

APPENDIX

“B”

Local Governments in Onondaga County

*A Survey of Registered Voters
Conducted August 5-7, 2005*

Report: August 15, 2005

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Purpose the Survey

This survey was commissioned by the Onondaga Citizen's League as a part of their year long assessment of how the structure of local governments might be changed to improve the ability of government in the area to respond to problems. Specifically, the League was interested in several potentially related questions. Do citizens see a problem with the situation of the local economy and population growth? Do they see the current system of local governments as desirable and as providing valuable benefits to residents? Do they think changing the structure of local governments would create a structure that could pursue economic development more effectively? Do they think that changes in structure would have much of an impact on the ability to pursue economic development?

To pursue these questions, a survey was developed in conjunction with members of the Onondaga Citizen's League study group. The script used begins on page 13 of this report. The survey was then conducted among 300 individuals registered to vote in Onondaga County. The process of calling and how the sample compares to all registered voters in the county are discussed on page 12.

Any questions about the calling process or the language used for the questions should be addressed to Jeff Stonecash, 443-3629, or jstone@syr.edu.

Perceptions of the Area

Assessments of how well things are going in the county are mixed. On one hand, when asked about the direction of the area, 54 % say things are headed in the right direction, and 34 % say wrong direction. Those percentages are fairly positive about the area. There is a less positive view of the local economy. Only 20 % think it is improving and 44 % think it is declining. As might be expected, the two views are related. Among those who see the local economy as improving, 78 % see things as headed in the right direction and 12 % choose wrong direction. Among those who see the local economy as declining, 35 % see things as headed in the right direction and 55 % choose wrong direction.

Q 1. Generally speaking, do you think things in the Onondaga County area are headed in the right direction, or in the wrong direction?

Right direction	53.5
Wrong direction	33.9
No opinion	12.6

Q 3. Over the last several years, do you see the local economy as improving, staying about the same, or as declining?

Improving	19.6
Staying same	34.6
Declining	43.9
No opinion	2.0

There is little variation by education, income, area of the county, or party enrollment in assessments of the direction of the area. Women are somewhat more positive (56 % right direction) than men (50 %) and those younger are more positive. 64 % of those under 45 choose right direction, while only 49 % of those over 45 do. The greatest difference occurs between those who identify themselves as liberal (24 % of all registrants) and those who identify themselves as conservatives (27 % of all registrants). 41 % of liberals choose right direction and 43 % choose wrong direction. 68 % of conservatives choose right direction and 19 % choose wrong direction.

Responses to other questions are just as mixed. Only 25 % say they worry a great deal about the value of their home. 51 % say they are only somewhat worried. Yet when asked how much growth is an issue, 40 % say it is a serious issue. Further, when asked in an open-ended question what is the most important issue facing the area, 43 % mentioned jobs and economic issues.

These issues are again related. Those worried about population growth are more likely to worry about the value of their homes. Among those who see population growth as a serious issue, 38 % worry a great deal about the value of their home. Among those who think population growth is not much of a problem, only 12 % worry a great deal about the value of their home. Among those who see population growth as a serious problem, 59 % see the local economy as declining, while among those who see population growth as not much of a problem, only 27 % see the local economy as declining. Among those who see population growth as a serious problem, 44 % see the area as headed in the right direction and 45 % chose wrong direction. Among those who do not see it as a serious problem, the percentages are 59 % right – 26 % wrong direction.

Q 4. Like many Northeast counties, Onondaga County's population is not growing. Do you see the growth issue as a serious problem for the area, somewhat of a problem, or not much of a problem?

Serious	39.9
Somewhat	32.2
Not much	26.9
No opinion	1.0

Q 5. Does the local economic situation lead you to worry about the value of your home a great deal, only somewhat, or don't you worry much about that?

Worry a great deal	25.3
Only somewhat	51.2
Don't worry	19.3
No opinion	4.3

Q 2. What do you think is the most important issue facing this area at this time? (Do not read the list; if no response, ask once "what concerns you and your family on a daily basis?" and then move on. Record only one response below; if more than one offered, ask "which is most important?")

Jobs / lack of jobs / local economy / lack of growth	43.0
Taxes / property taxes	8.0
Education / schools	8.7
Environment / Onondaga Lake	1.4
Neighborhood decline / housing stock	.7
Crime / drugs / public safety	17.8
Poverty / need for social services equity	.7
Health care / access	.7
Government fiscal problems	0
Cleanliness of communities	0
Lack of political leadership	.4
Destiny	7.0
Other	11.6

Demographics, party enrollment, area of the county, and home ownership have little to do with perceptions of the area. Liberals are somewhat more pessimistic and women are somewhat more worried about the direction of the area, but the differences are not great. There is a set of residents who are fairly positive about the direction of the area and are not worried about the local economy. There is another set that is not positive and is worried about the direction of the area. There are also many with very mixed and seemingly contradictory views.

An issue which is continually discussed is how important it is to maintain the fiscal health of the City of Syracuse. While the city is continually declining as a percentage of the county's total population, some argue that since the city is at the center of the county and contains many institutions vital to the area. When asked about how important the economic health of the city is, 42 % choose crucial and 40 % choose important. That reaction does not vary much by party enrollment, area of the county, or education level. The percentage choosing crucial rises with income, increasing from 34 % among those having less than \$50,000 in family income to 54 % among those making more than \$100,000.

All those who worry about the area are more inclined to see the future of the city as crucial. Among those who see the area as headed in the right direction, 37 % see the city's future as crucial, while among those who choose wrong direction, 54 % see it as crucial. Among those who see population growth as a serious problem, 57 % see the city's future as crucial, while among those not worried about population growth, 33 % see it as crucial.

Again, there is no consensus within the community about the direction of the area, and these variations are not tied to demographics.

Q 17. How important is that the City of Syracuse is in good shape economically for the overall future of the county: crucial, important, somewhat important, or not that important?

Crucial	41.9
Important	40.2
Somewhat important	11.0
Not that important	3.8
No opinion	3.1

Assessing the Value of Local Governments

Given the lack of growth in Onondaga County, many have argued that the county might be better off if the structure of local governments was simplified, generally meaning having fewer local governments or consolidating some functions, such as economic development, in one county government. During the course of the survey several questions were asked about these issues. Before moving to those results, however, it is important to assess how voters view local governments. Do they think there are too many or do they think they provide greater access and representation?

Voters were first asked if city, town, and village governments are an extra layer or valuable. A very strong majority (75 %) sees them as valuable, and only 20 % see them as an extra layer. This reaction is widespread, with no variation across demographic groups or areas.

Q 7. Do you see city, town and village governments as an unnecessary, extra layer of government, or as valuable because they are in touch with local problems and give citizens someone to contact about local problems?

Extra layer	20.0
Valuable	74.7
No opinion	5.3

Q 8. Do you think having city, town and village governments administer programs, rather than one government, makes the overall cost of local government in Onondaga County higher, about the same, lower, or no opinion?

Higher	39.7
Same	25.7
Lower	7.0
No Opinion	27.7

Q 9. Are town and village governments important enough to you that you accept any additional costs they might create, or are they not important enough to justify their costs, or no opinion about that?

Important enough	44.3
Not important	25.7
No Opinion	30.1

When asked how having these local governments affects the cost of local government, 40 % said they make the overall cost higher, while only 7 % say lower. Further, when asked if town and village governments are important enough to justify the costs, 44 % say they are important enough, and only 26 % say they are not important enough.

As might be expected, these opinions are related. Among those who see the local governments as an extra layer, 70 % think they make the cost of local government higher, while only 7 % think they make the cost lower. Among those who see the local governments as valuable, only 31 % think they make the cost of local government higher, 30 % think the cost is the same, and 7 % think they make the cost lower. Likewise, among those who think they are an extra layer, 17 % think they are important enough to justify the cost, while 67 % do not think so. Among those who think they are valuable, 55 % think they are worth the cost and 15 % do not think they are important enough.

Overall, then, the general view is that local governments are valuable to have. They may be seen as increasing costs, but a plurality sees them as worth whatever additional costs they create.

While the general view is positive, there is also evidence that voters do have some mixed views about the value of having multiple local governments. When more detailed questions were asked, it is clear that the prime value of local governments is that they are seen as improving representation. 71 % agree that they get better representation through local governments, while only 21 % disagree. 61 % agree that they have excellent access to local officials and only 38 % disagree. At the same time, 57 % agree that problems would be resolved faster with fewer layers of government, 59 % agree that local government costs more than it should, and only 37 % agree that more levels of government leads to better services for constituents.

In this county, we elect county, city, town and village officials. I'd like to read some statements regarding having these multiple layers of government, and ask if you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Agree	Disagree	No op
10. Citizens get better representation of local concerns through city, town and village government	71.4	20.8	7.8
11. Problems would get resolved faster if there were fewer layers of government.	56.5	36.4	7.1
12. More levels of government leads to better services for constituents.	37.1	51.7	11.2
13. Local government costs more than it should.	59.2	26.2	14.6
14. I have excellent access to my city/town/village elected officials.	61.2	28.2	10.5
15. The ability to create change depends more on the quality of leadership than the structure of government.	77.8	14.7	7.5

Voters are also fairly consistent in their opinions. For example, among those who agree they get better representation, 73 % agree that they have excellent access and only 18 % disagree. Among those who disagree about getting better representation, 31 % agree about having access and 61 % disagree. Those who think problems would be solved faster are more likely to agree that local governments make local government costs higher (50 % agree – 18 % disagree). Those who disagree that problems would be solved faster are more likely to think they get better

representation from local officials (71 % agree – 24 % disagree). There is a clear segment of the population that is very positive about local governments. They see them as enhancing representation and not appreciably raising costs. Another segment sees them as raising costs, making problems take longer to resolve, and as not enhancing representation.

Local Governments and Addressing Economic Development Issues

A central concern of this survey is what relationship, if any, voters see between growth and economic development issues and the structure of local governments in the county. Do they think altering the system of local governments would help make it easier to address growth and economic issues? Would they be willing to change the structure of local governments?

Voters were first asked if they think local governments can affect the local economy, or do they think other factors are the source of economic problems. 51 % say they think local government can solve problems, while 43 % think other factors are primary. While a majority thinks local governments can make a difference, that does not translate into belief that giving one government authority over economic development issues is the answer to this issue. Only 24 % say one government could have an effect, while 65 % say other factors are more important.

Q 6. Do you think the efforts of local governments – the county, city, and towns - can improve the area's economy, or are the area's economic problems largely due to things these governments can't affect, such as state taxes and regulations, labor costs, or the general condition of New York's economy?

Local government can	50.8
Beyond local control	42.5
No opinion	6.6

Q 16. Some say the area could do better promoting growth and jobs if one government had all authority to attract companies. Others think diversity of governments isn't the problem, but the primary problems are high taxes, labor costs, state regulations and the attractiveness of other areas of the country. Do you think one government could have an effect or are these other matters more important?

One government	23.6
Other problems	64.7
No Opinion	11.7

Perhaps most important, the results do not indicate that those who are troubled about the economy are more inclined to support the creation of a one-government solution. Indeed, the relationship is the opposite of what might be expected. Among those who see the local economy as declining, 20 % think one government could be effective. Among those who see the local economy as improving, support for one-government is higher, 39 %. That is, those troubled about the

economy are less inclined to support a single government. Those who see think local governments can affect the local economy are only somewhat more supportive of one government (29 %) than those who think other factors are more important (18 %). For every question regarding the local economy (e.g., how serious is the population growth situation, do you worry about the value of your home), those who are concerned are not more supportive of one government. Those who think having many local governments raises the cost of local government are more supportive of one government (28 % more effective – 61 % other factors) than those who do not think it raises costs (18 % - 68 %), but both groups are more inclined by strong majorities to think other factors are more important.

The ambivalent or contradictory nature of views about the connection between economic issues and the structure of local governments emerges again when voters are asked more directly about what to do about these issues. When asked if they would rather consolidate or maintain local governments, 53 % would rather have access and only 27 % would prefer an alternative which could create greater efficiency and lower costs.

Q 30. Would you rather consolidate town and village governments with the county to create more efficiency and lower costs or maintain town and village governments so you have your own local government and more access to local officials? Or do you have no opinion on this question?

Consolidate	27.4
Access	53.1
No opinion	19.4

Q 31. Do you see growth problems as important enough that you would be willing to consider restructuring local government?

Yes	57.6
No	29.9
No opinion	12.5

Q 32. Do you think restructuring government would have a major impact on growth in the area?

Yes	51.8
No	29.9
No opinion	15.3

Yet, at the same time, when asked if growth problems are important enough to consider restructuring, 58 % say yes and 30 % say no. When asked if restructuring might have a major impact on the area, 52 % say yes and 30 % say no. Those who would choose consolidation are much more optimistic that restructuring local governments would have a major impact (70 % yes – 20 % no), than those who would choose access (43 % yes – 43 % no).

There is some pattern of those who are more concerned about the area being more inclined to think that restructuring would have a major impact on growth. Among those who see the area as headed in the right direction, 24 % see a major impact and 58 % do not. Among those who see it as headed in the wrong direction, 35 % see a major impact and 45 % say no. The percentage that sees a major impact is higher among those troubled, but even among those troubled, a plurality does not see a major impact. The same pattern occurs for other concerns. Among those who worry a great deal about their home value, 35 % see a major impact and 41 % do not. Among those who don't worry much at all, 25 % see a major impact and 61 % do not. As of now, voters do not see a clear impact from restructuring government, and even those troubled about the local situation do not see a major impact.

Another alternative to general consolidation is to focus on specific functions. Voters were asked about various functions that might be consolidated into one countywide agency. The strongest support is for consolidating highway departments. 62 % support that and 28 % oppose it. Modest majorities also support consolidating economic development, purchasing, and police departments. A majority opposes consolidating school districts. A plurality favors consolidating tax collection, while pluralities oppose changes in fire departments and planning and zoning.

There is periodically discussion about changing the structure of governments within the county. I'd like to present some options and ask for each if you would support, maybe support, or oppose the option. In each case the question is whether to consolidate the activity into one countywide agency.

	Support	Maybe	Oppose	No op
18. Fire departments – one countywide agency?	41.0	8.3	44.5	6.2
19. Police and sheriff departments – countywide?	50.0	9.7	37.6	2.8
20. Highway departments	62.1	6.2	27.6	4.1
21. School districts	30.3	7.6	58.3	3.8
22. Tax assessment	41.2	8.0	41.9	9.0
23. Tax collection	46.2	7.3	37.2	9.4
24. Planning and zoning	37.0	8.3	48.4	6.2
25. Economic development offices	54.3	8.0	30.1	7.6
26. Purchasing departments	53.3	8.3	27.8	10.7
27. Merge all villages into town governments	37.2	5.9	43.8	13.2
28. Merge all towns into county government	25.4	7.3	59.7	7.6
29. Merge the City of Syracuse into the county	34.7	6.6	50.0	8.7

When asked whether to merge all villages into town governments, a plurality opposes that. In the rural towns, 30 % support this and 48 % oppose it. In the suburbs, opinion is evenly divided. Those who see the area as headed in the right direction are not supportive (33 % support – 50 % oppose), while those who see the area as headed in the wrong direction are more supportive (47 % support – 34 % oppose). Those who see the local economy as declining are more supportive (46 % support – 33 % oppose) than those who see the economy as improving (29 % support – 59 % oppose), but no group has a majority supporting this change.

When asked about merging towns into the county, 60 % oppose this and only 25 % support it. In the areas outside the City of Syracuse, 23 % support this and 62 % oppose it. Those who are pessimistic about the area or see the local economy as declining are more supportive, but more oppose this than support it.

When asked about merging the City of Syracuse into the county, 50 % oppose this and 35 % support it. Among residents of the City of Syracuse, 31 % support this and 50 % oppose it.

Summary

The results indicate that there is no consensus among registrants within the county about local governments. Opinion about the direction of the area is diverse, as are views about the local economy and its health.

Most registrants see local governments as valuable as a way to increase their access to officials and secure representation. They think they make the cost of local government higher, but are willing to pay that higher cost.

They think local governments can help improve the economy, but they do not endorse having one local government, the county, be responsible for taking these actions. Yet at the same time, they say they would be willing to consider restructuring and think it could have a major impact on economic development.

Finally, when asked about consolidating specific functions, only changes involving economic development, highway departments, and purchasing receive majority.

Demographics

Q 33. How many years have you lived in Onondaga County

Less than 25 years	28.3
25 to 49 years	38.5
50 or more years	33.2

Q 34. Do you own your home, rent, or have another arrangement?

Own	78.3
Rent	11.5
Other	9.8
No answer	.4

Q 35. In political terms, would you define yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?

Liberal	24.5
Moderate	39.9
Conservative	27.3
No choice	8.4

Q 36. Could you tell me the highest education level you achieved?

High school or less	22.4
Some college / community college / vocational school	25.2
College graduate	27.6
Some graduate school	4.9
Graduate degree	19.2
Refused	.7

Q 37. Finally, could you indicate which category your total family income falls into? (*read categories*)

\$ 0 - 25,000	7.7
\$ 25 - 50,000	21.3
\$ 50 - 75,000	19.9
\$ 75 - 100,000	13.3
\$100 - 125,000	6.6
\$125 - 150,000	2.5
\$150,000 or more	7.7
Retired	7.7
Refused	13.3

Calling, Likely Voters, and the Sample

Calling took place August 5-7, 2005. A computer file of all registrants in Onondaga County was obtained from the County Board of Elections. All registrants were included in the random sample drawn.

301 registrants completed the survey. The table below presents the profile of all registrants within the county and those we contacted. The composition of the county by sex, party enrollment, and area of the county are shown. The percentages sum down within each column for each group. For example, among all registrants, 54.2 % are female and 45.8 are male. Among the sample who completed the survey, 58.5 are female and 41.5 are male. Overall, the profile of the contacted sample is similar to that of all registered voters voters.

Comparison of All County Registrants and Sample Contacted

	County	Sample
<i>Sex</i>		
Female	54.2	58.5
Male	45.8	41.5
<hr/>		
<i>Party</i>		
Republican	35.3	40.5
Independent	24.5	19.3
Democrat	33.2	36.5
<hr/>		
<i>Area</i>		
Syracuse	25.7	22.0
Dewitt-Manlius	37.5	34.9
Northern Suburbs ¹	14.1	16.3
Rural towns	22.7	26.8

¹ Camillus, Cicero, Clay, Geddes, Manlius, and Salina

Survey Script

Hello, my name is _____. I'm calling from the Maxwell School at Syracuse University on behalf of the Onondaga Citizen's League, which is doing a study of how people see our local community. Could I take a few minutes of your time to ask you some questions?

1. Generally speaking, do you think things in the Onondaga County area are headed in the right direction, or in the wrong direction?

1 ___ right direct 2 ___ wrong direct 3 ___ No op

2. What do you think is the most important issue facing this area at this time? **(Do not read the list; if no response, ask once "what concerns you and your family on a daily basis?" and then move on. Record only one response below; if more than one offered, ask "which is most important?")**

- 1 ___ jobs / lack of jobs / local economy / lack of growth
- 2 ___ taxes / property taxes
- 3 ___ education / schools
- 4 ___ environment / Onondaga Lake
- 5 ___ neighborhood decline / housing stock
- 6 ___ crime / drugs / public safety
- 7 ___ poverty / need for social services equity
- 8 ___ health care / access
- 9 ___ government fiscal problems
- 10 ___ cleanliness of communities
- 11 ___ lack of political leadership
- 12 ___ other (record: _____)

3. Over the last several years, do you see the local economy as improving, staying about the same, or as declining?

1 ___ improving 2 ___ staying same 3 ___ declining 4 ___ no opinion

4. Like many Northeast counties, Onondaga County's population is not growing. Do you see the growth issue as a serious problem for the area, somewhat of a problem, or not much of a problem?

1 ___ serious 2 ___ somewhat 3 ___ not much 4 ___ no opinion

5. Does the local economic situation lead you to worry about the value of your home a great deal, only somewhat, or don't you worry much about that?

1 ___ worried 2 ___ not worried 3 ___ somewhat 4 ___ no opinion

6. Do you think the efforts of local governments – the county, city, and towns - can improve the area’s economy, or are the area’s economic problems largely due to things these governments can’t affect, such as state taxes and regulations, labor costs, or the general condition of New York’s economy?

1 ___ local govt can 2 ___ beyond loc control 3 ___ no opinion

7. Do you see city, town and village governments as an unnecessary, extra layer of government, or as valuable because they are in touch with local problems and give citizens someone to contact about local problems?

1 ___ Extra layer 2 ___ Valuable 3 ___ No opinion

8. Do you think having city, town and village governments administer programs, rather than one government, makes the overall cost of local government in Onondaga County higher, about the same, lower, or no opinion?

1 ___ Higher 2 ___ Same 3 ___ Lower 4 ___ No Opinion

9. Are town and village governments important enough to you that you accept any additional costs they might create, or are they not important enough to justify their costs, or no opinion about that?

1 ___ Impt enough 2 ___ Not impt 3 ___ No Opinion

In this county, we elect county, city, town and village officials. I’d like to read some statements regarding having these multiple layers of government, and ask if you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Agree	Disagree	No op
10. Citizens get better representation of local concerns through city, town and village government	1	2	3
11. Problems would get resolved faster if there were fewer layers of government.	1	2	3
12. More levels of government leads to better services for constituents.	1	2	3
13. Local government costs more than it should.	1	2	3
14. I have excellent access to my city/town/village elected officials.	1	2	3
15. The ability to create change depends more on the quality of leadership than the structure of government.	1	2	3

16. Some say the area could do better promoting growth and jobs if one government had all authority to attract companies. Others think diversity of governments isn't the problem, but the primary problems are high taxes, labor costs, state regulations and the attractiveness of other areas of the country. Do you think one government could have an effect or are these other matters more important?

1 ___ One govt 2 ___ other problems 3 ___ No Opinion

17. How important is that the City of Syracuse is in good shape economically for the overall future of the county: crucial, important, somewhat important, or not that important?

1 ___ crucial 2 ___ important 3 ___ somewhat impt 4 ___ not that impt 5 ___ no opinion

There is periodically discussion about changing the structure of governments within the county. I'd like to present some options and ask for each if you would support, maybe support, or oppose the option. In each case the question is whether to consolidate the activity into one countywide agency.

	Support	Maybe	Oppose	No op
18. Fire departments – one countywide agency?	1	2	3	4
19. Police and sheriff departments – countywide?	1	2	3	4
20. Highway departments	1	2	3	4
21. School districts	1	2	3	4
22. Tax assessment	1	2	3	4
23. Tax collection	1	2	3	4
24. Planning and zoning	1	2	3	4
25. Economic development offices	1	2	3	4
26. Purchasing departments	1	2	3	4
27. Merge all villages into town governments	1	2	3	4
28. Merge all towns into county government	1	2	3	4
29. Merge the City of Syracuse into the county	1	2	3	4

30. Would you rather consolidate town and village governments with the county to create more efficiency and lower costs or maintain town and village governments so you have your own local government and more access to local officials? Or do you have no opinion on this question?

1 ___ consolidate 2 ___ access 3 ___ No opinion

31. Do you see growth problems as important enough that you would be willing to consider restructuring local government?

1 ___ Yes 2 ___ No 3 ___ no opinion

32. Do you think restructuring government would have a major impact on growth in the area?

1 ___ Yes 2 ___ No 3 ___ no opinion

33. How many years have you lived in Onondaga County _____?

34. Do you own your home, rent, or have another arrangement?

1 ___ own 2 ___ rent 3 ___ other 4 ___ No answer

35. In political terms, would you define yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?

1 ___ Liberal 2 ___ Moderate 3 ___ Conservative 4 ___ No choice

36. Could you tell me the highest education level you achieved?

1 ___ High school or less
2 ___ Some college / community college / vocational school
3 ___ College grad
4 ___ Some grad school
5 ___ Graduate degree
6 ___ Refused

37. Finally, could you indicate which category your total family income falls into? (*read categories*)

1 ___ \$ 0 - 25,000
2 ___ \$ 25 - 50,000
3 ___ \$ 50 - 75,000
4 ___ \$ 75 - 100,000
5 ___ \$100 - 125,000
6 ___ \$125 - 150,000
7 ___ \$150,000 or more
8 ___ retired
9 ___ refused

That's all. Thanks for your time.