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ABSTRACT

To examine ratings of satisfaction with selected community services in relation to spending preferences and to ascertain policy-relevant implications of citizen evaluations in planning and delivering rural services), a study focused on perceptions of community leaders and household respondents in eight rural Alabama counties. Research literature on policy-relevance of services ratings, monitoring service quality, ambiguity of satisfaction measures, spending preference as a policy-relevant variable, and differing attitudes of community leaders and nonleaders was reviewed. Data were collected by a mail questionnaire survey of selected county leaders (522 respondents) and by interviewing a random cross-sectional sample of 926 residents. Satisfaction scores and spending preferences were obtained for seven community services (water, public schools, ambulance, garbage, hospitals, fire protection, law enforcement). Leaders tended to be more satisfied with services, except for schools, where residents were more satisfied. Residents were less constrained in spending preferences: a majority wanted to spend more on four services (water, schools, hospitals, fire protection), while a majority of leaders wanted to spend more on three services (water, public schools, fire protection). These results illustrate fundamental differences in perspective between leaders and nonleaders: residents may evaluate and express preferences based on their experience, whereas leaders may take a broader, community-wide perspective. (MH)

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SATISFACTION WITH RURAL SERVICES: THE POLICY PREFERENCES
OF LEADERS AND COMMUNITY RESIDENTS*

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SATISFACTION WITH RURAL SERVICES: THE POLICY PREFERENCES
OF LEADERS AND COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

The services residents receive from local governments are a central feature of the residential environment in nonmetropolitan areas (Deseran, 1978; Christenson, 1976; Marans and Rodgers, 1975). As services make a fundamental contribution to the quality of life in rural places (Dillman and Tremblay, 1977), efforts have been made to map the distribution of satisfaction with services across physical locales (Kuehn, 1976; Johnson and Knapp, 1970; Crawford et al., 1975) and among various social and demographic categories of residents (Kuehn, 1977; Carruthers et al., 1975). Most have failed to establish direct ties between satisfaction with services and overall community satisfaction, however (Rojek, et al., 1975; Goudy, 1977; Molnar et al., 1979).

Improvements in community services are changes in major social functions affecting the living environment of a locality (Warren, 1972:9). Improvements in the availability and level of services have been linked to a shift toward small town and rural residential preferences and a subsequent reversal of nonmetropolitan population decline (DeJong and Sell, 1977), but little is known about the way community residents perceive services or the factors supporting a commitment to improved public services.

Although a number of studies have focused specifically on satisfaction with various services, the policy implications of these results have not been systematically examined. Expressions of relative satisfaction have been explored for their own merits, but little attention has been given to action implications relevant to local service producers and decision makers. Slow economic growth, high inflation and resistance to further taxation complicate efforts to reconcile revenue, expenditures, and public expectations for services (Levine, 1980).

Dissatisfaction with services may stem from unavailable services, the cost of services, as well as the quality of the service provided. Each source of dissatisfaction suggests a somewhat different set of responses on the part of the local official or service provider who is confronted with the result. The action implications of an expression of dissatisfaction with a community service often are confounded in the simplicity of a response to a global survey item.

The objective of this study is to examine ratings of satisfaction with selected community services in relation to spending preferences. We focus on the perceptions of community leaders and random household respondents, comparing levels of satisfaction and relating them to spending preferences that may be linked to changes in the amount or quality of a rural service. We seek to explore the relationship between satisfaction and spending preferences in order to ascertain the policy relevant implications of citizen evaluations in the process of planning for and delivering rural services.

The Policy-Relevance of Service Ratings

Community surveys have long been a standard tool used to assist decision makers in determining the values, needs, and problems of local residents and to determine how well local government is serving the public. As values are desired outcomes sought by individual actors, researchers often are led to devise situations which encourage individuals to communicate their goals or preferences (Clarke, 1974:4). Hatry et al. (1977:5), identified three alternative survey strategies for obtaining individual preferences. They are: (1) global measures of overall satisfaction; (2) specific measures that evaluate service characteristics in detail; or (3) a combination of global and specific measures.

Global measures, such as satisfaction ratings, focus on overall perceptions or evaluative orientations toward a service. Hatry et al. (1977:5), argue that such measures provide an important overview to upper-level local officials, such as municipal managers, major executive officers, and council members. Christenson (1976) used global measures to provide a macro-level view of service satisfaction on a statewide basis. Further analysis showed that greater numbers of public employees in a locale resulted in higher global perceptions of quality in public services (Christenson and Sachs, 1980:99). For service producers, global measures may not be useful for diagnostic purposes because of their generality and the possibility that they may be confounded with other affective or attitudinal dimensions.

A major weakness of global satisfaction measures is that such judgments are formed relative to plausible alternatives (Campbell et al., 1976:171). Satisfactions are tied to expectations and those available standards of comparison in which such expectations are in turn moored. If a more intensive, more highly developed level of service is beyond the realm of experience or aspiration of the respondent, it cannot serve as a standard of comparison. Thus a rating of "satisfied" may reflect some level of habituation or unquestioned acceptance of a community attribute as well as actual contentment with the service.

A second evaluative approach focuses on specific service characteristics and eliminates global measures. Such results are of greatest use to individual operating agencies. The expanded attention given to experience with each individual service, however, may limit the range of services that may be addressed in a given survey or the amount of attention that may be devoted to other issues.

A third approach, using a combination of global and specific measures, may provide desirable overview information about a specific service, as well as some idea of the sources of service satisfaction and dissatisfaction. For the most part, studies that have examined specific service characteristics have not obtained satisfaction measures, but studies that examine a broader spectrum of services tend to employ satisfaction measures. Both types of information may be useful for efforts to diagnose or ameliorate service delivery problems (Ostrom, 1973).

Satisfaction ratings, then, are most useful in the assessment of ongoing service operations, but may not assist policy decisions to introduce, expand, reduce, or eliminate a service function. Global ratings and specific measures can assist internal resource allocation, but may not be as useful for budgetary processes in which incremental increases of cutbacks must be administered across an array of services. The mix of measures appropriate to a particular survey is a function of the research audience and kind of decisions the results will be expected to influence.

Monitoring Service Quality

Improvements in service delivery systems are based on knowledge of the inadequacies in the existing activity. As Ostrom (1971:278) notes, however, there are no routine transactions between service producers and service consumers that provide constant feedback to the service provided about productivity or demand for the product.

Many services operate within a broad band of public apathy, where others elicit public reaction with only minor deviations from established norms. Public complaints are often the only direct indicators of public response that providers have for their service. Furthermore, few citizens have the time

or knowledge to evaluate individual services in detail or to take any action except to express dissatisfaction about general gross deficiencies (Fitch, 1975:409).

To properly diagnose and suggest response to service problems, indicators should allow comparisons over time and between places. The problem of measuring outputs in a comparable way has led some to use expenditure data as measures of quality (expenditures-per-pupil as a measure of school system quality, for example). The relative productivity of different service providers can never be determined in a useful way, however, if input measures are employed as output measures.

Milbrath (1979:36) argued that research utilizing both objective and subjective output indicators should arrive at reasonably valid inferences about the levels of quality of living experienced by people. Similarly, the approach undertaken by Ostrom and associates (1971) was one based on multiple methods and multiple indicators of service quality. Physical measures of output, citizen surveys, and agency records were assembled to assess convergence among measures. An interview survey obtained perceptions of service characteristics, evaluations of the services, as well as preferences for different levels of service provision. Ostrom (1977:284) concluded that fairly accurate perceptions can be obtained from citizens (that is, ratings consistent with physical and record data), given careful attention to phrasing of questions about specific aspects of service output.

Many nonmetropolitan areas share an inherent advantage in the provision of public services. In most rural areas, the officials or service providers are also citizens of the county or community. As citizens they receive the services of their own agency and can thus evaluate service levels on a first-hand basis (Ostrom, 1977:278). Although public reporting frequently is less detailed in nonmetropolitan jurisdictions, service providers, officials, and

residents all gain considerable information from their own experience about service levels in the community.

The Ambiguity of Satisfaction Measures

Global satisfaction measures may be found particularly wanting in the process of budget formulation and justification. A rating of "satisfaction" with a service may reflect: (a) overall contentment with a well-provided service; (b) satisfaction with a service that is underdeveloped and marginally provided and the respondent feels that it should stay that way; or (c) a service that is available and adequately provided, but the respondent feels should be expanded. Each condition suggests a materially different course of action for the decision-maker, but by itself the global measure may not provide sufficient insight into what steps may or may not be appropriate.

Expressions of satisfaction are confounded with the quality, availability, and expense of a service. Dissatisfaction may emanate from a comprehensive service that is narrowly available, or a widely available service that is only partially developed, low in frequency, or narrow in coverage. The respondent also may be displeased with a high quality, widely available service that is expensive to provide.

Presumably, a rating of "satisfied" reflects contentment with intensity, coverage, and cost of a service. Dissatisfaction may arise from negative perceptions of each, any, or all of the dimensions. A citizen's assessment of how good a job is being done in a particular service area may represent a valid direct evaluation but also may vary considerably with personal characteristics, neighborhood context, and differential experience or contact with a service (Clark, 1974:17).

Some services may have little immediacy in the respondent's own life situation, and ratings may reflect low levels of contact with a service. For

example, concern for ambulance service may be distributed as a partial function of age. Thus service perceptions may vary on a dimension of frequency of use or personal immediacy that may influence ratings of global satisfaction or spending preference.

Individuals' surroundings or socioeconomic context may shift evaluations as a function of local conditions and the costs of alleviating the situation. As Clarke (1974:8) suggests, rural citizen A is a fanatic about cleanliness (has previously lived in an upper-middle class suburb), resents carrying his garbage to a dumpster, and is "very dissatisfied" with the service. Rural citizen B, however, has lived in the open country all his life, has recently hauled the trash to the county landfill, and burned the rest. He is happy to have a dumpster where he or his wife can drop off the garbage on the way to work and is "very satisfied" with the service. Thus very similar objective conditions can generate quite different evaluative responses.

Spending Preference as a Policy-Relevant Variable

While satisfaction measures may profile the feelings residents have toward the services they receive, spending preferences may provide an additional dimension of specification for the policymaker. When scarce resources must be allocated, aggregate satisfaction levels and spending level preferences may more fully identify areas of compromise or continuity in the decision process.

Spending preferences reflect an additional measure of commitment to a problem (Korsching, 1979:3). A spending preference can give some indication of the degree to which the respondents support the service as a solution to some need. Spending money is a natural choice or behavioral intention that expresses a preference with strong policy implications (Clarke, 1974).

One limitation of willingness to pay, however, is that most government services are jointly supplied to many individuals, where many individuals benefit

at different levels at different times. A spending preference then reflects many of the problems and issues contained in what James Coleman (1966) has called a collective decision, also known as the "free rider" problem. The difficulty is that some individuals tend to endorse spending for services that disproportionately benefit themselves. For example, you perceive the new water-line to your section of the county as "in the public interest" and express your support by voting for it in a tax referendum.

Other problems with spending preferences trace to the lack of accountability among spending choices. The respondents may elect to spend more in all areas, an option of little realistic applicability to the policymaker. As a consequence, some have suggested the use of budget pies (Clarke, 1974).

The intent of a budget pie is to present the respondent with a circle and have her divide the sections according to her allocation preference. Money-preference conversion tables may give the rater some sense of the change an increased (or decreased) allocation might be expected to bring. The primary advantage of the budget pie is that respondents are constrained by the size of the circle. A surplus (i.e. an overall tax cut) can be indicated in the process, or different size circles can be used to indicate overall budget increases or decreases.

The major problem with the approach is complexity, in terms of the number of allocations to be made, the problems of using money-performance conversions, and the difficulty of making abstract choices in a multi-factor context. More difficult decision structures are seemingly more relevant to realistic decision-making situations, but also risk diminished validity due to the complexity of the response required (Clarke, 1974:14). Employing budget pie formats that traded-off realism for simplicity, Clark found that interviewers of lower-class

respondents had to explain very carefully the logic of the budget pie, but with patience obtained satisfactory response rates.

Although the direct expression of a spending preference may lack the realistic constraints of a budget pie, it does provide useful information to the rural service decision-maker. It may extend the meaning of known satisfaction levels by linking them to preferences for expansion, maintenance, or retrenchment in a particular service. The spending preference is simple, direct, and with appropriate instructions, readily obtainable and comparable among a broad spectrum of educational levels and residential backgrounds. Extended over a series of services, a spending preference may reveal a systematic propensity to spend among various groups in a community, as well as antecedent sources of dissatisfaction underlying a readiness to spend.

Although the linkage between attitudes and behavior has been repeatedly found to be tenuous, conditional, and short-lived (Deutscher, 1973; Liska, 1974), Aijen and Fishbein (1973) found considerable evidence linking behavioral intentions to actual behavior. They concluded that feelings about an object are less important than statements of intended action in predicting actual behavior. Thus, a spending preference may more accurately resemble a behavioral intention, and a satisfaction an attitudinal indicant.

This suggests that the spending preference may be a useful indicator of support for various policy options with respect to service delivery. As Korsching (1979:5) notes, such a response may be used to guide future planning under the assumption that there is an immediate intention of action, but also that the decision would have some persistence through time.

Community Group Membership

This study focuses on satisfaction and spending preferences for seven community services in a eight-county rural area as viewed by positional leaders

and area residents. As suggested, the relationship between satisfaction and spending preferences is neither simple nor direct. Satisfaction levels are influenced by initial aspirations for a service as well as a broad number of social, economic, and contextual factors (Campbell et al., 1976). We explore the relationship between the two dimensions among community leaders and residents as a basis for suggesting a more comprehensive framework for conducting meaningful, policy-relevant research in this area.

Several lines of thought suggest systematic differences in contentment and spending preference between community leaders and the general public. Community leaders, by definition, are a step or two closer to the center of decision making and control than ordinary community residents. Because leaders often have greater involvement in the decision-making process, they are more likely to be aware of changes or improvements they helped to install (Colfer and Colfer, 1978:313; Molnar et al., 1979).

Leaders also may be more knowledgeable about budgetary and expenditure processes by which services are delivered and the potential impacts of spending shifts. They may be more familiar with the organizational and managerial processes associated with service delivery, viewing service problems in terms of the character of service provider staffs, administrative competence, or supervision rather than operating budget insufficiencies.

Although Smith and Klindt (1976) reported similar perceptions of community needs among leaders and nonleaders, a number of others have shown wide variability between leaders and nonleaders in ratings of community facilities and services (Nix and Seerley, 1973; Nix et al., 1974; Molnar and Purohit, 1977). Goudy (1977:379) found that self-identified leaders gave more positive ratings on each of three measures of community satisfaction.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Sample and Data Collection

The data for this study were collected as part of a research project funded under Title V of the Rural Development Act of 1972. An eight-county study area in Alabama¹ was selected on the basis of the level of development activity present in the area and its location along the route of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. The project will place the counties on a route between the Tennessee River and the Port of Mobile. The overall aim of the research was to support a concentrated extension rural development program to respond to opportunities presented by the forthcoming transportation system. To attain this objective, a mail questionnaire survey of county leaders was conducted, followed by an interview survey of a random sample of county residents.

Leaders. Leaders were selected by a combined positional and snowball procedure so as to ensure the representation of influence in the county (Curtis and Petras, 1977; Laumann and Pappi, 1976). Individuals holding elected or appointed positions in local government, as well as state and Federal officials located in the counties, were included in the sample. Leadership positions included: County Commissioners, major county department heads, community mayors, and county directors of State and Federal agencies. The sample also included members of selected development-related advisory groups and committees. These were individuals with formal involvement in planning, organizing, and decision-making with regard to some aspect of rural development. Additional influentials in community development were identified through a nomination procedure included in the questionnaire.

In the Summer of 1979, the questionnaire was sent to 792 individuals who met the previously discussed criteria of leader. Respondents were initially sent a copy of the questionnaire and a cover letter describing the purpose and intent of the study. Following Dillman's (1978) suggested approach, non-respondents were sent four successive reminders to promote return of the questionnaire. A total of 522 leaders completed the questionnaire. The overall return rate was 66 percent, adjusted for the deceased and those no longer residing in the area.

Residents. In the Spring of 1980, interviews were obtained from a one percent cross-sectional sample of the adult population age 18 and over in the same eight counties. A multi-stage, probability-in-proportion-to-size random area sampling design was employed to select dwelling units and systematic procedures used to obtain interviews within households (Babbie, 1973:100).

Interviewers were instructed to request the head of household when approaching a sample dwelling unit. If she or he was not at home, an interview was obtained with an adult age 18 or over, if available, or call back arrangements made. In the resulting sample, age, sex, and racial characteristics generally paralleled census figures, although the sample tended to be more female and slightly older than the population as a whole. The overall completion rate for the study was 85.4 percent. Non-interviews were primarily due to an inability to find respondents at home, as very few refusals were obtained.

Measurement

Both leaders and household residents were presented with the same set of questions to obtain satisfaction and spending preferences. Interview respondents were presented show cards with response frameworks.

Satisfaction with selected community services was measured with a five-level Likert response framework--"very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied." Respondents were asked "how satisfied are you with:" each of the seven services. For the purpose of this analysis, responses were coded 0 to 100 in units of 25 to facilitate comparison of mean scores on a percent-of-scale basis. The midpoint 50 reflects "undecided/don't know" responses. A small number of "don't have service" responses were coded as 0 or "very dissatisfied" responses.

Both sets of respondents rated the same seven services: water, public schools, garbage collection, ambulance, hospitals, fire protection, and law enforcement (leaders were asked to rate "police"). Fifty leaders who returned mail questionnaires were interviewed in the household survey were not asked service questions that appeared in the questionnaire and their responses are treated as missing in this analysis.

Spending preferences were obtained with a Likert response framework--"spend less," "spend same amount," "spend more," and "spend new taxes." The latter two responses were combined for this analysis. Respondents were asked "how much should the county spend on" each of the seven services. "Don't know" responses were included in the "spend same" category and the variable was coded 1 to 3. This analysis treats spending preferences as a weakly ordinal variable; thus the categories of spending variables are treated as indicators of an underlying continuum of preference.

A measure of readiness to spend was developed by counting the number of services for which the respondent was willing to spend "more" or "new taxes." The variable ranged from 0 to 7.

Six control variables were employed. Sex was coded as 1=male, 2=female. Race was coded as 1=nonwhite, 2=white. Education was coded in six categories ranging from "less than high school" to "completed postgraduate degree."

Income was coded in five categories ranging from "\$4,999 or less" to \$25,000 or more." Age was coded in six categories ranging from "18 to 30" to "71 and over." Town was a dummy variable contrasting those that lived in communities with edge of town and open country residents (Van Dusen and Zill, 1975).

Analysis

To examine leader-resident differences in satisfaction with the services, mean satisfaction scores are presented with a t-test of differences. The marginal distributions of spending preferences in each sample are compared with a chi-square test. Mean satisfaction across spending levels is compared in each sample with a one-way analysis of variance. Regression analysis is employed to examine the relative contribution of satisfaction, spending, and selected control variables in differentiating leaders and household residents. Finally, the relative importance of the various satisfaction measures and control variables are used to explain an overall readiness to spend more on community services.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows mean satisfaction scores for selected community services for leaders and residents.² Leaders tended to be more satisfied with the services, with the exception of public schools where residents were more satisfied. Leaders were most satisfied with garbage collection ($\bar{x}=67.2$) and least satisfied with public schools ($\bar{x}=41.1$). Residents also were most satisfied with garbage collection ($\bar{x}=65.1$), but were least satisfied with water service ($\bar{x}=45.3$). The largest differences occurred in satisfaction with water and hospital services. In both cases leaders were much more satisfied.

- Table 1 here -

Public schools was the only service for which leaders did not express a mean score at the satisfied end of the scale ($\bar{x}=41.1$). Residents averaged below the scale midpoint (50) for water, public schools, hospitals, and fire protection, indicating dissatisfaction with these services.

The spending preferences of leaders and community residents are presented in Table 2. More than 50 percent of the respondents in each community group wanted to spend more on water service, but many leaders wanted to spend the same. Most respondents wanted to spend more on public schools, but again a larger proportion of leaders wanted to spend less or the same amount.

- Table 2 here -

A majority of leaders wanted to spend the same for ambulance service, but residents were divided between the same and more categories. Most respondents indicated that the same amount should be spent on garbage collection. More residents wanted to spend more on hospitals and law enforcement. A majority of both groups wanted to spend more on fire protection, but residents were somewhat more inclined to spend more on this service.

Residents tend to be less constrained in their spending preferences, however, as a majority wanted to spend more on four of the seven services. A majority of leaders wanted to spend more on three of the seven services. Only a small proportion desired to spend less on any one service.

Satisfaction levels are related to spending preferences in Table 3. Mean satisfaction scores varied significantly across spending categories within each group. For most services, the most satisfied respondents were those wanting to spend the same on the service. The most dissatisfied leaders wanted to spend less on all the services, but for water, ambulance, and garbage service the most dissatisfied residents wanted to spend more on the service. Thus the relationship between satisfaction and spending was not the same in each group.

- Table 3 here -

The lowest levels of satisfaction were found among leaders and residents wanting to spend less on public schools. Dissatisfaction and a preference for spending cutbacks coincided for most of the services. Some levels of dissatisfaction seem to precipitate support for service improvement, whereas more extreme levels of dissatisfaction may undermine justification or belief in the potential usefulness of improving the service.

Table 4 regresses leader or resident status on satisfaction, spending and control variables.³ Equation 1 shows that leaders were more satisfied with water ($B = -.22$), hospitals ($B = -.13$), and law enforcement ($B = -.07$), but residents were differentiated by higher levels of satisfaction with public schools ($B = .15$). Equation 2 shows that spending on water ($B = -.08$) and garbage service ($B = -.24$) predicted group membership, indicating that more leaders wanted to spend the same on these services. Residents wanted to spend more on hospitals ($B = .09$) and fire protection ($B = .08$).

- Table 4 here -

Equation 3 combines satisfaction and spending variables to distinguish the two respondent groups. The satisfaction coefficients remained relatively stable, but fire protection spending became nonsignificant. Spending and satisfaction variables explained 16.5 percent of the variance in the group membership variable.

Equation 4 shows effects of all three sets of variables in a single equation. Water service and hospital satisfaction continued to predict group membership when controls were introduced, but law enforcement satisfaction no longer differentiated the two groups. Garbage service spending continued to differentiate leaders and residents, but the other service spending variables were not predictors when satisfaction and control variables were introduced.

According to the control variables, more residents were women and leaders tended to have higher education, higher incomes and tended to be older. The three variable sets together explained 50.4 percent of the variance in the group membership variable.

Table 5 shows the relative contributions of each variable set in differentiating leaders and household respondents. The control variable set, as expected, was the largest direct predictor of community group membership ($R^2=47.3$). Satisfaction ratings and spending variables had similar impacts 10.5 and 7.0 percent, respectively. Finally, the satisfaction measures had an increment of 3.2 percent of explained variance over the other two variable sets, suggesting systematic differences in the way leaders and community residents perceived the community services. The spending preferences made a similar significant contribution over and above the other two variable sets (3.1 percent).

- Table 5 here -

Table 6 shows the regression of the measure of readiness to spend on satisfaction and control variables. Among random household respondents, satisfaction with water service was a negative predictor of the readiness to spend ($B=-.14$), as was fire protection ($B=-.08$), and law enforcement ($B=-.11$). When control variables were added, white respondents were less likely to endorse a propensity to spend ($B=-.08$). The satisfaction variables explained only 5.8 percent of the variance in spending propensity.

- Table 6 here -

Among the leaders, satisfaction variables explained very little of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2=.04$). Public school satisfaction was a negative predictor of readiness to spend ($B=-.16$), and fire protection satisfaction was a positive predictor ($B=.16$).

When control variables were introduced, none of the satisfaction measures remained a significant predictor. Wealthier leaders tended to endorse spending on more services ($B=.19$), but older leaders favored spending on fewer services ($B=-.13$).

The regression analyses suggest that the readiness to spend more on services is reflected in dissatisfaction with public schools among younger leaders. Among household residents, dissatisfaction with water service, fire protection, and law enforcement predicted a readiness to spend more, as did being nonwhite. These results suggest the presence of only a weak overall propensity to spend among residents and leaders.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between expressions of satisfaction with community services and preferences for spending on services is neither simple nor direct. The findings revealed generally higher levels of satisfaction among community leaders and with some exceptions, a tendency for residents to prefer more spending on community services.

A spending preference may reflect not only a willingness to have funds expended, but a premise that the amelioration of the service is desirable, and that the benefits that accrue will be appropriately distributed. The results of this study suggest that moderate levels of dissatisfaction reflect some level of support for a service, contributing to a willingness to spend money on it. More extreme forms of dissatisfaction seem to generate opposition to spending, a resistance that may lie in the roots of the dissatisfaction.

Services that are poor in quality may be improved through an infusion of resources. Services that are viewed as inequitable, unearned, or undesirable may generate funding opposition whatever their quality. Furthermore, individuals also may evaluate the consequences of a collective improvement and endorse only those actions from which they stand to benefit.

Differences in the pattern of leader-resident satisfaction levels across spending preferences may reflect a differential perspective on the service delivery system. Leaders are by definition more familiar with the administrative and operational workings of local government. Leaders may be more likely to attribute gaps in service quality to inadequate leadership, poor management, or incompetent staffing rather than a fundamental lack of response. Leaders closer to the everyday functioning of local government in rural areas may have a greater tendency to personalize problems with service delivery, attributing functional problems to the inadequacy of individuals, faulty organization, or misuse of resources, rather than a lack of resources.

The results further illustrate fundamental differences in perspective between leaders and household residents over and above personal background and locational characteristics. Residents may evaluate and express preferences for community services based on their experience, whereas leaders may take a broader, community-wide perspective on the provision of services. Thus, leader evaluations may be based less on personal need or inconvenience, but on other values about local government activities.

Some respondents may be primarily motivated by a desire to avoid taxation, and a suspicion that certain residential areas and groups of residents will differentially benefit from efforts to improve services. Reluctance to support spending may be grounded in class-based equity considerations as well as a fundamental desire to avoid taxation from which one has little chance of benefiting.

The deeply conservative, traditional nature of the study area is also a consideration. Alabama has some of the lowest property taxes in the nation, and the study counties have some of the lowest in the State. The extremes of socioeconomic status found in the area often undermine collective sentiment

to improve service through local tax effort. The many poor may not wish to threaten the land they may own or the small income stream they may maintain, and the few rich do not feel an obligation to extend the benefits they can privately afford to the public at primarily the landowners' expense.

The analysis illustrates the fundamental difficulties of obtaining policy-relevant data in a simple, direct manner. Budget preferences may reflect a variety of premises about government functioning, the equitable distribution of services, or the kinds of people that are likely to benefit from a service expenditure. Furthermore, it is not clear whether satisfaction and spending preferences can have more than an indirect role in resource allocation decisions.

When many decision makers fail to act with budget-pie realism in their activities, it may be unreasonable to impose such complexity on respondents with a wide range of educational levels. Spending preference and satisfaction levels may fundamentally serve only to identify areas of concern, resentment, or public indifference. Most respondents do not possess the knowledge or synoptic conception of local government functioning that would enable them to make complex judgments about government expenditures in a survey situation.

Rising service costs unsettle the balance among revenue, expenditures, and expectations. The equilibrium may be restored through new taxes or user charges, more productive or efficient expenditures, or lowered public expectations. Reconciling fiscal solvency with services that are adequate, equitable, and stable is a complex process with important implications for community residents and those employed in the service delivery system (Levine, 1978). Survey results may have limited direct utility in these deliberations, but as Dillman (1977:273) outlines, surveys may contribute to the process of reconciling public preferences and policy options.

Spending and satisfaction are only two of numerous dimensions of public sentiment about community services. The analyst can provide this and other information to illuminate the conditions under which a decision process must operate, but can never produce decisions solely on the basis of aggregated citizen preferences. Future research will clarify the evaluative dimensions useful for policy-relevant research and articulate the nature of services as an aspect of how individuals experience their community.

FOOTNOTES

1. The eight county area is a rural heavily-wooded part of the state. The 1980 census reports population sizes ranging from 10.09 to 27.6 thousand residents. Six counties grew between 1970 and 1980, none more than five percent, and two declined slightly. Only one county has zero percent urban, and the largest place in the area has 7.7 thousand residents in 1980. The 1980 proportion nonwhite ranged from 32.9 to 78.2 percent. Some of the poorest counties in the state, 1974 per capita incomes ranged from \$2,618 to \$3,326, 1970 median educations ranged from 8.3 to 10.2 years, and the 1970 working-age (18-64) population ranged from 44.7 to 49.8 percent. All had 10 percent or more of their population working outside the county.
2. Although the leader data do not constitute a probability sample, significance levels are presented to illustrate relative magnitude of differences.
3. Regression analysis is employed to predict the dichotomous leader-resident variable because (a) standard errors of estimate are available for regression coefficients, facilitating the evaluation of individual variable effects, and (b) discriminant analysis weights are linearly equivalent to regression coefficients in the dichotomous case, $W = (c + D)b$, where D is the difference between group means and c is a constant.

Table 1. Mean Satisfaction with Selected Community Services for Leaders and Random Household Respondents

Service	Mean satisfaction ¹		t-value ²
	Leaders	Residents	
Water	64.1	45.3	9.7**
Public schools	41.1	47.1	-3.3**
Ambulance	62.2	58.0	2.6*
Garbage	67.2	65.1	1.4
Hospitals	59.2	48.5	6.0**
Fire protection	56.0	48.2	4.4**
Law enforcement	64.1	59.5	3.1*
	N=522	N=926	

¹"Very satisfied" = 100

* p < .05

²Separate variance estimates

** p < .001

Table 2. Spending preferences for Selected Community Services for Leaders and Random Household Respondents

Service	Spending (percent)			χ^2
	Less	Same	More	
Water				
Leaders (N=440)	3.2	46.6	50.2	14.2*
Residents (N=926)	5.6	36.6	57.8	
Public schools				
Leaders (N=443)	12.6	32.3	55.1	24.2*
Residents (N=923)	8.6	22.8	68.7	
Ambulance				
Leaders (N=437)	3.4	61.6	35.0	29.9*
Residents (N=921)	7.5	46.4	46.1	
Garbage				
Leaders (N=445)	2.6	63.8	33.3	31.6*
Residents (N=925)	9.6	67.7	22.7	
Hospitals				
Leaders (N=439)	3.6	52.2	44.2	46.4*
Residents (N=919)	6.2	33.0	60.8	
Fire protection				
Leaders (N=440)	2.7	45.2	52.0	15.2*
Residents (N=921)	1.3	36.2	62.5	
Law enforcement				
Leaders (N=434)	3.0	59.7	37.3	17.6*
Residents (N=923)	6.4	48.5	45.1	

* $p < .001$

Table 3. Mean Satisfaction with Selected Community Services by Category of Spending Preference for Leaders and Residents: Analysis of Variance

Service	Mean satisfaction ^a			F-ratio
	Spend less	Spend same	Spend more	
Water				
Leaders	<u>44.6</u>	72.0	61.1	11.9**
Residents	<u>38.9</u>	53.8	<u>34.5</u>	26.7**
Public schools				
Leaders	<u>19.1</u>	43.3	44.7	16.2**
Residents	<u>20.5</u>	50.2	49.3	31.5**
Ambulance				
Leaders	<u>26.7</u>	69.4	57.4	23.2**
Residents	<u>60.5</u>	63.4	45.9	38.1**
Garbage				
Leaders	<u>30.8</u>	74.5	61.8	30.5**
Residents	<u>56.8</u>	68.8	<u>52.8</u>	29.0**
Hospitals				
Leaders	<u>21.7</u>	65.9	56.4	19.0**
Residents	<u>28.1</u>	61.2	41.0	56.6**
Fire protection				
Leaders	<u>31.2</u>	64.4	51.3	15.2**
Residents	<u>31.3</u>	64.0	35.6	94.0**
Law enforcement				
Leaders	<u>55.8</u>	68.5	61.7	4.7*
Residents	<u>41.9</u>	63.0	57.1	18.5**

* p < .01

^a"Very satisfied" = 100

** p < .001

Table 4. Regression of Community Group Membership on Satisfaction Ratings, Spending Preferences, and Selected Control Variables: Standardized Beta Coefficients

Variable set	Community group membership ¹			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<u>Satisfaction ratings</u>				
Water	-.22**		-.22**	-.08**
Public schools	.15**		.13**	-.01
Ambulance	-.02		-.02	.00
Garbage	.03		.01	.01
Hospitals	-.13**		-.12**	-.10**
Fire protection	-.01		-.01	.04
Law enforcement	-.07*		-.06*	.00
<u>Spending preferences</u>				
Water		-.08*	-.10*	-.03
Public schools		.05	.02	.02
Ambulance		-.03	-.03	-.00
Garbage		-.24**	-.21**	-.13**
Hospitals		.09**	.07*	.02
Fire protection		.08*	.03	.01
Law enforcement		.00	.01	.04
<u>Controls</u>				
Sex				.23**
Race				.02
Education				-.33**
Income				-.27**
Age				-.09**
Town resident				-.05
R ²	.105	.070	.165	.504
F-ratio	19.8	12.8	16.6	59.3

¹Leader = 1

* Coefficient twice its standard error

Resident = 2

** Coefficient three times its standard error

Table 5. Direct and Incremental Explained Variance in Group Membership from Satisfaction, Spending, and Control Variable Sets

Variable set	Direct effect	Incremental effect (R^2)	
		Over controls	Over all
Satisfaction ratings	.105*	.016*	.032*
Spending preferences	.070*	.016*	.031*
Control variables	.473*	-----	.325*

* $p < .001$

Table 6. Regression of Readiness to Spend on Satisfaction Ratings and Control Variables for Leaders and Household Residents: Standardized Beta Coefficients

Variable	Readiness to spend			
	Resident		Leaders	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<u>Satisfaction ratings</u>				
Water	-.14**	-.14**	-.00	-.03
Public schools	-.02	-.02	-.12*	-.09
Ambulance	.04	.03	.01	-.00
Garbage	.00	.01	.01	.00
Hospitals	-.08*	-.07*	.16*	.15*
Fire protection	-.11*	-.09*	-.01	-.02
Law enforcement	-.01	-.02	.08	.06
<u>Controls</u>				
Sex		-.03		-.04
Race		-.08*		-.02
Education		.07		.08
Income		.03		.19**
Age		.04		-.13**
Town resident		-.06		.00
R ²	.058	.068	.040	.121
F-ratio	7.4	4.7	2.5	4.3

* Coefficient twice its standard error

** Coefficient three times its standard error

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