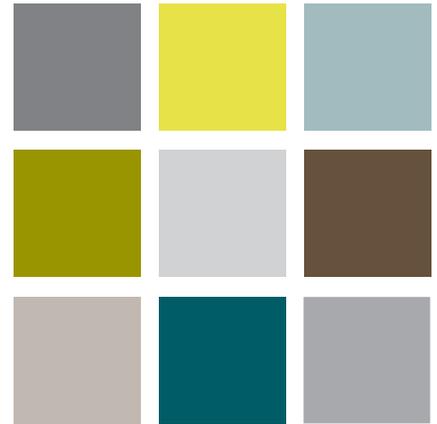


County Governments and Rural Populations Impact Statement



SITUATION

Counties are the local governments most important to rural populations across the United States. They administer important public programs and widely engage in economic development planning. These governments now exceed the size of federal civilian government in terms of employment. Yet little has been known about counties' direct activities across the nation as a whole. The information gap is most acute in the case of small, remote rural counties. The lack of reliable information impacts policy and planning efforts as well as county officials' ability to communicate needs and successes to policymakers. This is particularly important in the present aftermath of the Great Recession—where counties' policies may help communities to better adjust to downturn.

RESPONSE

OARDC/OSU scientists are the lead investigators in the first-nationwide, cross-time study that document the policies county governments employ to increase job growth and provide public services and to assess the broad array of county characteristics that affect both remote rural and urban counties ability to provide economic development and general public services. In collaboration with the National Association of Counties (NACo), the project has collected primary data from over 1600 county governments for 2001, 2004, and 2008. Our



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

County Governments and Rural Populations

research finds that counties' administrative capacity and experience of fiscal stress are related to the policies they provide. Our statistical (i.e., econometric) analyses establish that net of major control variables, centralized administration, size, and staff capacity are positively related to a greater scope of economic development and social service activities. Conversely, fiscal stress such as state government cutbacks and loss of local employers reduce these activities.

IMPACT

The study provides comprehensive information for county governments and researchers to monitor change across the nation during three different economic periods. The project has uncovered new information about counties' economic development and service activities and changes over time. From 2001-2008 counties overall tended to increase the economic development and services activities they undertake—in keeping with the decentralization of U.S. government. However, those with less administrative capacity and those experiencing fiscal stress were less likely to expand these activities, indicating gaps among counties in their ability to respond to the Great Recession. These findings have been disseminated across the country by NACo on its website and will be published formally by the journal *Social Problems* in November 2014.

Contact Information

Linda Lobao

Professor

320D Kottman Hall
2021 Coffey Rd
Columbus, OH 43210

614.292.6394

lobao.1@osu.edu

senr.osu.edu