs of services;”
- Female respondents are twice as likely as male respondents to feel that crime has increased in their neighborhood over the last several years but are more optimistic that things will be better in the next several years;
- On the issue of less expensive pension benefits for newly hired employees, a slight majority of male respondents (51 percent) agreed with that policy whereas 66 percent of female respondents disapproved.

## Discussion

McLaughlin (2010) notes in his assessment of the statewide poll that “elected officials seem to be ahead of the public in understanding the current and looming costs of Pennsylvania’s current complex system of municipal governance.” Allegheny County residents are representative of that observation. They are satisfied generally with the current structure and do not see or sense a crisis. They have: a fair level of trust in their institutions building from the bottom-up with their local governments and neighborhoods; think those institutions are doing reasonably well in the services they offer; have a degree of optimism about the future of those services; and grumble about taxes being higher than they would like.

That said, respondents left open a general willingness to pursue sharing services, even to the point of expecting their public officials to give such strategies a “top priority.” City and also-urb respondents as well as female respondents are particularly open to service sharing as a strategy. Importantly, service sharing is seen both as a strategy for improving services and for reducing costs. To the degree that the cost of financing Pennsylvania’s “complex system of municipal governance” becomes more than the resources of the state can bear, new service sharing arrangements have the potential of resonating with citizens.

## Appendix B Background for the Survey

Against the background of a deep recession that is depressing state and local revenues and straining capacity to maintain adequate public services, this survey asks Pennsylvanians how they feel about the performance of their local governments and how they feel about various changes in state local policies that are being debated in the Pennsylvania General Assembly and in various communities across the Commonwealth.<sup>6</sup> Responses to some questions, such as which level of government provides respondents with police protection, also offer insights into how well citizens understand the costs and consequences of the current structure of local government.

Some scholars, think tanks, and government reformers<sup>7</sup> have argued for decades that Pennsylvania's economic growth is hindered by one of the most fragmented systems of local government in the United States. According to the Governor's Local Government Fact Sheet, the Commonwealth had in 2009, in addition to 67 counties, 2,562 municipalities; 1,539 active public authorities;; 1,177 police departments; 2,608 fire departments, of which 2,475 were volunteer companies; and 3,160 municipal pension systems, or about 25 percent of all such plans in the nation. Nearly 30 percent of the municipalities have fewer than 1,000 residents, and nearly 80 percent have fewer than 5,000 residents.

Although Pennsylvania has the nation's third largest rural population, even the state's two largest urban areas have a large number of relatively small municipalities: 130 in Allegheny County alone<sup>8</sup> and 239 in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Municipal governments in Pennsylvania have more power over land use than larger county governments, arguably creating incentives for municipal officials to over-subsidize economic development projects, capture project revenues, and export some portion of project costs to neighboring jurisdictions in the form of overcrowded roads and schools, higher crime rates, etc. In the view of reformers, local government fragmentation results in an inefficient use of government resources, creates incentives for municipal governments to adopt policies that impose external costs on their neighbors, threatens many municipalities with deteriorating services and insolvency, raises the cost of doing business in the state, distorts private sector investment decisions, and impedes economic growth.

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<sup>6</sup> According to a Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL) analysis, five million Pennsylvanians, or nearly 40 percent of the state's population, live in municipalities facing some degree of financial distress. Twenty-six percent live in municipalities with significantly underfunded pensions systems. See PEL's Power Point presentation entitled, Pennsylvania Municipal Financial Stress, October 2010.

<sup>7</sup> For example, among scholars, David Y. Miller of the University of Pittsburgh and Carolyn Adams, David Bartelt, and David Elesh of Temple University; think tanks, The Brookings Institution; and reform groups, the Pennsylvania Economy League, and 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania.

<sup>8</sup> Allegheny County includes 128 municipalities entirely within its boundaries and two municipalities partially within its boundaries.

Critics also argue that state policies subsidize municipal proliferation and inefficiency. The Commonwealth does not require municipalities to provide police protection, fire protection, or to take care of thousands of miles of essentially local roads that were absorbed into the state system during the Depression. The Pennsylvania State Police, for example, provide full or part-time police services for more than half of the Commonwealth's municipalities, some of which are relatively large and affluent, and are obligated to provide service to any municipalities that discontinue full-time police coverage. Similarly, the Commonwealth subsidizes volunteer fire companies, while municipal support for such companies is generally non-existent or relatively low. Through Act 205 distributions of insurance tax revenues, the state subsidizes municipal pension plans without exercising oversight of benefit levels. For nearly half of such plans the state subsidy covers the full cost of the employer contributions. The number of municipal pension plans exploded subsequent to enactment of Act 205 in 1984.

Reformers and some state legislators in Harrisburg generally have advocated laws or policies to facilitate the consolidation of smaller municipalities into larger governments, to provide municipalities with new and what they regard as fairer revenue sources, to move responsibilities for police protection and land use to the county level, to require municipal governments served by the state police to reimburse the Commonwealth, and to help "right-size" municipal services by fostering cost-sharing agreements and the formation of regional service districts, such as police forces, by cooperating municipalities. A number of the reforms highlighted in this survey deal with police protection, as it is typically the most expensive municipal service. According to the Local Government Fact Sheet, there were 32 consolidated police departments, and 124 municipalities had contractual agreements to share police costs. Recently, legislation was introduced in Harrisburg to abolish municipalities and make counties the basic unit of general local government. Although governors of both parties have taken the lead in urging municipal cost-sharing and consolidation, generally with limited success, Pennsylvania's recent governors have not made it a high priority.<sup>9</sup>

Defenders of the current structure of municipal governments include elected local government officials and social scientists who subscribe to the public choice approach to policy analysis. Contrary to public choice scholars, however, local elected officials generally see inadequate local tax revenues, inadequate state aid, and unfunded state mandates as the main problems facing communities rather than fragmented government, although elected officials in core cities and county officials in particular also favor more tools to facilitate municipal consolidation and cost sharing. Associations representing these officials (the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania League of Cities and Municipalities, Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, and the Pennsylvania State Association of

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<sup>9</sup> Governor Mitchell Daniels of Indiana, Republican, and former Governor Jon Corzine of New Jersey, a Democrat, are among state chief executives who have made municipal cost-sharing or consolidation a high priority. Under Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell, the state planning board has developed legislation to facilitate municipal consolidation and cost-sharing and to provide counties and municipalities with access to additional revenues, but the governor himself has not given these issues the prominence that he has given consolidation of the state's school districts.

Township Supervisors) generally argue that state residents prefer smaller governments and that state subsidies are partial remedies for an unequal capacity to provide adequate services in large parts of the state, particularly impoverished urban areas and sparsely populated and relatively low-income suburban and rural areas.

Local officials also argue that a number of state policies impede improvements in local government efficiency. County and municipal officials generally want the state to adequately fund state mandates, fully fund courts, and reduce their dependency on the property tax by providing new -- and in their view fairer -- sources of revenue, such as higher municipal service fees, local income taxes, county-option sales taxes, and a mechanism for collecting additional revenues from charitable and educational institutions exempt from the property tax. Municipal officials also support reforms to Act 111, the state law which prohibits police officers and firefighters from striking but allows an unelected binding arbitration panel to dictate labor contracts without a formal requirement to consider the ability of local taxpayers to fund the contracts. In the face of unfunded municipal pension liabilities estimated at \$6 billion statewide, some local officials want the state to authorize defined contribution (as opposed to defined benefit) pensions for newly hired workers, to exempt pensions from collective bargaining, or to curtail future pension costs through other measures.

Municipal unions are also parties to this debate. The unions generally support local elected officials in advocating for additional revenues but oppose legislative efforts to constrain the unions' ability to win wage and benefit increases through collective bargaining. Police and firefighter unions have fiercely resisted Act 111 changes and public employee unions strongly oppose even optional defined contribution pensions. Municipal unions have opposed legislation that would remove pensions from collective bargaining (most states do not allow unions to bargain for pensions) and substitute a state-administered system similar to that funded by the state and school districts for teachers. Some municipal unions, however, would support changes that made pensions more uniform across local governments to provide greater opportunity for career advancement by changing employers.

Public choice scholars in the tradition of Charles Tiebout generally argue that multiple and smaller local governments lead to more efficient tax and service levels than large, consolidated governments because consumers can shop for the package that best fits their needs and, in effect, "vote with their feet." They contend that the pressures of such a competitive market will induce even larger governments to achieve efficiencies. Scholars who dispute this view argue that evidence that individuals actually shop for local governments in this fashion is relatively weak. They contend that many residents in larger governments are unable to vote with their feet because of high transaction costs, such as selling their homes. They also contend that state subsidies and the complexity of current arrangements inhibit even sophisticated taxpayers from understanding the real costs of local government and therefore from realizing whatever efficiencies might be theoretically possible in a competitive market. Both reformers and local government officials argue that without the changes they advocate, the quality of public services will continue to deteriorate in many communities and threaten residents with a lower quality of life.

Some scholars argue that citizens are generally more willing to support consolidation of “system-maintaining” services that require shared infrastructure investments, such as mass transit or water supply, than “life-style” services that are labor intensive, such as schools and police.<sup>10</sup> *Perhaps taking note of this, participants in the Deliberative Democracy Poll were somewhat less likely to see combining resources as a top priority after deliberation.*

This survey attempts to provide some initial and tentative answers to key questions in this debate: How does the public view their local governments? How well does the public understand current and looming cost and services-issues facing municipalities? And how open is the public to a number of changes advocated by both reformers and local government officials?

### **Allegheny County’s Deliberative Democracy Project**

This survey provides a snapshot of public opinion on these issues across the state and in the three large geographic regions defined above. Because it was designed in collaboration with the Pittsburgh Foundation’s Allegheny Forum, it also is part of an experiment in the degree to which citizens themselves can, through education and deliberation, make better-informed decisions either to affirm current arrangements or become advocates for various changes. As noted earlier, as part of the foundation’s project, Carnegie Mellon University and the Coro Center for Civic Leadership conducted on September 25 a “Deliberative Democracy” Poll on local government issues. One hundred eighty-three Allegheny County residents contacted initially by a random-digit dialing survey spent most of a day at the university, where they were asked many of the same questions in the Temple poll, provided with information on local government issues, exposed to a panel discussion by experts, and given an opportunity to deliberate among themselves, much like a jury. Participants in the project were polled again at the end of the day to determine whether the additional information provided to them and the opportunity for deliberation changed their views, and if so, in what ways. Although the Deliberative Democracy participants were not as representative of citizens in the county as the Temple oversample, they were similar in many respects and did represent a broad range of demographic characteristics in terms of age, race, income, education and size of their municipalities of residence.<sup>11</sup> They also were generally similar to the Temple respondents with respect to their initial views. The results of the

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<sup>10</sup> Oliver P. Williams made this argument in *Metropolitan Political Analysis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> The 183 participants were a subgroup of a random sample of 300 residents who had agreed to participate in the Deliberative Democracy Poll when contacted by phone and whose responses to some of the similar questions more closely matched the Temple random sample of the county. Compared to the region’s population, the 183 participants included, for example, a higher percentage of African Americans and a lower percentage of whites, a higher percentage of those with a bachelor’s degree, a higher percentage of homeowners, a higher percentage of those 65 and older, and a lower percentage of those 19 to 34 years old. A higher percentage of the 183 participants identified themselves as independents, and lower percentages as Democrats or Republicans, than are registered that way in the county.

Deliberative Democracy Poll cannot be generalized as representative of the county's adult population in the statistically valid way that the Temple survey can. Rather, the Deliberative Democracy Poll is similar to a huge focus group in suggesting how information and deliberation might be expected to change the views of Allegheny County residents.

The Temple survey provides state and local policymakers with some insights into the feasibility of achieving specific changes, given the status of public opinion in the state, its three large regions, and many subgroups in the population distinguished by demographic characteristics such as age, race, gender, income, education levels, the size of their municipality, and whether families include a government employee.

## Appendix C: Methodology

The Municipal Governance Survey consists of interviews with 1462 residents of Pennsylvania and 179 residents of Southern New Jersey, all 18 years of age and older.<sup>12</sup> This report summarizes findings from the Pennsylvania portion of the survey.

The survey was designed by Drs. Joseph P. McLaughlin, Jr. and Michael G. Hagen of Temple University in consultation with Richard A. Stafford, MS, of the Heinz College of Public Policy and Management of Carnegie Mellon University; Dr. Gregory J. Crowley of the Coro Center for Civic Leadership in Pittsburgh; Dr. David Y. Miller of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh; and Dr. David Elesh of Temple University. It was conducted from June 9 to 20, 2010, by Temple's Institute for Survey Research under the direction of Dr. Heidi E. Grunwald.

Residents of the state's two largest urban regions -- Allegheny County and the five counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery) -- were oversampled to improve the precision of estimates calculated for those areas. Thus, residents of these two urban regions and a region composed of the state's 61 other counties (hereafter called the Rest of Pennsylvania) have roughly similar numbers of respondents and therefore have roughly similar margins of error. Because the three regions differ in population size, however, residents of each had different probabilities of being interviewed. The samples have therefore been adjusted to accurately reflect the statewide and regional populations. Percentages in the text and the table showing statewide responses by region are based on weighted data. Unweighted data are reported for each column to provide readers with a general sense of the relative precision of the estimates, had unweighted data been used to calculate tests of statistical significance.

	<b>Unweighted N</b>	<b>Weighted Sample</b>	<b>Margin of error (unweighted)</b>
Allegheny	501	10%	4.4%
Southeast	504	32%	4.4%
Rest of PA	457	58%	4.6%
Total	1462	100%	2.6%

Because the focus of the report is attitudes toward local government, the survey identified the municipality of residence for all respondents, thus allowing analysis of the responses by such factors as the size of municipality and whether the municipality is served by the state police.

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<sup>12</sup> The number of interviews in southern New Jersey was set so that those respondents would represent an appropriate fraction, when combined with the residents of southeastern Pennsylvania, of the population of the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Findings for the bi-state metropolitan area will be reported separately.

As noted earlier, in Pennsylvania law and in this report, first, second, and third class cities; first and second-class townships; boroughs; and the state’s sole town are defined as “municipalities.” Most survey questions used the terms “your city, town, or borough” to refer to municipalities. County governments were identified as such. In reporting responses to questions that asked about a combination of municipal and county services or taxes, the report will use the term “local.” The survey did not deal with public opinion about school districts, which raise and spend the largest share of local revenues in most of the state, nor did it deal with the other form of local government, public authorities.

The survey was produced by Temple University’s Institute for Public Affairs in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Foundation’s Allegheny Forum Project and with the partial support of the Hillman Foundation, which is gratefully acknowledged. Findings are made available for public use with attribution to Temple University’s Institute for Public Affairs.

Two survey weights were constructed by The Urban Institute, a prominent public policy research organization in Washington, DC. The only difference between the two weights is that the weighted numbers of respondents in each region is equal, by construction, to the number of respondents we would have interviewed in the region if we had interviewed a sample of 1462 residents of Pennsylvania at random—that is, with equal probabilities of being interviewed—while the weighted numbers of respondents in each region is equal, by construction, to the total number of adults living in the region.

<b>Unweighted Sample</b>			<b>Weighted Sample</b>		<b>Population</b>	
<b>Region</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Allegheny	501	34	155	10	988,532	10
Southeast	504	34	473	32	3,024,663	32
Rest of PA	457	31	850	58	5,437,485	58
Total	1,462	100	1,462	100	9,450,680	100

The survey weights have been constructed so that they also adjust the sample for differences across demographic groups in the probability of completing an interview, which involves both our ability to contact members of the group and their willingness to answer. All telephone surveys under-represent some groups and over-represent others, and survey data are routinely adjusted for these differences in “non-response” using “post-stratification” weights. Our survey weights were constructed using an iterative raking procedure to match estimates for age, race, gender, educational attainment, and household ownership, in addition to adjusting for households that have multiple chances of being sampled and for differences in the probability of selection within households. The demographic estimates were obtained from the 2006-2008 American Community Surveys and differ from Census Bureau population estimates in that only adults (those 18 and older) were eligible to respond to the survey. The weights were calculated separately for the regions, to make the sample of each region representative of the region’s population. Cell phone numbers were not included in the sampling frame

but the data were weighted to make the sample representative of demographic groups especially likely to rely on cell phones only, including young people.

Because the focus of this survey is public opinions about local government, the survey identified all respondents by their municipality of residence. Respondents were asked to provide their county, municipality, and their street address or the nearest intersection. Their self-reported municipality was then confirmed using GIS software. These steps allow analysis of their responses by the size of their local government as well as by their county, region, and conventional demographic characteristics such as party affiliation, education, income, age, race, and gender. The weighted sample also mirrors the population by size of municipality of residence.

**Population of Pennsylvania Regions and of Survey Samples by Size of Municipality (Percentages)**

<b>Size of municipality</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Unweighted Survey</b>	<b>Weighted Survey</b>
Allegheny County			
0-5,000	12	14	13
5-20,000	36	36	37
20-110,000	27	29	25
Pittsburgh	25	21	25
Southeastern PA			
0-5,000	7	7	5
5-20,000	30	34	32
20,000-110,000	25	30	27
Philadelphia	39	30	36
Rest of PA			
0-5,000	40	46	45
5-20,000	40	35	38
20-110,000	20	19	17