

discussed politics more frequently, and only slight evidence that the group that was required to vote in order to collect its \$25 paid more attention to radio, television, or newspapers during the campaign.

Political scientists who have called for compulsory voting to motivate more citizens to participate in the electoral process should go back to the drawing board, the authors say. Evidently, even financial incentives are not sufficient to make the nonvoter learn more about politics.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Spoon-Fed Ideology

THE SOURCE: "Indoctrination U.? Faculty Ideology and Changes in Student Political Orientation" by Mack D. Mariani and Gordon J. Hewitt, in *Political Science and Politics*, Oct. 2008.

ARE LIBERAL COLLEGE PROFESSORS indoctrinating a generation of innocent college students? The perceived left-wing bias of the professoriate has inspired a push in state legislatures to enact an "Academic Bill of Rights" to protect students from being propagandized. Turns out, according to Mack D. Mariani and Gordon J. Hewitt, that students all along haven't been buying it.

There is little question, write Mariani, a political scientist at Xavier University in Cincinnati, and Hewitt, assistant dean at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, that college faculties tilt liberal. In a survey by the Higher Education Research Institute, about 53 percent of professors identified themselves

as liberal or far left, while only 16 percent said they are conservative or far right. By contrast, 25 percent of Americans surveyed in the 2004 American National Election Study said they were left of center, and 41 percent said they were to the right.

Mariani and Hewitt studied the responses of 6,807 students to questions about political orientation when they entered college as freshmen and three years later, when they were seniors. The researchers took the ideological temperature of faculties at different institutions using a similar political orientation question included in the Higher Education Research Institute survey. They reasoned that if the indoctrination problem were real, students at the institutions with the most liberal faculties would be more likely to switch their political allegiance from right to left. They saw "little evidence that this is the case."

Overall, Mariani and Hewitt found that 57 percent of students didn't budge in their political orientation during their four years. About 27 percent moved to the left and 16 percent to the right. That was a net swing of about 10 percent to the left, but the authors say this merely moved the students closer to the normal spectrum of views among 18-to-24-year-olds. They found that women were more likely to move left than men, but this too brought them in line with the national averages. Students from well-off families were more likely to move rightward.

The bottom line shouldn't come as a surprise: Professors' political notions don't make a big impression on their students.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Local Government Colossus

THE SOURCE: "Attempted Merger" by Josh Goodman, in *Governing*, Nov. 2008.

NEW YORK CITY HAS 1.1 million pupils in a single school jurisdiction. The entire state of Maine has only 200,000 students in 290 districts. Last year, Democratic governor John Baldacci and the Maine legislature required that school boards consolidate. The goal was to reduce their number to 80. It's been a tough sell.

Maine is only one of a number of demographically challenged states to promote consolidations among its school districts, townships, counties, villages, cities, and library boards. Indiana governor Mitch Daniels, a Republican, has proposed doing away with township government, slashing the number of library districts, and forcing school district consolidations. New Jersey governor Jon Corzine, a Democrat, has proposed eliminating state aid for towns with fewer than 5,000 residents. New York and Ohio are looking at similar proposals. Iowa tried to push consolidation but failed. Nebraska and Arkansas merged school districts, but only after years of fighting.

From the vantage point of the state capitals, the hundreds of small governmental units scattered across the land are inefficient, unwieldy, and confusing. State officials in Maine believe that school consolidation alone could save \$36 million as

larger districts more efficiently employ a single superintendent, special education coordinator, or even art teacher or computer lab. But at the local level, the benefits seem abstract and largely unproven, the drawbacks, real and personal. Indiana's effort to eliminate townships, for example, would retire more than 5,000 officials, all popular enough to get elected, often over and over again.

A tense debate is under way

between states and localities, writes Josh Goodman, a staff writer for *Governing*, over what local government should look like. The local pride that comes from having your own school district or township isn't worth the higher taxes that result from inefficient or duplicative services, say many state officials. But any possible savings from consolidation aren't worth the cost of losing control of your own school, tax assessor, or emergency rescue unit, say many residents.

Given fierce opposition to mergers, almost all states have offered both carrots and sticks. Maine extends logistical assistance to school districts to work out consolidations. Indiana wants to create a state office to provide technical assistance to local governments. In the push for marriages of convenience between governments, most localities need prenuptial counseling to make them work—and a few financial handouts don't hurt either.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The Price of Salvation

THE SOURCE: "Changing the Rules: State Mortgage Foreclosure Moratoria During the Great Depression" by David C. Wheelock, in Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis *Review*, Nov.–Dec. 2008.

THE MORTGAGE BANKERS Association announced some bad news in December: Seven in every 100 homeowners had fallen behind in their house payments, and another three were in foreclosure. It was a modern record, but hardly in the same league as rates during the Great Depression. On New Year's Day 1934, about half of all urban home mortgages were delinquent. And during the previous 12 months, nearly four percent of farm owners had lost their land to foreclosure.

The 1930s farm crisis, etched in memory by photographs of crowded foreclosure auctions with a faded barn in the background, seemed to have a particularly strong effect. During an 18-month period starting in

1933, writes David C. Wheelock, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 27 states limited or halted foreclosures. Pressure for moratoria was strongest in the Midwest and other regions with large rural populations.

The laws ranged from temporary prohibitions on foreclosures to bans on "deficiency judgments," which were rulings that enabled a lender to require mortgage holders to pay the difference between their debt and the price their devalued land fetched at auction. Some states gave former landowners up to two years to

Mortgage delinquency rates are bad, but not nearly as bad (yet) as they were during the Great Depression.

redeem farms lost to foreclosure, and others allowed some families to stay on their former property as renters.

In the short run the foreclosure legislation redistributed wealth, favoring borrowers over lenders. It saved some farmers from failure, and it gave the economy time to recover while the federal government initiated programs to refinance delinquent mortgages. It prevented wholesale evictions that "might have seriously endangered basic interests of society," according to a government report at the time.

In the longer run, however, the legislation did "impose costs on future borrowers," Wheelock writes. Previous economic studies have found that private lenders made "significantly fewer loans in states that imposed moratoria and tended to charge higher rates on the loans they did make." During the Great Depression, about half the states decided that the immediate cost to society of widespread foreclosures was greater than the danger of costs later on. Nonetheless, he concludes, the relief legislation transferred at least some of the pain to future borrowers.