

## *An Evaluation of County Life: A Survey of County Administrative Officials*

Carol Ann Traut, *University of South Dakota*

Bob Sutton, *South Dakota Petroleum Marketers Association*

County government increasingly has become the focus of research. Not only do counties continue their roles as administrative arms of their states but they also are major service providers to their residents. This is especially true in less populated states. This study presents the views of elected county officials in a rural state on the quality of life in, and the major problems faced by, their counties. We find that how these officials view conditions in their counties is very much influenced by both the county population and the geographic location of the county. It is concluded that policymakers need to consider the varying needs of rural and urban populations as well as the variations within each rural and urban area.

Many researchers as well as public officials themselves have noted that county government is no longer simply an administrative arm of the state. Counties have assumed major and independent roles in meeting the needs of their residents (e.g., Streib and Waugh 1991b; Schneider and Park 1989). The administration necessary to carry out these newer roles is hampered both by the lack of adequate financial resources and by the imposition of mandates on local governments by higher levels of government (e.g., DeSantis 1992; Sylvester 1989). Most studies focus on the more heavily populated, metropolitan counties. This study presents the views of the people who carry out major administrative tasks in jurisdictions ranging from metropolitan to sparsely populated counties. The study then analyzes their evaluations of the quality of life in, and the problems faced by, their counties, using both the characteristics of the officials and socioeconomic characteristics of the counties they represent.

### **Quality of Life and Major Problems in Counties**

County officials, like other residents of their counties, can make general quality-of-life evaluations. Overall assessments of community life are generally linked to the physical environment—e.g., delivery of services, housing, medical facilities. At the same time, evaluations of the quality of

---

CAROL ANN TRAUT is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of South Dakota. BOB SUTTON is Executive Director of the South Dakota Petroleum Marketers' Association.

*The American Review of Politics*, Vol. 15, Winter, 1994: 519-532

©1994 The American Review of Politics

life in a community are very much linked to sociocultural factors (Campbell et al. 1976; Hughey and Bardo 1987). In an era of declining resources, one of the major concerns of governmental officials is assessing the impact of stable or declining services and/or rising taxes on the overall support that residents are willing to give their communities.

In addition to providing quality-of-life evaluations, county officials, from their vantage points as both residents and officeholders, also can become more specific and delineate major county problems. Research indicates that primary concerns of growing and more urban counties are community development and waste management issues although development issues of industry and job loss and declining populations are certainly concerns of rural counties as well (Marando and Thomas 1977). Sylvester (1989) saw mandates from both federal and state governments as putting a further strain on the limited resources of county governments. Streib and Waugh (1991a) found that solid waste management, land use, roads, education, water supply, and law enforcement ranked in descending order as very important policy issues for county officials regardless of county characteristics.

### Methodology

The data are taken from a mail survey sponsored and administered in the summer of 1992 by the South Dakota Association of County Officials (SDACO). This study focuses on the three groups of elected administrative officers of county government represented by SDACO: auditors, treasurers, and registers of deeds. The *county auditor* serves as clerk to the board of county commissioners and as the local supervisor of all primary and general elections. The auditor also has primary responsibility for county-wide budget preparation. This position is also responsible for all fiscal checks and balances on the county level. The *county treasurer* serves as tax collector and investor of county funds. The treasurer is also the local representative of the state Division of Motor Vehicles and the local licensing agent for the Department of Game, Fish, and Parks. The *county register of deeds* is responsible for recording and securing all county land records, including deeds, mortgages, and bills of sale. In South Dakota, the register of deeds also serves as the local registrar of vital records.

The survey had two general question areas. First, the survey focused the evaluations given by these three groups of the quality of life in their counties. Questions on the quality of life ranged from questions on community pride to waste disposal. Next, the questions focused on their perceptions of the major problems faced by their counties. There was a 93.7 percent response rate for a total of 180 respondents.

## Research Setting

South Dakota is a state of approximately 700,000 people with 66 counties. Two counties, Todd and Shannon, are not included in this study because they contract with adjoining counties for administrative services. Counties play an important service provision role in South Dakota where, according to the 1990 census, twenty-nine counties have fewer than 5,000 residents. At the other extreme, in the two counties with over 80,000 people (Minnehaha County [Sioux Falls] and Pennington County [Rapid City]), urban sprawl presents a different set of problems. These problems, as well as those faced by less populated counties, must be addressed within the confines of a governmental structure established over 80 years ago. Despite criticisms of costs and inefficiency, there has been a reluctance to alter county government administration and powers. This reluctance stems in large part from rural county residents who, having depended so long on county government for major services, do not want to give up the current system for one that might not provide them with the same access and control.

South Dakota, like many less populated states, has developed sectional differences. In South Dakota's case, the major split is between the counties east (44 counties) and west of the Missouri River (22 counties). In part, the split is agriculturally based: farming (East River) and ranching (West River) areas. Although Rapid City (Pennington County), the state's second largest city is in the West River region, there is a feeling that East River counties and Sioux Falls dominate politics and control state resources. West River tends to vote solid Republican (except for the Native American counties) while East River counties are more evenly divided between the two political parties (Clem 1992).

Another way to analyze the differences between the two regions is to refer to Elazar's (1966) political culture typology. South Dakota is classified as a moralistic-individualistic state. The east, especially northeastern South Dakota, is similar to Minnesota both in its ethnic background and in its historical links to the reform movement and to values of moralistic subcultures. Western South Dakota, this theory has argued, exemplifies an individualistic subculture with its emphasis on minimal reliance on government. Finally, the two regions differ in that four of the Indian reservations are located completely or partly in West River counties. This situation creates complex jurisdictional and socioeconomic problems that fewer East River counties have to face.

## Characteristics of County Officials

The officials in this survey are white and predominantly women. There are no minority officials although South Dakota has an 8 percent minority population, primarily Native American. Over thirty-two percent of the Native American population in the state is in Todd and Shannon counties, which do not provide their own administrative services although they have their own county commissioners. In addition, Native Americans identify much more closely with elected tribal officials who form the governing body on each of the seven reservations located in the state. Therefore, minority representation in county government has been, and remains, minimal at best.

Of the 192 officials, 155 are women. Women overwhelmingly have dominated these three positions since the 1960s. Prior to that time, when women were much more likely to stay in the home, most of these positions were held by men. As women began to take positions outside the home, they were attracted to the clerical responsibilities available in the local courthouses. When elected positions became vacant, the experienced clerks became the logical choice of voters as the new county officials. Today, especially in the rural areas, most men are employed in the area of agriculture, leaving these elected county positions open to women interested in a steady income. This income often is used to support the unstable family income derived from agricultural endeavors (Pfeifle 1993).

These officials are relatively well educated with 44 percent having at least some college and only 1.7 percent reporting less than a high school education. In terms of careers, almost 70 percent have served their county either in this position or another governmental position for over five years. One third have been in their current positions for over 13 years. Finally, almost 46 percent (86 people) make the minimum salary mandated by state law, \$20,689. The highest salaries, those over \$30,000, are made by the six officials in the urban counties, Pennington County (Rapid City) and Minnehaha County (Sioux Falls).

## How Officials Rate the Quality of Life in South Dakota Counties

Asking quality-of-life questions allows these officials to express their concerns both as citizens and as public officials who share in a small way governmental responsibility for shaping the community environment. County officials were asked thirteen questions concerning their perceptions about the quality of life in their counties. Table 1 indicates that the overall quality of life in South Dakota counties is rated high. Only 4 percent felt that overall quality of life was poor or very poor. Likewise when asked to evaluate their

**Table 1. Quality of Life Evaluations**

*Much has been said about the quality of life in South Dakota. How would you evaluate your county in the following areas . . . [Response categories: 1. Very Poor, 2. Somewhat Poor, 3. Good, 4. Very Good.]*

	Number (%) of Officials Answering . . .			
	Very Poor	Somewhat Poor	Good	Very Good
Place to Raise Children	0 (0.0)	3 (1.6)	58 (31.9)	121 (66.5)
Fire Protection	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)	76 (41.8)	105 (57.7)
Overall Quality	0 (0.0)	7 (3.8)	94 (51.6)	81 (44.5)
Public Education	0 (0.0)	13 (7.2)	96 (53.3)	71 (39.4)
Community Spirit	2 (1.1)	24 (13.3)	85 (47.0)	70 (38.7)
Water Quality/Quantity	11 (6.0)	25 (13.7)	80 (44.0)	66 (36.3)
Police Protection	1 (.5)	15 (8.2)	105 (57.7)	61 (33.5)
Parks and Rec.	6 (3.3)	18 (9.9)	105 (57.7)	53 (29.1)
General Care Physicians	10 (5.6)	33 (18.4)	97 (54.2)	39 (21.8)
Hospital Services	27 (15.3)	31 (17.5)	83 (46.9)	36 (20.3)
Waste Disposal	8 (4.5)	34 (19.1)	105 (59.0)	31 (17.4)
Streets and Roads	10 (5.6)	43 (24.0)	106 (59.2)	20 (11.2)
Housing Availability	14 (7.7)	73 (40.3)	84 (46.4)	10 (5.5)

\*Frequencies vary because not all officials answered all questions.

county as a place to raise children, over 98 percent said that their county was a good or very good place to raise children. The public education offered by schools in the counties was also ranked very good or good by over 91 percent of the respondents. Ninety-one percent of the officials also felt that the protection provided by their police was good or very good.

One area that is very important both locally and nationally is health care. Many officials in our study responded to two questions in this area with "poor" or "very poor" answers. In response to the question asking them to evaluate hospital services in their counties, nearly 33 percent of county officials felt that these services were somewhat poor or very poor. In addition, 24 percent of the respondents felt that general care physician availability was poor or very poor. Several factors contribute to the lack of physicians in small, rural communities. Non-competitive salaries, long hours, inadequate medical facilities, and lack of educational and cultural opportunities have encouraged the outmigration of quality physicians who do not return after receiving an education.

In areas such as housing, waste management, conditions of roads, and water quality, there were also numerous negative responses. Over 48 percent

of the respondents indicated that the availability of housing was poor. Nearly 30 percent also felt that the quality of roads was poor or very poor. Almost 24 percent of these officials rated waste disposal practices as poor or very poor. Finally, with discussion taking place statewide on water development funding, nearly 20 percent of county officials felt that water quality is poor or very poor.

### Explaining Perceptions of County Quality of Life

We performed regression analyses to see what factors affect public officials' evaluations of the quality of life in their counties. Three personal characteristics variables were used. The number of years in office was used to examine the effect of experience and observation on these officials' perceptions of county living conditions. The educational level of the official also was used as an independent variable. We would expect that those who have had at least some college would be more aware of conditions elsewhere and perhaps more willing to recognize the limitations of their own counties. The original four-category education variable was dichotomized into those with high school educations or below (coded 0) and those with educations above high school (coded 1). Finally, we used the specific position of the county official. We expected to find that auditors and treasurers, two sets of officials most aware of shrinking financial resources, were much more negative about the quality of life in their counties than registers of deeds. We created dummy variables for auditor and treasurer.<sup>1</sup>

County characteristics include the population (1990 census) and East/West River county distinctions. We speculated that officials in more populated counties would be more positive because such counties would have more resources, both governmental and private, available to provide specific quality-of-life items (county property valuation and per capita income were both strongly correlated with population). We expected West River county officials to give lower ratings because of the difficulties existing under the dual jurisdiction make-up of West River counties and because of the longstanding perception that eastern counties dominate state politics and resources.

As Table 2 shows, the factors most consistently affecting quality-of-life evaluations are population and the geographic split between East and West River counties. As we expected, officials in the East River counties are much more positive about living conditions. These positive evaluations (and conversely negative evaluations from West River county officials) include both a general "community spirit" issue and specific items such as police, water, parks and recreation, health facilities, streets and roads, and housing.

**Table 2. Regression Results for Quality of Life Evaluations (Betas)**

	Auditor	Treasurer	Years in Office	Education	Population	East*
Quality of Life	-.04	.06	-.11	-.17***	.16***	.09
		<i>Model F</i> = 2.28		<i>sig. F</i> = .04	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .08	
Hospital Services	-.01	.16***	-.11	-.09	.34***	.17***
		<i>Model F</i> = 6.32		<i>sig. F</i> = .01	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .19	
Physicians	.03	.17***	-.13**	-.01	.30***	.13**
		<i>Model F</i> = 4.64		<i>sig. F</i> = .01	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .14	
Police Protection	-.05	-.03	.05	-.06	.16***	.15***
		<i>Model F</i> = 1.71		<i>sig. F</i> = .12	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .06	
Public Education	.12	-.01	.02	-.12	.07	.10
		<i>Model F</i> = 1.34		<i>sig. F</i> = .24	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .05	
Place to Raise Children	.06	.02	.04	-.10	.04	.18***
		<i>Model F</i> = 1.58		<i>sig. F</i> = .15	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .05	
Community Spirit	.05	.01	.01	-.08	.04	.15***
		<i>Model F</i> = 1.62		<i>sig. F</i> = .41	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .03	
Parks and Recreation	-.02	.05	-.09	-.18***	.21***	.25***
		<i>Model F</i> = 5.08		<i>sig. F</i> = .01	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .15	
Fire Protection	-.05	.01	-.11	-.23***	.05	.07
		<i>Model F</i> = 2.09		<i>sig. F</i> = .06	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .06	
Water Quality/Quantity	.18***	.15**	-.21***	-.07	.06	.19***
		<i>Model F</i> = 3.44		<i>sig. F</i> = .01	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .11	
Waste Disposal	.07	.11	-.26***	-.21***	.06	.06
		<i>Model F</i> = 3.21		<i>sig. F</i> = .01	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .10	
Streets	.14**	-.08	-.01	-.25***	.05	.30***
		<i>Model F</i> = 6.60		<i>sig. F</i> = .01	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .19	
Housing Availability	.09	-.01	.10	-.11	.08	.18***
		<i>Model F</i> = 2.17		<i>sig. F</i> = .05	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .07	

\*East = dichotomous variable. West River counties coded 0, East River counties coded 1.

\*\*p ≤ .10; \*\*\*p ≤ .05

Officials in populated counties are more positive about the overall quality of life in their counties, police protection, parks and recreation, physician care, hospital services, streets and roads, water quality and quantity, and housing. The lower evaluations of living conditions given by officials in rural counties reflect, we think, their awareness of fewer resources leading to greater dissatisfaction with many areas of life in their counties.

Of the personal variables, how long an official has lived in the county has a negative effect on evaluations of living conditions in the issue areas of waste disposal, water quantity/quality, and physician availability. Given the attention paid to these topics by officials on other governmental levels and by the media, it is not surprising that those in office the longest are more sensitive to the discrepancies between what their county has and what they feel it should have. Education does have, as we expected it would, a negative effect on quality of life evaluations. Those with less education are more positive about both general and specific items, particularly parks and recreation, fire protection, waste disposal, streets and roads, and overall quality of life. Finally, the officials' positions have little effect on quality of life evaluations. Contrary to expectations, treasurers are significantly more positive than are registers about health services and water quantity/quality. Likewise, auditors are significantly more likely than are registers to rate water quantity/quality and streets and roads positively. One possible explanation is that those with financial responsibilities are the most likely to "put a good face" on how their counties are handling these well publicized issue areas.

### Major Problems Faced by County Governments

These officials were asked an open-ended question about the major problem facing their counties. According to Table 3, twenty-five percent of the officials listed property taxes, including tax increases and equalization specifically, as major problems. Property taxes are vital sources of local governmental revenue (according to Peterson [1993] they provide 75 percent of all local government tax revenues nationwide). Because state law does not give counties the opportunity to increase revenues from sales taxes commonly used by municipalities, the dependence on, and conflict over, local property taxes will continue.

Almost twenty percent listed community development issues—maintaining the population base and taxpayer numbers and jobs and industry concerns—as major problems. Rural flight has had a significant impact on rural county population. The lack of job opportunities in rural areas has forced young people to seek employment in cities and neighboring states. Fifty-one (or 80 percent) of the 64 counties in this study lost population between 1980

**Table 3. Major Problems Facing South Dakota Counties**

Topic	Number of Specific Mentions		Total Mentions	
Property Taxes			38	(24.5%)
General	17	(11.0%)		
Tax Increase	16	(10.3%)		
Equalization	5	(3.2%)		
Community Development			31	(19.9%)
General	1	(0.6%)		
Population Loss	12	(7.7%)		
Lack of Jobs/Industry	18	(11.6%)		
Administration			28	(18.0%)
General	1	(0.6%)		
Lack of Cooperation with Commissioners	3	(1.9%)		
Rising Costs of Service Provision	17	(11.0%)		
Tribal Relations	7	(4.5%)		
Quality of Life			21	(13.6%)
Housing	1	(0.6%)		
Education	10	(6.5%)		
Health Care	4	(2.6%)		
Roads and Bridges	6	(3.9%)		
Federal and State Mandates			20	(13.0%)
General	8	(5.2%)		
Solid Waste	10	(6.5%)		
ADA	2	(1.3%)		
Agriculture			9	(5.8%)
Drought	1	(0.6%)		
Farm Commodity Prices	6	(3.9%)		
Water Development	2	(1.3%)		
Criminal Justice			8	(5.1%)
General	1	(0.6%)		
Detention	3	(1.9%)		
Court Costs	4	(2.6%)		

Note: Percents are based on an *n* of 155 respondents who named a problem.

and 1990. Ten of the 13 counties gaining population in the decade are among the 15 most populous counties. These counties, like their rural counterparts, worry about job opportunities although their development concerns also center on problems presented by an increasing and diverse population.

Eighteen percent of the respondents cited administrative issues as major problems. Among these administrative issues was finding money to continue providing services (7 percent listed this issue). Other concerns were staffing and funding and working with the county commissioners. An administrative problem unique to South Dakota, but listed by 4 percent of the officials, is tribal relations. Over the years, the provisions of treaties have fallen short of addressing issues such as law enforcement responsibilities, highway and bridge maintenance, and property tax collection.

Fourteen percent listed quality of life issues as problems—specifically education, housing, health care, county roads, and gambling. Interestingly, there appears to be a lack of correspondence between the quality of life evaluations and the listing of major problems. For example, housing and health issues were rated as poor by a substantial number of these officials although they were not listed as major problems by more than a handful of people (only one person listed housing as a major problem and only four listed health care as a major problem). Likely, the officials considered their personal views as county residents when they responded to quality of life questions while they answered the "major problem" questions as county government officials who must then address the problems.

Although state and federal mandates are seen as problems nationally, only 13 percent of these officials cited mandates as major problems for their counties. It is likely that the nature of these officials' positions does not require that they directly develop policy to address mandates as county commissioners must do. For example, only 2 of the 20 people who listed mandates as a major problem cited the Americans with Disabilities Act although there has been wide discussion of the impact that this legislation will have on governments. Ten people mentioned solid waste mandates as a major concern. Counties have played a major role in maintaining landfills for several decades. As a result of the federal government's Subtitle D mandate on the operation of landfills, many counties have chosen to remove themselves from the solid waste arena. The closure requirements on landfills have become heavily regulated nationwide, and state mandates include costly soil, water, and air quality testing with existing landfill operations. Agriculture issues were listed as major problems by only 6 percent of these officials. Criminal justice issues were listed by 5 percent.

### Explaining Perceptions of Major Problems

We applied the same explanatory variables used in the analyses of the quality-of-life evaluations to the seven major problem categories listed in

Table 4. Logistic Regression Results for Major Problem Categories

	Auditor	Trea- surer	Years in Office	Educ- ation	Popu- lation	East*
Property Tax	-.13	1.01*** <i>Model x<sup>2</sup> = 16.00</i>	-.05*	-.99*** <i>sig. x<sup>2</sup> = .01</i>	-.01***	-.01
Community Development	-.16	.28 <i>Model x<sup>2</sup> = 18.19</i>	.02	.45 <i>sig. x<sup>2</sup> = .01</i>	-.01	2.35***
Administration	-.15	-.05 <i>Model x<sup>2</sup> = 5.44</i>	.01	.36 <i>sig. x<sup>2</sup> = .49</i>	.01	-.84***
Quality of Life	.09	-.71 <i>Model x<sup>2</sup> = 7.81</i>	.05	-.08 <i>sig. x<sup>2</sup> = .25</i>	-.01	-.24
Mandates	.48	-.97 <i>Model x<sup>2</sup> = 8.47</i>	.01	.74 <i>sig. x<sup>2</sup> = .21</i>	-.01	.45
Agriculture	-.49	-1.71 <i>Model x<sup>2</sup> = 18.43</i>	-.03	-1.39 <i>sig. x<sup>2</sup> = .01</i>	-.01	-2.18***
Criminal Justice	.08	-.30 <i>Model x<sup>2</sup> = 1.42</i>	-.02	.67 <i>sig. x<sup>2</sup> = .96</i>	.01	-.19

\*East = dichotomous variable. West River counties coded 0, East River counties coded 1.

\*\*p ≤ .10; \*\*\*p ≤ .05

n = 155

Table 3. Since the seven dependent variables in this analysis are dichotomous—i.e., whether or not officials name a category of issues as a major problem—we used logistic regression. Table 4 gives the results of this analysis.

Because the dependent variables are highly skewed, providing further explanation is very difficult. Indeed, four of the models are not significant. However, certain patterns do emerge in some areas. Regional differences play a significant role in three problem areas. Officials in West River counties see agriculture issues as major problems. West River county officials, who must deal with jurisdictional issues and with administration of a large geographic area, also are more likely to view administration as a major problem. East River counties, faced with expansion as the farming and ranching populations continue to decline, cite development problems.

Population size also plays a role. The smaller the county, the more likely taxation is seen as a major problem.

There is one model in which the personal characteristics of these officials play a role. People who have been in office a shorter time are more likely to regard property taxes as problems. We think this may reflect self-interest on the part of officials because newer officials are more vulnerable electorally and therefore more likely to be concerned with the effect of tax hikes on their reelection hopes. The less education an official has, the more likely s/he is to cite property taxes as a major problem in the county. Finally, treasurers, who must collect taxes, are more likely than auditors or registers of deeds to see taxes as a major county problem.

### Conclusion

Through the data collected from the survey responses, we have a better understanding of the way in which officials from diverse counties view their environment. We believe the perceptions we have observed are similar to those of officials in other less populated states. The personal characteristics of these officials help us to understand their reluctance for change on the county level. Nearly 50 percent of the officials have served the county in a non-elected county position prior to the current position, and 70 percent have served their county for over ten years. This longevity is generally beneficial to counties in that it provides governmental stability. Such long tenure, on the other hand, also indicates a strong affinity for the status quo both on issues of how counties presently carry out their current responsibilities and on the broader issue of government organization itself. Government officials themselves are thus very unlikely to support county government reform on efficiency arguments alone, particularly if such reform includes the loss of government positions.

When asked to evaluate their counties, an overwhelming majority of these officials responded that quality of life in general was good or very good, and that their county was a good place to raise children. In addition, over 90 percent rated their police protection and public education as good or very good. Considering the length of time the respondents have lived in and been officials of these counties, such community pride is expected. At the same time, they evaluated the quality of medical facilities, infrastructure issues, housing, waste disposal—all issues given attention not only in South Dakota but nationally—as less than ideal.

The specific problems cited by these officials are also like those cited by both the general public and local government officials across the country. Many respondents felt that property taxes are the major problem in their

counties. This is not surprising given the public aversion nationally to taxation. This problem may have received additional recognition due to the fact that in South Dakota, county officials serve tax collectors for all political subdivisions and thus have first-hand experience with the concerns of the taxpayers. Many of the officials listed population loss and lack of jobs and industry as major problems. These areas are directly linked with property tax concerns as the decline of commercial and industrial property produces a tax shift onto residential and agricultural land taxpayers. Other problems cited very much reflected the problems faced by local governments nationwide—costs of government service provision (including education), mandates, and infrastructure issues.

When we evaluate why officials varied in their responses to quality of life questions and problem areas, we recognize that, in South Dakota as in other rural states, officials are a rather homogeneous group whose views do not differ dramatically. We would expect that personal characteristics would have more impact on the attitudes of a more diverse group. What differences do show up consistently are influenced largely by the environment. There is an interesting juxtaposition of positions taken in the evaluations of problems and quality of life based on the two environmental variables. Growth and increasing urbanization clearly produce an active combination of both increased benefits and costs. While officials from more populated areas and from East River counties registered concern over taxation and community development, they also are more positive than their rural county and West River counterparts about the basic amenities of life that their counties are able to provide. The greater difficulties of providing for the needs of the people in rural counties and in West River counties in turn affect overall evaluations of living conditions.

Given the lack of emphasis on rural areas by academics and practitioners alike, rural dissatisfaction and resentment can only continue to build unless state and national policies allow for recognition of the concerns of the nation's 60-plus million rural people. Equally important is the variation within urban or rural environments. Researchers tend to lump all urban or rural areas together. Clearly, the development of policies to provide for the basic needs of the people must recognize not only rural-urban differences but also the socioeconomic differences within each large category.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>We ran alternative analyses substituting gender for position. Women and men did not hold differing views on the questions asked.

## REFERENCES

- Campbell, Angus, Philip Converse, and W. Rodgers. 1976. *The quality of American Life: Perceptions, Values, and Satisfaction*. New York: Sage.
- Clem, Alan L. 1992. The 1992 Election in South Dakota. *Public Affairs*, 102. Vermillion: USD Governmental Research Bureau.
- DeSantis, Victor. 1992. Salaries of County Officials for 1992. *The Municipal Yearbook*. Washington, DC: International City Manager's Association.
- Elazar, Daniel. 1966. *American Federalism: A View from the States*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell.
- Hughey, Joseph B. and John W. Bardo. 1987. Social Psychological Dimensions of Community Satisfaction and Quality of Life: Some Obtained Relations. *Psychological Reports* 61: 239-246.
- Marando, Vincent L. and Robert D. Thomas. 1977. *The Forgotten Governments: County Commissioners as Policymakers*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.
- Peterson, John E. 1993. Local Government's Fiscal Recovery: Don't Count on Property Taxes. *Governing* 6: 58.
- Pfeifle, Lenore. 1993. *Personal Interview*. Pierre, SD.
- Schneider, Mark and Kee Ok Park. 1989. Metropolitan Counties as Service Delivery Agents: The Still Forgotten Governments. *Public Administration Review* 49: 345-352.
- Streib, Gregory and William L. Waugh. 1991a. The Changing Responsibilities of County Governments: Data from a National Survey of County Leaders. *American Review of Public Administration* 21: 139-154.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991b. Probing the Limits of County Reform in an Era of Scarcity: A National Survey of County Administrators and Executives. *Public Administration Quarterly* 15: 378-392.
- Sylvester, Kathleen. 1989. All Localities Shall. *Governing* 2: 26-30.