

FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES WITHOUT POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION: LESSONS FROM IOWA

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The importance of improving public services through a program of political consolidation is a recurring topic of discussion in Illinois. In contrast, actions taken to increase the functional integration of the service operations of independent jurisdictions do not receive the same level of attention from media, policymakers, or even scholars. We utilize a unique public archive created by the State of Iowa to disseminate information on the agreements its governments create to work with others to deliver services. Our analysis of 2,040 intergovernmental agreements formed between city and county governments between 1993 and 2020 indicates these governments utilize four general mechanisms to expand the integration of their law enforcement services. Iowa's example reveals substantial functional integration has been produced through these agreements and highlights the value of this public data archive in documenting these relationships. These findings offer important lessons for state and local policymakers in Illinois about alternatives to eliminating local governments and the benefits of supporting the compilation and dissemination of comprehensive data on shared service relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The negative impact that our large number of local governments has on the cost and quality of public services is a recurring discussion among state and local policymakers in Illinois (Walzer & Plasch, 2016; Joffe, 2019; Walzer & Blanke, 2019; Civic Federation, 2014, 2021; CMAP, 2018). Integrating service operations by eliminating separate jurisdictions governed by independent political leaders is viewed by many in state government, good government organizations, and the media as important to improving the cost, equity, and quality of local public services in the U.S. (Carr & Feiock, 2004; Leland & Thurmaier, 2014; Morse & Abernathy, 2015; Carr & Siciliano, 2019).

Political consolidation is an unusual strategy in that its infeasibility of implementation on even a small scale receives as much attention as its potential benefits (Feiock & Carr, 2001; Carr & Feiock, 2002). Decades of research in

public administration and political science have identified the many political and managerial obstacles encountered in consolidating governments that account for its infrequent adoption across the U.S. (Carr & Feiock, 2004; Leland & Thurmaier, 2014). Indeed, Walzer and Plasch (2016) note that the Governmental Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force formed by the Rauner Administration did not seek a legislative mandate for local political consolidation, even though reducing the number of local units in Illinois was a clear motivation for its creation. Instead, its recommendations largely focused on how the state legislature and agencies could reduce duplication of services through incentivizing more cooperation and additional study of the possible elimination of a few specific types of governments.

This decision acknowledges the fact that multiple paths to reducing service fragmentation exist (Carr & Feiock, 2004; Morse & Abernathy, 2015). Leland and Thurmaier (2014) observe that despite the emphasis on political consolidation, operational integration occurs by degree, and alternative mechanisms differ by extent of integration of the activities of the independent jurisdictions and the permanence of the change (Carr & Feiock, 2002, 2004). Political consolidation reduces the number of independent local governments providing services to residents. Depending on the number and types of governments involved, it may provide substantial – radical to some – and lasting change to the existing structure of public services. In contrast, functional consolidation integrates the operations for specific services while maintaining the existing independent political jurisdictions responsible for providing the service. Functional consolidation is less comprehensive and may be viewed by some as too incremental to create meaningful change (Leland & Thurmaier, 2014). The consolidation of functions typically happens in one of two basic ways: The first is the creation of special-purpose local governments to replace provision by two or more independent general-purpose governments. The second is the creation of shared service arrangements where two or more autonomous governments choose to work together. Functional consolidation through special districts is more enduring, but also creates new units of government.¹

Political consolidation is presented as a systemic solution to our challenges in Illinois, and its lack of implementation is often seen as a failure to address these problems (Joffe, 2019; Civic Federation, 2021). The fact that political consolidation has not happened at scale in Illinois is widely understood, but what about functional consolidation? We know that many local governments in Illinois work together to produce services, but the picture we have about

these activities is very incomplete. Dozens of examples of service sharing by Illinois governments have been highlighted in reports published over the last decade (e.g., Joint Committee, 2011; MMC, 2013; Kim, 2015; Walzer & Plasch, 2016; Lieutenant Governor, 2018; CMAP, 2021). The information generated through these case analyses and periodic surveys adds to our understanding of these activities, but none of these studies are intended to be comprehensive. Political consolidation is often presented to the public as a systemic solution to our problems, but the fragmented and episodic way we study service sharing, through occasionally highlighting a few examples of successful initiatives undertaken by a few governments, creates an impression of functional consolidation as an incremental solution individually crafted for specific governmental settings.

Our sustained attention on the need for substantial political consolidation is unfortunate and at least partly due to a data problem in Illinois and virtually every other state: We focus on what we choose to monitor. We monitor the numbers and types of local governments so we know if the numbers change. We aggregate and publicize data about what local governments raise and spend annually but focus less on identifying the extent and scope of activities they do together. Given this, progress on functional consolidation of services through integrating operations is far less visible than the documented lack of progress in eliminating political jurisdictions.

LESSONS FROM IOWA?

The *Illinois Municipal Policy Journal's* mission is to insert academic insights into practical applications for local government programs and services in Illinois, with the belief that the findings are often generalizable to other settings. We seek to contribute to this mission by presenting research on local governments in Iowa, believing it provides two basic lessons for Illinois. First, it provides insights into the mechanisms local governments use to integrate law enforcement services and their frequency of use. Second, Iowa provides an example for how Illinois can compile and disseminate the critical information needed to improve our understanding of public service delivery on an ongoing basis.

We use 2,040 agreements between the 940 cities and 99 counties for law enforcement from this Iowa archive to examine the functional consolidation taking place through shared services. Law enforcement is a core public service that both cities and counties are required to provide and an ideal service to

assess the extent of integration that has been created. We find that substantial integration has occurred and happens largely through comprehensive service contracts. Approximately 75% of all the agreements create comprehensive contracts, which is the mechanism creating the most integration of law enforcement within the county. Roughly 10% of agreements create mechanisms other than service contracts. These mechanisms do not produce the same extent of integration of services but likely include more governments in the agreement.

Finally, we recognize Iowa and Illinois are different states and Iowa's experience with functional consolidation is not automatically generalizable to Illinois. The states differ in population, total governments, and various other critical factors affecting these decisions. However, we suspect that the similarities between the two states are larger than the differences when it comes to the incentives and opportunities for cities and counties to work together on law enforcement services. The appendix includes a map of Iowa indicating the number of cities and population in each county as of 2022.

DATA: IOWA'S 28E AGREEMENTS

Iowa and Illinois both have statutes permitting local governments to jointly exercise their powers through intergovernmental agreements (Iowa, 2022; Illinois, 2021). An important difference in these laws is that Iowa includes a requirement that agreements created under the authority of their statute (Chapter 28E) must be submitted to a public archive maintained by the state government. Parties are required to submit new and revised agreements and notices of termination of existing agreements "before entry into force" (28E.8), and this requirement has led to a resource that is unique in the United States. It has enabled Iowa to create a comprehensive and constantly updated source of information about the formal agreements created by its 1,941 local governments over the last three decades.

The archive currently hosts the full text of approximately 20,000 agreements organized into 33 activity categories and is searchable based on metadata provided when the agreement is submitted. This metadata includes the names and types of the participating organizations, functional category best describing the activities involved, agreement filing date, home counties and regions of the parties, and the agreement number assigned by the archive. Figure 1 illustrates how Iowa's archive can be used to search for agreements based on the metadata.

FIGURE 1

SEARCHING IOWA'S 28E AGREEMENT ARCHIVE

Chapter 28E of the Iowa Statutes empowers its governments to create agreements to work together for mutual advantage. The resulting agreements and accompanying cover sheets containing the metadata described below must be submitted to a public archive maintained by the Secretary of State. This archive is searchable by following these steps:

1. Access to the website: <https://sos.iowa.gov/search/28ESearch.html>
2. Two ways for searching:
 - 2.1 Search By Details — Users set conditions to search results such as participant name, service types, agreement file date, organization type, county, and region.
 - 2.2 Search By Numbers — Users can type a filing number of an agreement to directly link to a page for a specific agreement.
3. Click 'View' to see summaries of the agreement, plus the icon (+) to see the list of participants, and the filing number to access the agreement. Agreements from the 1990s are largely images of scanned agreements. Later agreements are archived as PDF versions of the documents.

The University of Illinois Chicago's Networks & Governance Lab (NGL) uses this archive to support our research program on shared service collaborations in the public sector. Using custom-made web scraping scripts, the metadata for each agreement is extracted from the archive.² The NGL's current data set includes full text of agreements and metadata from January 1993 to December 2020, and demographic, economic, and financial information for the same period for all of Iowa's local governments.³

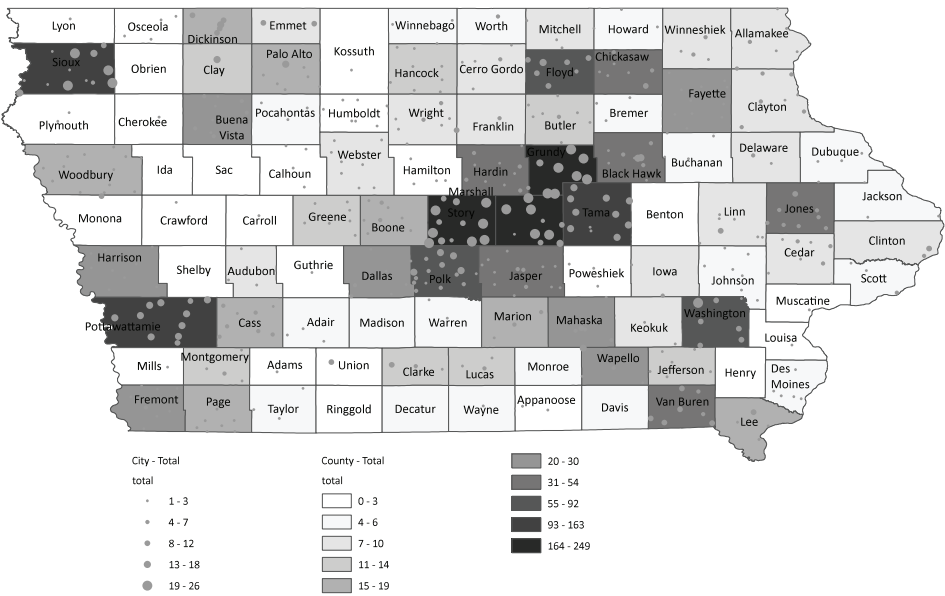
We note the Iowa archive is limited to formal agreements involving at least one government made under the authority of Chapter 28E. It does not include all possible agreements between organizations, omitting most obviously any informal agreements made directly between officials working with these organizations. Given this, the picture provided by these agreements is likely biased toward relationships involving substantial resources, politically salient services, or other situations where documenting the commitments made by the parties is prudent. In their analysis of a random sample of 500 28E agreements, Li and her colleagues (2021) found that most of the agreements examined were created as fee-for-service contacts. Agreements creating joint operations or new organizations were the second and third most common in the sample, but

each were more common in a few activity categories such as streets and roads and water supply.

ANALYSIS

Given the obstacles to political consolidation, it is important to ask if we can obtain the benefits expected from political consolidation through functional consolidation of some public services. The question is beyond the scope of this article, but this research is a first step to addressing this question. Here, we identify the extent to which functional consolidation of law enforcement services has occurred between city and county governments in Iowa and the general forms this integration takes.

FIGURE 2
LAW ENFORCEMENT AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CITIES AND COUNTIES BY COUNTY,
1993-2020



Source: Analysis by the authors from agreement data compiled by the University of Illinois Chicago's Networks & Governance Lab.

We analyze the 2,040 law enforcement agreements involving at least one city and one county submitted to the Iowa archive between 1993 and 2020. These 2,040 agreements include 1,750 new agreements and 290 renewals or amendments of prior agreements. Figure 2 depicts the geographic distribution of the agreements by county. Not surprisingly, there is an association between the county's population and the number of law enforcement agreements. Story, Grundy, Marshall, and Polk counties have the most agreements and are also among the most populous counties in the state. The association is not perfect, as demonstrated by Grundy County, which has more agreements than many other larger counties. The cities involved in the most agreements, such as Liscomb (Marshall County), Dike (Grundy County), and Conrad (Grundy County), are in these same more populous counties. And at the other end of the scale, the counties with no or few law enforcement agreements are among the least populated counties.

The metadata used to create Figure 2 reveals the number of agreements involving law enforcement submitted, but nothing about how the agreements work. We analyzed the text of the 2,040 agreements to identify the mechanisms created by cities and counties to work together on law enforcement. Two coders started with the same 100 agreements and developed several tentative mechanisms. Coders then worked independently on the remaining agreements, with each coder analyzing a random sample of the agreements coded by the other. Differences in coding were discussed and resolved by consensus. The entire research team worked to finalize the mechanisms and to establish clear boundaries among them.

Figure 3 depicts the four general mechanisms created by these agreements, organized in terms of potential integration of the operations of the parties to the agreement. Each mechanism has two subgroups that we propose affect the extent of operational integration that can be achieved. Other factors specific to the agreement and parties likely also affect the extent of integration an agreement produces, but these four mechanisms create a continuum we can use to assess the progress made toward functional consolidation.

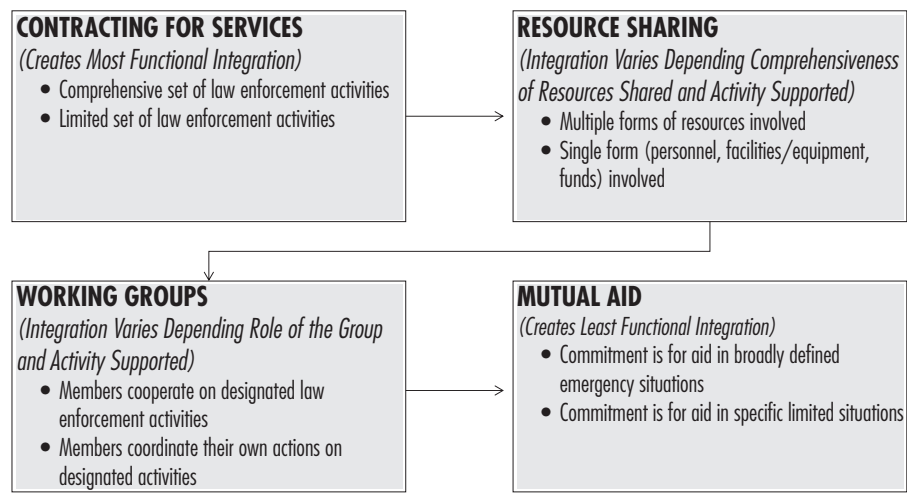
CONTRACTING FOR SERVICES

(1,841 AGREEMENTS, 90.2% OF ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT)

The mechanism most often deployed is service contracts. These agreements commit one organization to provide outlined services to one or more other

organizations in exchange for compensation. Agreements created to contract for law enforcement are usually bilateral (89%) and support county provision of law enforcement services to a city.

FIGURE 3
GENERAL MECHANISMS CREATED TO INTEGRATE LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES
BETWEEN CITIES AND COUNTIES



To assess potential for variations in the integration produced through service contracts, we distinguish between agreements for a comprehensive set of law enforcement activities and those involving a more limited activity. We define comprehensive services to include dispatch, patrol and arrest, and investigations. Less comprehensive agreements are defined as not involving all three components or created for comprehensive activities meant to supplement existing police services. Functional integration is highest with comprehensive law enforcement services because the county essentially provides law enforcement for itself and a city.

Comprehensive Law Enforcement Services (1,523 Agreements, 82.7% of All Contracting for Services)

The activities outlined in this agreement between the City of Oakland and Pottawattamie County illustrates the activities typical for comprehensive law enforcement agreements (M020133):⁴

- “Radar operations to control speed.
- Issuing violations under city ordinances (excluding animal control ordinances) upon request.
- Housing inmates who have been incarcerated under a city ordinance.
- Service of abatement notices on request.
- Periodically checking commercial buildings for unlocked doors and trespassers.
- Investigation of traffic accidents and complaints.
- Dispatch of city fire departments and first responders.
- Staffing a 24-hour E911 dispatch center.
- Providing a detective division to investigate crimes and conduct on-going investigations.
- Investigation of drug-related offenses.
- Supplying schools or community clubs with officers and materials for special programs and talks upon request.
- Supply fully equipped patrol cars with radio, lights, siren and all related equipment, gasoline and oil, tires, and maintenance, uniforms, and all other personal equipment.”

Other examples of comprehensive agreements include:

- Story County provides comprehensive law enforcement services to the City of Slater including “dispatching, crime investigation, security services, and providing staff and equipment” (M508995).

- Van Buren County provides the City of Keosauqua “general law enforcement assistance, including but not limited to regular intermittent patrol, crime detection, crime prevention, crime scene identification work, witness interview, and such other functions as necessary and appropriate to provide law enforcement protection to the citizens and property of the city” (M510817).

Limited Law Enforcement Services

(318 Agreements, 17.3% of All Contracting for Services)

Cities and counties also contract for a less comprehensive package of law enforcement services. This may include arrangements covering the provision of officers for a few hours each day as needed to provide additional short-term capacity to the contracting government, or for specific law enforcement activities, such as dispatching the contracting government’s officers. Examples include:

- Wapello County provides patrol services to the City Eddyville for 15 hours per week (M509928).
- Pottawattamie County provides dispatch for 24 hours per day and patrol for 16 hours each day for the City of Avoca (M021877).
- Winnebago County permits the City of Forest City to hire county peace officers to periodically cover shifts and staff special events for the city police department (M510166).

RESOURCE SHARING

(63 AGREEMENTS, 3.1% OF ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT)

A second mechanism for functional consolidation is resource sharing. These agreements provide a legal framework for the parties to share resources, such as personnel, funding, and facilities and equipment. Agreements to share resources may appear similar to services contracting but these agreements often use language indicating the parties are partners in the activity and will share its costs. Seventy-one percent of the resource sharing agreements are between a single city and county. This is less than in the case of service contracting, but still a large majority.

The extent of the integration largely depends on the amount and types of resources shared. We distinguish between agreements sharing multiple forms

of resources (personnel, facilities and/or equipment, and funding) and those sharing a single form. The extent of integration also varies depending on the activity supported by the agreement (e.g., shared dispatch versus officer training). Given this, the extent of functional integration achieved through agreements to share resources is less clear than for services contracting.

Multiple Forms of Resources Shared

(35 Agreements, 55.6% of All Resource Sharing)

These agreements typically outline shared equipment and facilities, personnel, and funding. Instead of one government purchasing services from another, these agreements create a mechanism for each to contribute resources to the shared activity. The most common example of resource sharing involving multiple types of resources in law enforcement are agreements creating shared dispatch operations between one or more cities and counties. For example:

- Delaware County and the City of Manchester share resources to create Delaware County Communication Center by splitting the costs of the center; “costs for maintaining, repairing or replacing communications equipment and general operating expenses of the center shall be paid equally by the City and County” (M005303).
- Lucas County and the City of Chariton agree to provide the joint operation, maintenance, and financing of a law enforcement center used by both governments as an operations center, holding facility, and jail (M007008).
- Polk County and the City of Polk agree to establish a stable consortium for public safety agencies as a part of the Central Iowa Regional Public Safety Communication System Project by sharing facilities (Public Safety Answering Point), equipment (radios, Computer Aided Dispatch, and Records Management System), and funds (E911 funds, MICS grant) (M505192).

Single Form Resources Shared

(28 Agreements, 44.4% of All Resource Sharing)

Other agreements shared more limited resources.

- Clinton County (and three cities) share grants funds received from the Gateway Area Police Administrators to purchase a computer-aided dispatch system to be shared by the group (M509213).

- Polk County and the cities of Urbandale and Johnston agree for joint enforcement of a panhandling ordinance. This agreement shares personnel only, and “no new entity nor any joint financial mechanism is created” (M503049).
- Linn and Tama counties, the cities of Cedar Rapids, Hiawatha, and Marion, and the University of Iowa Police Department agree to share facilities owned by Cedar Rapids for training purposes (M510151).

WORKING GROUPS

(69 AGREEMENTS, 3.4% OF ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT)

A third mechanism for integrating law enforcement is the creation of formal working groups. These agreements establish a formal group comprised of representatives from each member organization to address a shared problem. Most agreements creating working groups involve several cities and counties; only 32% are between a single city and county.

Working groups use various labels, such as task forces, alliances, committees, multi-jurisdictional public authorities, and special districts. Agreements typically establish a process for governing the group, including the use and composition of an executive board, selection of officers, and indicate if adoption of an operating budget for the group is required.

To assess potential variations in functional integration created by working groups, we distinguish agreements that create a mechanism for cooperation among the members from those facilitating coordination among them. Integration potential is increased when the group is created to support cooperation among its members. In these instances, the working group produces the activity on behalf of its member organizations. Working groups that serve as a mechanism for coordinating the activities of its members create less integration because each member maintains operational control over the activities covered by the group.

Finally, as with shared resources, the functional scope of working groups is often limited to activities such as officer training, enforcement of drug laws, making high risk arrests, etc. This reduces the potential for integration over what might be possible for a more comprehensive set of law enforcement activities.

Members Cooperate on Activity (38 Agreements, 55.1% of All Working Groups)

The group's access to funding helps distinguish if its role is to support cooperation or coordination, and consequently, the potential for integration of the members' operations. Agreements supporting cooperation typically identify resources (taxes, grants, member charges) and require the group to adopt a budget to support its work. In some instances, these groups may be formed as special purpose governments and funded through taxes or fees authorized through a referendum.

- The counties of Hamilton, Humboldt, Pocahontas, Webster, and Wright and sixteen cities created the Mid Iowa Safety Alliance to “plan, foster, implement, monitor, and evaluate a comprehensive safety program” (M008495).
- Davis, Keokuk, Van Buren, Wapello counties and the cities of Ottumwa and Sigourney cities created the Southeast Iowa Inter-Agency Drug Task Force to “implement joint action on drug investigations, enforcement, and prosecution” (M509624).

Members Coordinate on Activity (31 Agreements, 44.9% of All Working Groups)

Other agreements create working groups charged with coordinating the activities of their members on an important shared problem. Agreements to coordinate the activities undertaken by members produce less integration because each member retains autonomy over its actions:

- The counties of Hamilton, Humboldt, Pocahontas, Webster, and Wright and 17 cities within these counties create the Mid Iowa Safety Alliance to “implement joint and/or cooperative action in the parties' safety efforts” (M008495).
- Cass County and five cities (Cumberland, Lewis, Marne, Massena, and Wiotia) agreed to create the Cass County Public Safety Commission to “administer the Unified Law Enforcement District” (M508792).

MUTUAL AID

(67 AGREEMENTS, 3.3% OF ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT)

The fourth mechanism creates mutual commitments to provide aid to the others upon request. These agreements commit two or more organizations to mutual assistance and establish processes to implement the commitments for aid and to propose changes as needed. Similar to resource sharing, mutual aid agreements share resources among the parties, but periodically and only upon request. Resource sharing agreements are often structured to provide ongoing sharing and thus greater functional integration. Just over half (58%) of the mutual aid agreements between cities and counties committing each to aid in law enforcement are bilateral.

Agreements for mutual aid typically require that each party will provide aid at its own expense. Mutual aid agreements create a governance mechanism, such as a board of directors or designated administrators to establish the rules and regulations governing processes for requesting aid and when reimbursement of expenses may be permitted.

In terms of functional consolidation, this form provides the least potential for integration of activities. Mutual aid agreements maintain operational autonomy of members, minimizing potential integration. These agreements create a framework for coordinating the deployment of resources of independent jurisdiction when needed. To assess variation among mutual aid agreements, we distinguish between broad commitments for aid and commitments that are more limited in scope. Broad commitments include a list of general emergency situations, whereas limited commitments for aid focus on specific situations.

Broad Commitments for Aid

(57 Agreements, 85.1% of All Mutual Aid)

The most common approach to mutual aid is for commitments for general-purpose assistance provided on a reciprocal basis between a county and city for “law enforcement services and public safety of citizens” at their own expense.

- The agreement between Woodbury County and the City of Sergeant Bluff formalizes mutual aid on law enforcement services “to manage routine requests from each government for law enforcement services including responding to citizen calls, taking reports, and performing other generally non-emergency law enforcement duties” (M507274).

- Sioux and Lyon counties and the cities of Hawarden, Orange City, Rock Valley, and Sioux Center commit to provide aid to each other “when additional personnel are needed to deal with a given situation” (M037153).
- Harrison County and the City of Woodbine “mutually agree to provide law enforcement assistance when needed on a reciprocal basis” (M025675).

Limited Commitments for Aid (10 Agreements, 14.9% of All Mutual Aid)

Other agreements create limited commitments for mutual aid. Examples include:

- Wapello County and the City of Oskaloosa agree to mutual assistance for RAGBRAI, an annual recreational bike tour, attracting thousands of participants (M506314).
- Polk County and the City of Perry (from Dallas County) agree “to provide law enforcement assistance between each Party, upon request, and to jointly exercise law enforcement authority within each Party’s respective jurisdiction, to deal with drug investigations and activity” (M015154).

DISCUSSION: LESSONS FROM IOWA ABOUT FUNCTIONAL CONSOLIDATION

Our analysis provides two basic lessons for state and local policy makers and municipal managers in Illinois. First, this analysis shows how Iowa has been able to expand functional consolidation in local government law enforcement without eliminating governments. Cities and counties in Iowa have worked together to integrate their operations through intergovernmental agreements. These findings should provide comfort to those concerned that a lack of political consolidation means that local government officials are not seeking opportunities to reduce service fragmentation. Consolidating functions does not produce every presumed benefit of political consolidation, but also does not produce all its costs.⁵ It is something city and county governments choose to do.

Second, this analysis shows the value of a comprehensive public archive of intergovernmental agreements for understanding how our system of local government operates. Our lack of comprehensive information about how

Illinois' local governments work together is a significant obstacle to developing the knowledge base needed to efficiently disseminate best practices and to conduct the research needed to create public policy that supports these efforts. Functional consolidation through intergovernmental agreements is likely common in Illinois, but we lack the data to know for sure, and to analyze the impact of these agreements. In the remainder of this concluding section, we briefly elaborate on these two topics.

INTEGRATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES OCCURS WITHOUT POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION

Our analysis identified the agreements created by cities and counties in law enforcement and described the four general mechanisms (contracting for services, shared resources, working groups, and mutual aid) used by these governments to work together while maintaining their authority to independently provide these services.⁶ Our analysis shows these arrangements are widely used by Iowa's local governments and that contracting for services, the most integrative mechanism is the approach these officials most often chose. Indeed, nearly 75% of the 2,040 agreements we examined involve comprehensive service contracts. Approximately 10% of the agreements created integration mechanisms other than service contracts. These other mechanisms do not produce the same extent of consolidation as service contracts but often include more organizations in the agreement.

Are there lessons here for Illinois? We suspect that these same mechanisms are also widely used here. The handful of case studies (e.g., Kim, 2015; Task Force, 2015; Walzer & Plasch, 2016; Lt. Governor, 2018) produced about service sharing in Illinois are strongly suggestive of this outcome. For example, the survey of shared service arrangements conducted by the Metropolitan Mayor's Caucus identified more than two dozen law enforcement collaborations among local governments in the Chicago region active in 2015 (Kim, 2015). It is likely substantial functional integration is also happening through these same mechanisms throughout Illinois, but the picture is simply less clear than in Iowa because their data are better.

The Local Government Shared Services Directory compiled by the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (Kim, 2015) provides a great example of the limited picture in Illinois. This is the most comprehensive data available on shared service arrangements created by Illinois local governments that we could find, but this

inventory is focused on a single region in the state, approximately half of the local governments contacted did not provide data for the directory, and the shared service activities identified do not include detailed information about the agreements supporting them. However, the most important limitation is that the inventory reports on these arrangements at a single point in time. We make these points not as a critique of this very useful report, but as an illustration of the large gap between the two states in how this information is compiled and disseminated.

ILLINOIS NEEDS COMPREHENSIVE DATA TO ASSESS PROGRESS ON FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

This research highlights the value that Iowa's public archive has for identifying the varied critical relationships that its local governments create in working together to provide services to their residents. The information produced through case studies of service sharing is important but inadequate for our needs. We lack comprehensive information about these relationships and how they change over time. The status quo in Illinois is that we have a very limited understanding of which governments are more likely to work with others, the factors that affect their choices, the activities they do together, and the impacts of these relationships on the cost, quality, and access to public services.

We conclude with a very brief discussion of important questions that can be examined with more comprehensive data on shared service arrangements. This article raised this question: Given the obstacles to political consolidation, can we obtain the benefits expected from political consolidation through functional consolidation of some public services? Identifying the forms that functional consolidation of law enforcement services takes, and the frequency of their use is only the first step in answering this question. The next steps require understanding the aggregate effects of these relationships by identifying and examining the networks of governments connected through these agreements. Iowa's public archive of intergovernmental agreements also supports these analyses.

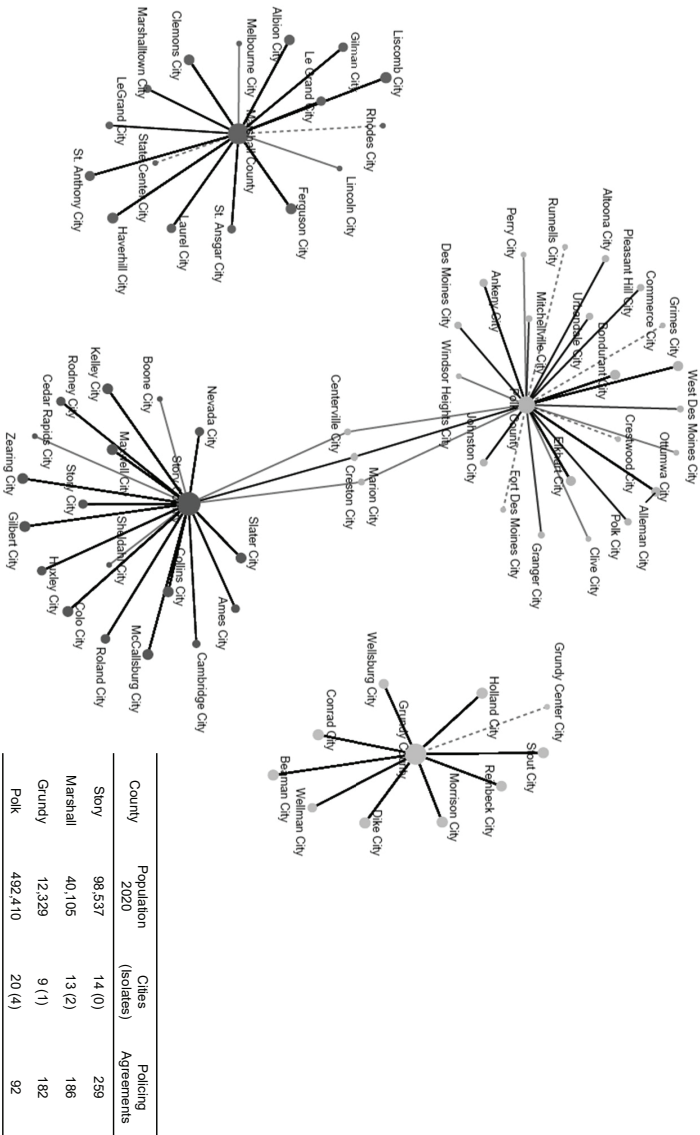
The metadata included in the Iowa archive enables the creation of relational maps showing who participates in these networks, who they choose to work with, and how their links with each other change over time. It also shows the governments not participating in interorganizational agreements, and ultimately the functional networks created through these agreements. Public

managers and policymakers alike have an interest in understanding variations in the composition, structure and evolution of different functional (e.g., law enforcement versus economic development) or spatial (e.g., countywide or metropolitan) networks, because these factors affect important outcomes, such as service costs, effectiveness, and equity in access to minimum standards (Lee & Hannah-Spurlock, 2015; Siciliano, Carr, & Hugg, 2021).

As an example of how these data can be used, Figures 4 and 5 display the networks of law enforcement agreements created by two groups of cities and counties in Iowa. The two groups are each comprised of governments in several adjacent counties that have produced very different law enforcement networks. Figure 4 shows the three counties (Story, Marshall, and Grundy) with the most law enforcement agreements, and the most populous county (Polk) in the state. Figure 5 depicts a group of six neighboring counties each near the bottom both in terms of population and use of law enforcement agreements. These maps display relational data, with the dark lines identifying the presence of agreements among the cities and counties, and the larger nodes (circles) indicating involvement in more agreements than the governments indicated by smaller circles. Given our focus is on agreements between cities and counties, it is not surprising that counties are involved in more agreements than cities. For context, we also include the cities within each county not involved in the shared services network. Cities not having a law enforcement agreement with a county government are indicated by light lines connecting them to their home county. Location of the nodes in the maps and the distance between them is an artifact of the software and does not provide meaningful information.

We do not have space here to analyze the factors that account for the differences between the networks depicted in these maps, but some likely factors stand out. Differences in population, residential density, and governmental capacity are among the factors that deserve attention. And this kind of analysis leads to the most important question of all: Do these differences in the networks translate into differences in the performance of law enforcement in these communities? A statewide archive of shared service agreements created by the governments in this state will be able to address this question and others about what our local governments do and how they do it. It can also provide a mechanism for efficiently disseminating best practices about shared services from across Illinois and to map the relationships these agreements create.

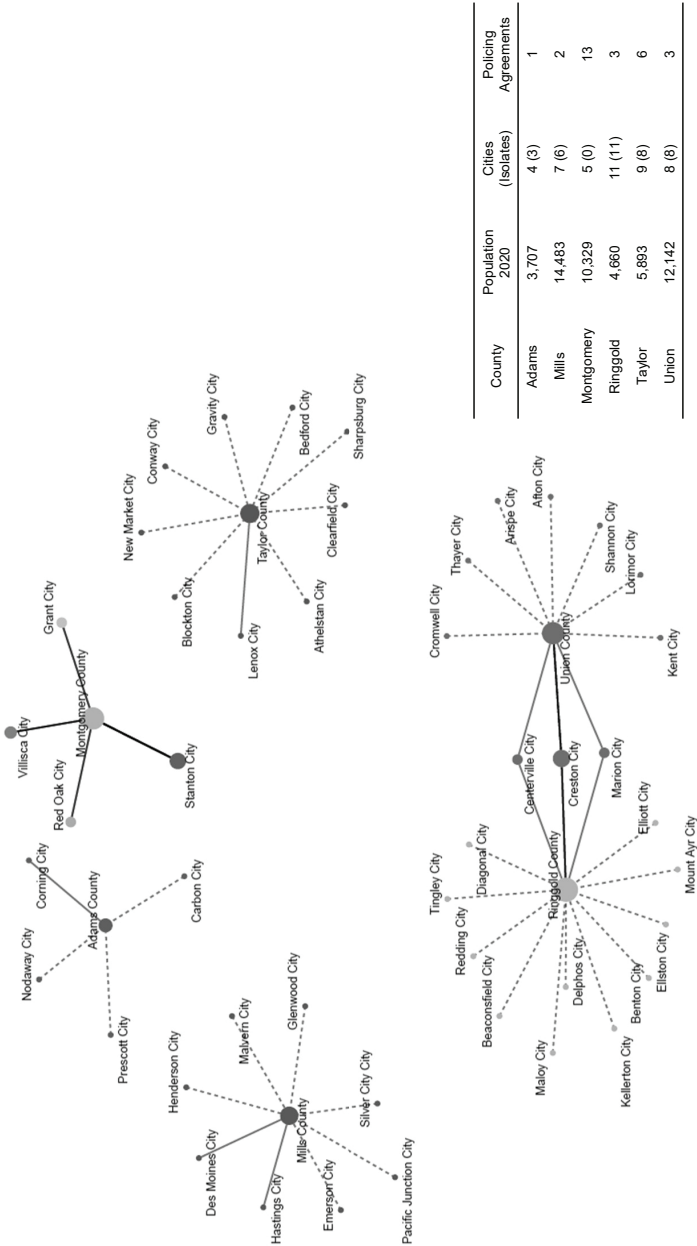
FIGURE 4
NETWORK MAP OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CITIES AND GRUNDY, MARSHALL, POLK, AND STORY COUNTIES



Note: Dark lines indicate governments are connected by at least one 28E agreement during the period. Dotted lines indicate the absence of an agreement involving the city over the period. The line connects the city to its home county.
Source: Analysis by the authors from agreement data compiled by the Networks & Governance Lab.

FIGURE 5

NETWORK MAP OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CITIES AND ADAMS, MILLS, MONTGOMERY, RINGGOLD, TAYLOR, AND UNION COUNTIES



Note: Dark lines indicate governments are connected by at least one 28E agreement during the period. Dotted lines indicate the absence of an agreement involving the city over the period. The line connects the city to its home county.
Source: Analysis by the authors from agreement data compiled by the Networks & Governance Lab.

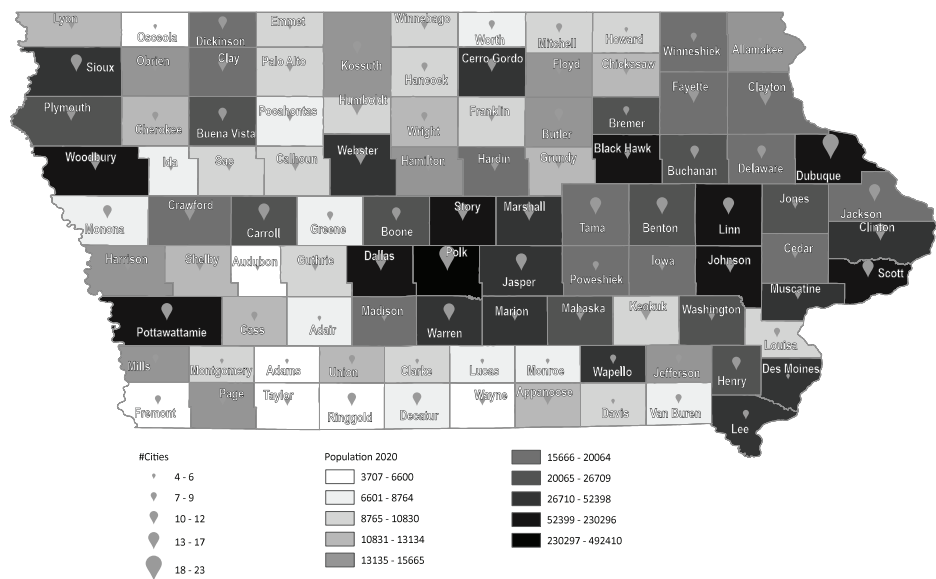
Finally, we note the information produced by a statewide public archive is important for our understanding of the impacts of the various reforms recommended by task forces, good government groups, academics, and the media over the last decade. Absent the kind of information provided by this archive, it will be more difficult to assess the impacts of various policy changes enacted by the State of Illinois intended to reduce service fragmentation and the overall costs of local government.

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APPENDIX

FIGURE A-1
POPULATION AND CITIES BY COUNTY IN 2020



Notes: Labels indicate names of Iowa’s 99 counties. Iowa had 940 city governments in 2022. State population in 2020 was 3,190,369, and it is the 23rd largest state by area (55,838.9 square miles) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Source: Analysis by the authors from U.S. Census Bureau data.

ENDNOTES

¹ Creation of special district governments accounts for most of the increase in local governments in the U.S. in recent decades (America Counts Staff, 2019). Some of these new governments are used to integrate functions of existing local governments or to substitute for their creation.

² The URL for UIC’s Networks & Governance Lab (NGL) is <https://cuppa.uic.edu/net-gov-lab/>.

³ The NGL periodically updates this dataset every other year with information on new agreements, revisions, and terminations. The NGL is involved in ongoing data cleaning to detect and correct errors (e.g., misspellings of and variance in the use of contractions and acronyms that refer to an organization across agreements), organization classification mistakes (e.g., categorizing a municipality as a county), and misidentification of the activity category (e.g., submitted as public health rather than police protection).

⁴ The number in the parentheses is the number assigned to the agreement when it is submitted to the archive. The passages from the agreements included are direct quotes from the agreement.

The rest of the numbers in parentheses that appear throughout this section also refer to a passage's respective archive agreement number.

⁵ There is a large academic literature on city-county consolidation that casts doubt about realizing the presumed benefits of political consolidation (Carr & Feiock, 2004; Leland & Thurmaier, 2014).

⁶ Our analysis is limited to functional consolidation in law enforcement between cities and counties. However, other studies of agreements from Iowa's archive indicates widespread use of these agreements by other types of local governments and for many different public services (Li et al., 2021; Sicilano, Carr, and Hugg, 2021; Sanchez & Qian, 2023; Zhang & Zehra, 2023).

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