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Values & Beliefs

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What values are common to residents of the metroscape?.
Although public officials might neither ask nor answer this question out loud, their unspoken assumptions about their community's values influence discussions and negotiations regarding a variety of regional public policy issues.

As we've discussed in previous issues of *Metroscape*, there are several factors that make a compelling case for the importance of regional collaboration regarding a number of economic and social policy issues. However, policymakers may wonder whether regional collaboration comes with a cost—a devolution of decision making to a power structure at a greater distance from the voters and their values and beliefs. Elected leaders may wonder whether the values and beliefs of their local constituents can be sufficiently aligned with those of other jurisdictions in order to find a compromise that allows for collaboration without sacrificing the character, preferences, tastes, and vision of each unique community.

The results of a recent survey make the case that voters across the region value many of the same things; therefore, regional collaboration can be achieved without compromises in values. These results also suggest that there may be differences in how we reach our goals and mechanisms to achieve the vision for the future that we collectively share. The hard work of collaboration takes place in crafting solutions that drive us toward a common vision for the future, while maintaining the sense of distinctiveness that generates pride in our local communities.

In 2014, organizations in southwest Washington (Community Foundation of Southwest Washington, Washington State University–Vancouver, Clark College, Northwest Health Foundation, AHA!, Oregon Public Broadcasting, the Columbian, and the United Way of the Columbia Willamette) led an effort to engage residents in a dialogue about the community's future. The first step of the project, named 500,000 Voices of Southwest Washington, was to understand the basic values and beliefs of the community. One of the objectives of the project was to allow for comparisons to the Oregon side of the metropolitan region.

The partners engaged DHM Research, the same firm that designed and implemented the Oregon Values and Beliefs survey (most recently completed in 2013), and selected a series of questions very similar to that asked of Oregon voters, allowing comparison between the two states. The charts and discussion that follow are based on the results of the 2014 survey in southwest Washington, compared to the 2013 Oregon Values and Beliefs survey.

A total of 673 people responded to the southwest Washington survey by phone and online. The Oregon Values and Beliefs survey results are based on responses from 709 people from the three metropolitan counties (Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington). The southwest Washington survey's margin of error is +/- 3.8 percent. We show the margins of error, in some of the charts, in order to remind the reader to be careful about drawing conclusions about differences between the two groups, particularly where the estimate is within the margin of error.

SURVEY RESULTS

Why do we value our community?

The first question of the survey asks "What do you value about living in your community?" The most common response to this open-ended question (figure 1) among respondents in both Washington and Oregon was the friendliness or neighborliness of the community. Allowing for the margin of error, there is no significant difference between the percentage of respondents in either survey who noted friendliness or neighborliness as an important part of what they value in their community. Oregonians were, however, more likely to cite scenic beauty and weather as important aspects of what they value about Oregon, while respondents in southwest Washington were more likely to value safety, a small community, and a quiet and peaceful community.
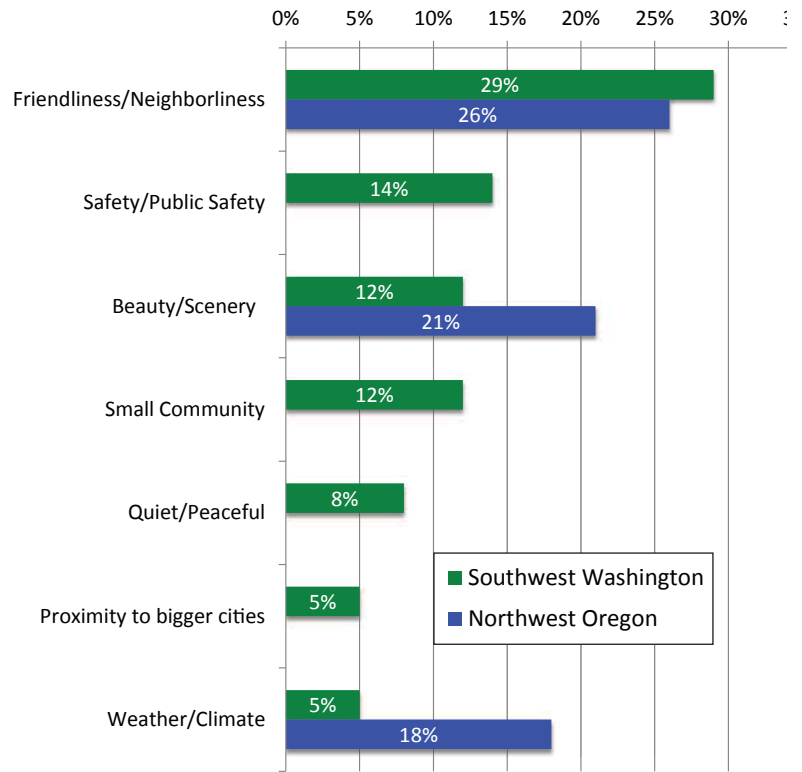
What are our most important priorities for local government?

The survey also asked respondents to name "the most important issue that you want your local government officials to do something about." The open-ended responses, shown in figure 2, demonstrate very few statistical differences between Oregonian and Washingtonian respondents within the metropolitan region. Our populations are similarly concerned with the economy and jobs, road infrastructure, and government leadership and corruption. However, it appears Washingtonians would like government to take action on crime and drug abuse, while Oregonians more urgently want their local government to "do something" about government spending and taxation. As other survey responses indicate, the "something" that Oregonians want done might differ from the action that Washingtonians are looking for.
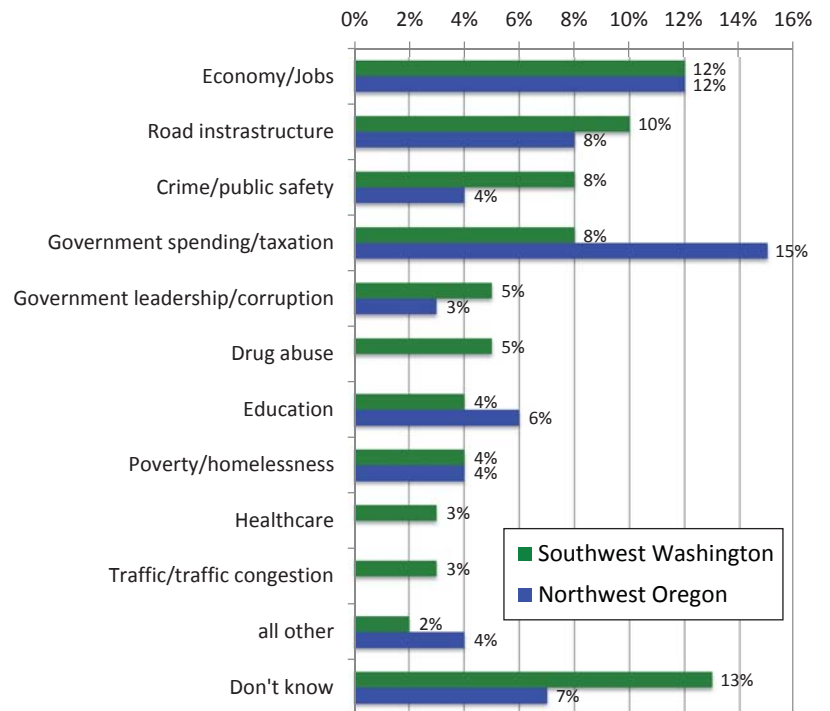
Figure 1. *Why do we value our community?*

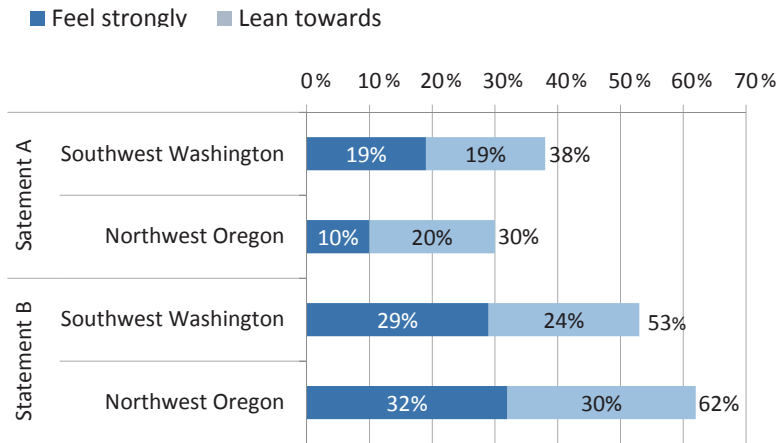Figure 2. *What are our most important priorities for local government?*

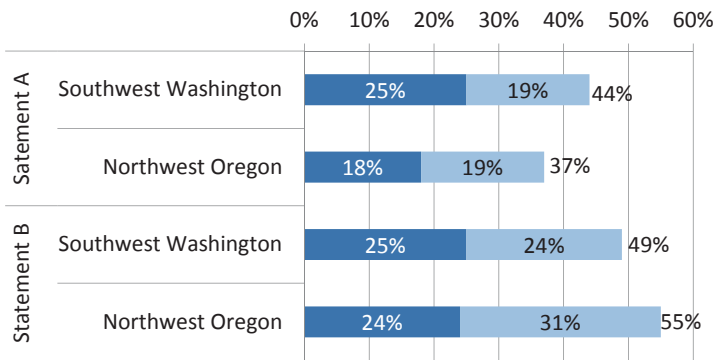Figure 3. *Do we put greater priority on the economy or the environment?*

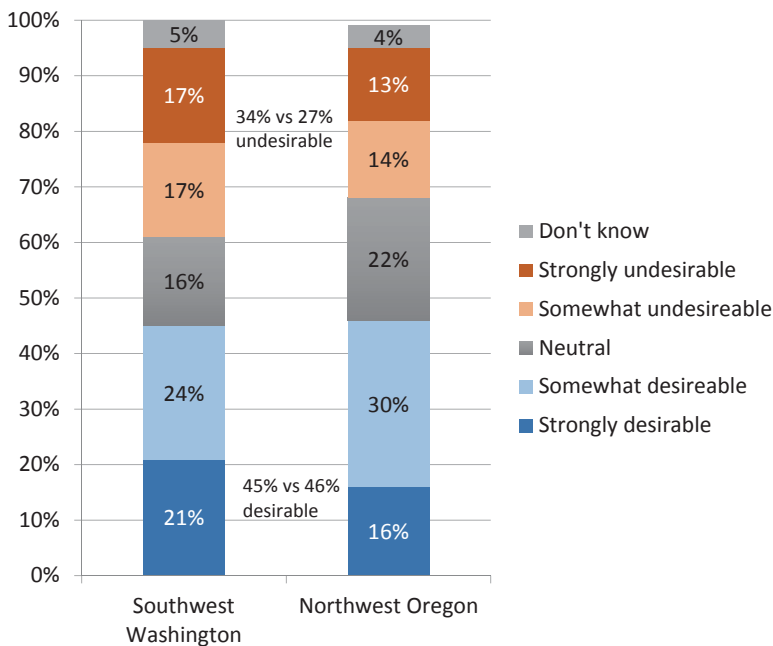Figure 4. *Should we invest in roads or transit?*

Figure 5. *Desirable/Undesirable: We should shift some funding for road and highway construction toward public transportation.*

Do we put greater priority on the economy or the environment?

Another question asked respondents to decide which of two statements they are more likely to agree with. Statement A was "Economic Growth should be given priority even if the environment suffers to some extent," and Statement B stated "Protection of the environment should be given more priority, even at the risk of slowing economic growth." As shown in figure 3, 38 percent of the southwest Washington respondents agreed with Statement A, while 30 percent of those in northwest Oregon agreed. However, a greater percentage of both groups agreed with Statement B; 54 percent of southwest Washingtonians, compared to 62 percent of northwest Oregonians. Thus, even accounting for the margins of error, metropolitan Oregonians are statistically less likely to favor Statement A and more likely to favor Statement B. Interestingly, among those who strongly favored Statement B, the differences between the Oregon and Washington responses are not statistically significant.

Should we invest in roads, transit, and climate change?

The survey asked respondents to rank tranportation priorities. Statement A stated, "We should invest more in roads for cars." Statement B declared, "We should invest more in public transit." As shown in figure 4, both groups leaned more toward Statement B. However, for southwest Washington, the differences between A and B are not statistically significant, while those

in northwest Oregon clearly favor Statement B, even accounting for the margin of error.

The results from a similar question showed little statistically significant difference between Oregon and Washington respondents. Figure 5 shows the results of a question asking respondents to say whether the following statement was strongly desirable, somewhat desirable, somewhat undesirable, or strongly undesirable: "[We should] shift some funding for road and highway construction toward public transportation, such as better bus service and high-speed rail projects." The percentages separating the two groups for each category of response are not large enough to be statistically significant. However, in both cases, the differences between desirable and undesirable were significantly different with both the Oregon and Washington respondents favoring a shift toward spending more for public transportation.

Climate change is one issue that did reveal differences between southwest Washingtonians and northwest Oregonians. Figure 6 shows how the two groups responded to the following two statements:

- Statement A, "Climate change requires us to change our way of life, such as driving less or living more simply."
- Statement B, "If climate change becomes a problem, we can deal with it later."

While both groups were more likely to agree with Statement A than Statement B, Oregonians were much more likely to agree that climate change requires changes in our lifestyles.
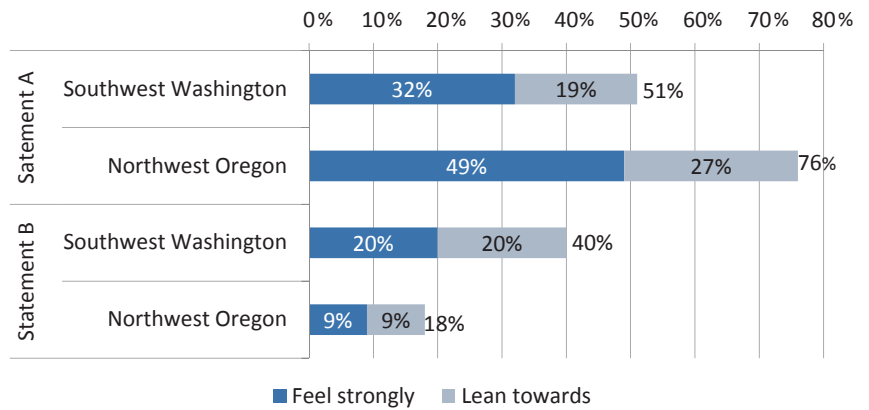

Figure 6. A: *Climate change requires us to change our way of life, such as driving less or living more simply.* B: *If climate change becomes a problem, we can deal with it later.*
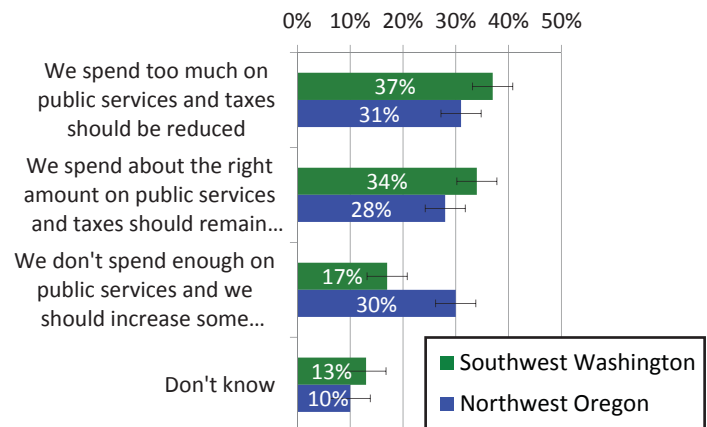

Figure 7. *We don't spend enough on public services, and we should increase some taxes.*

Attitudes Toward Taxes and Spending

Attitudes toward taxes and spending also showed minor differences between the two populations of respondents. The only statistically significant difference shown in figure 7 was in response to the statement, "We don't spend enough on public services, and we should increase some taxes." Northwest Oregonians were more likely to agree with that statement than were those in southwest Washington. This response parallels the results in figure 2, and indicates that within the metropolitan area, Oregonians were more willing to support tax increases and more likely to endorse local government spending on public programs than were Washingtonians.
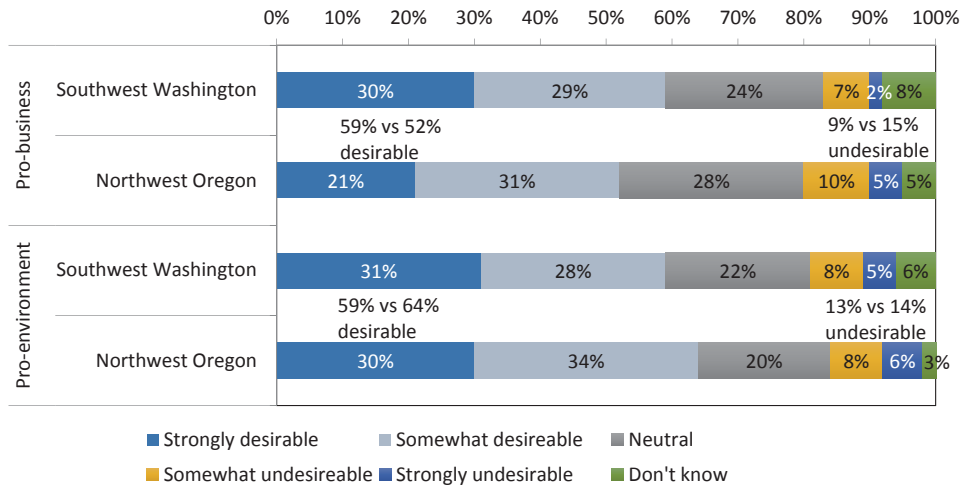
Figure 8. Desirable/undesirable: (1) *Build and communicate a pro-business attitude in local and state government*; (2) *Build and communicate a pro-environment attitude in local and state government.*

Attitudes about Economic Development and Business

The survey also inquired about attitudes regarding government policies toward economic development and business. Respondents were asked about a set of actions that government might take and whether they were strongly desirable, somewhat desirable, neutral, somewhat undesirable, or strongly undesirable. The two actions we report on in figure 8 are "Build and communicate a pro-business attitude in local and state government" and "Build and communicate a pro-environment attitude in local and state government." Fifty-nine percent of respondents in southwest Washington supported the "pro-business" position, compared to 52 percent of respondents in northwest Oregon. Fifty-nine percent of respondents in southwest Washington also supported the "pro-environment" statement, compared to 64 percent among northwest Oregonians. Once again, the differences are too small to be statistically significant. Among both groups of respondents, both a pro-business and pro-environment attitude are considered desirable, despite the fact that the positions may conflict with one another.

Observations and Conclusions

The survey results shown here reveal a great deal of similarity in the values and beliefs between the respondents from southwest Washington and northwest Oregon—from what is valued in their communities to the importance of preserving the environment. The results also reveal some differences in attitudes related to taxation and investment in government programs. These differences may play a role in how local governments respond to pressing policy issues.

There was also a difference of opinion in how southwest Washingtonians and northwest Oregonians approach the issue of climate change, with those in Oregon more willing to change their lifestyles to address this challenge. That said, the similarity between the values and beliefs of these two populations on issues as contentious as economic development and the protection of the environment isn't surprising given the region's significant social and economic connections.

These survey results suggest that although regional collaboration requires diligence in creating solutions that help us reach our common vision for our region's future, our communities' values aren't so far apart that the task is impossible. M