



# The Latest Research

Local government in the United States is organized for a 19th century social and economic environment, not for its 21st century equivalent. As this chapter has made crystal clear, we have many local governments, often crammed into the same metropolitan area, all making decisions that affect one another and the broader region with varying levels of cooperation and coordination. While there is more-or-less universal agreement on these points, there is less agreement on what a 21st century model of local governance should look like. Should it involve more city-county consolidation and a move to true regional governments, like Portland's Metro? Or do we want less centralization and more fragmentation, a concentrated effort to create a flexible and efficient market for public services along the lines of the Tiebout model? As the studies described below suggest, the latest research on these questions gives conflicting answers.

- **Faulk, Dagney, and Georg Grassmueck.** "City-County Consolidation and Local Government

Expenditures." *State and Local Government Review* 44 (2012): 196–205.

One of the central arguments for reducing the number of local governments is efficiency. Supporters say consolidation can make government more efficient and less costly by eliminating duplication of services and increasing economies of scale. This argument has taken on particular resonance during the past half-decade, as cash-strapped local governments have begun dusting off old consolidation proposals and debating whether they might offer an obvious means to do more with less. Yet evidence for the promised cost savings of consolidation is pretty mixed. This study is worth noting because of its powerful comparative-method research design. Faulk and Grassmueck examine two groups of cities and counties: One group consolidated, and the other considered but ultimately rejected consolidation. This allows them to make an apples-to-apples comparison of local government expenditures. The key finding of this study is actually a nonfinding: There was no difference in