



# The Latest Research

As discussed above, the Great Recession had an enormous and potentially long-lasting impact on public agencies. Most obviously, public-sector payrolls shrank as states and localities shed hundreds of thousands of employees in an attempt to keep the books balanced. By 2014 that exodus was tapering off, but it was clear that things were not just going to return to the way they were. The big question, of course, was what was going to happen? Would agencies stay lean and try to keep doing with less? Would they engage in more contracting out? Would the shattered traditional notion of a secure government-sector job make it more difficult for agencies to recruit the best and the brightest into careers in public service? What about representation—did the massive disruption in employment leave bureaucracies more or less representative of the constituencies they serve? These are big questions that social scientists have been busily studying, and the research reviewed below offers some perspective on what the answers might be.

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• **Levine, Heliss, and Eric Scorsone.** "The Great Recession's Institutional Change in the Public

*Employment Relationship: Implications for State and Local Governments."* *State and Local Government Review* 43 (2011): 208–214.

The Great Recession made the pay and benefits of public employees a white-hot political issue. Rightly or wrongly, government employees were sometimes accused of being more insulated from economic problems than were their counterparts in the private sector. This chapter discussed the bitter fights that broke out in Wisconsin and Ohio over labor relations in the public sector, fights that were repeated on a less heated scale in many states and localities. Does all this mean that the public labor sector is undergoing a dramatic and long-term shift? If so, what does it imply? Levine and Scorsone take a crack at answering these questions. They conclude that the Great Recession has brought about one of the biggest changes in public employment in 50 years. The fallout of that change is probably lower pay and fewer benefits for government employees. As a result, public agencies of the future may struggle to attract a high-quality labor pool, which may in turn have implications for the quality if not the cost of public goods and services.

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