

Citizen Perceptions of Little Rock City Government: Findings from South of I-630

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During the Fall semester of 2014, students from Class 10 of the Clinton School of Public Service Field Research Methods course partnered with Arkansas Community Organizations (“ACO”) to conduct research on the perceptions of city government held by Little Rock residents in the neighborhoods south of Interstate 630. The study began in August of 2014, and concluded in December of 2014. ACO is an independent, Arkansas-based non-profit organization that focuses on community organizing and political engagement in traditionally marginalized communities. The organization has members in several neighborhoods in Little Rock.

The editors of this study would like to emphasize that, in the tradition of ethnographic and interpretive research, this study does not purport to provide “facts.” In general, the views expressed in this paper are the views of citizens, although the paper does contain some analysis and some recommendations. The main purpose of this study is to provide both a description and an analysis of the ***perceptions of citizens who live, have lived worship, or work in institutions south of I-630.***

Importantly, this study tries to avoid commenting on whether the citizens’ perceptions are correct or incorrect. Further, the focus of this research is not to determine the implications of I-630 as a racial and economic divider of Little Rock. Rather, this report is intended to amplify the voice of residents of the City of Little Rock whose words are often not heard. This report summarizes our findings regarding citizen perceptions of city officials, and their interactions with neighborhoods south of I-630 as well as other pressing neighborhood concerns. Although these are perceptions, that does not mean they should be taken lightly, as citizen perceptions can be a potent force in political behavior.

This study is based on qualitative and quantitative primary data that was collected through focus groups and surveys that were conducted by Clinton School students over the course of the Fall 2014 semester. This report seeks to understand the relations that community members have with their city government and public officials. Both the focus groups and the surveys utilized open-ended questions to better represent participants’ perceptions.

An analysis of the data collected indicates that the majority of participants were not familiar with the Mayor’s Office or the Little Rock City Board of Directors. Despite residents being aware of issues in the neighborhood, they possess limited knowledge of who their city officials are or how to submit a grievance to city government. Many participants were not confident that either entity would be responsive to their community’s issues. Additionally, many respondents indicated that they do not believe that the Mayor or the City Board of Directors would listen to them or help them with their issues.

Participants voiced concerns about numerous issues that could benefit from attention from the City of Little Rock, including crime in the neighborhood, the city’s failure to adequately maintain property, and a lack of constructive activities for youth and other community members. Many respondents indicated that they believed that neighborhoods south of I-630 receive a lower level of attention from city officials than neighborhoods north of I-630. Respondents noted that this

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perception applies to a variety of issues including access to public services, access to job opportunities, and a lack of investment in neighborhood infrastructure.

Introduction

An unspoken physical and psychological barrier divides the City of Little Rock. I- 630, which connects downtown Little Rock with west Little Rock represents the physical manifestation of this barrier. Although I-630 has significantly improved transportation across the city, its construction also displaced many low income residents living in or near its path. Many groups challenged the construction of the interstate based on this potential for displacement of residents (Barth, 2014). Despite legal challenges, I-630 was completed in 1985, which led to the clear racial divide evident in Little Rock today, with neighborhoods north of I-630 becoming predominantly white and neighborhoods south of I-630 becoming predominantly African-American and Hispanic (Barth, 2014).

The community partner for this project, ACO, is an independent, non-profit organization that focuses on organizing traditionally marginalized Little Rock communities to create positive changes around issues such as better sidewalks, increased voter registration, lower sales taxes, and relocation of the technology park to a non-residential location. Founded in 1985, ACO aims to make an impact on the lives of low-income and working Arkansans (ACO, 2014). Neil Sealy, Executive Director of ACO, partnered with Dr. Warigia Bowman, Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service, to collect data on citizen perceptions of local government by residents who live south of the interstate. This research aims to listen to community voices, collect data on community perceptions, and offer potential solutions to improve local governance.

Overall, the focus groups provided rich, detailed data, while the surveys provided briefer, but easily quantifiable information. Some of the most frequently mentioned issues in both the focus groups and the surveys included the poor conditions of roads and sidewalks, a high number of vacant lots and abandoned houses, the low quality of sanitation services and trash pick up, and weak relationships between city officials and officers towards members of the community.

Literature Review

Interstate 630 (I-630) is a highway that runs east-west through Little Rock, Arkansas. It has been called a “potent physical and psychological divider in the social fabric” of the city (Barth, 2014). In the 1930s, when U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower pushed for the creation of an interstate highway system that would connect cities with populations over 100,000 (Barth, 2014; Mohl, 2002). President Eisenhower saw this as a necessary mechanism to ensure the ease of military travel from one part of the country to another and as a stimulus for the national economy. (Barth, 2014; Mohl, 2002). Thomas H. MacDonald, then chair of the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, envisioned the construction of an interstate system as an opportunity to strengthen civic infrastructure and as a method of reducing city slums. With federal funding,

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state highway departments throughout the country have carried out interstate projects similar to the construction of I-630 over the past eight decades (Mohl, 2002).

In the 1950s, Little Rock began to expand westward; a push primarily by affluent Caucasian residents who, according to Koon, wished to live apart from other segments of the population (Koon, 2011). The passing and funding of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 transformed the nation and its roadways, but was certainly not without controversy (Weingroff, R., a 2006). In 1958 the “8th Street Expressway”, designed by MetroPlan and the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, was proposed to link the western side of Little Rock to businesses downtown. The 8th Street Expressway is now commonly known as I-630 (Pumphrey, 2013).

Although interstate highway projects were envisioned as a way to solve the issues of cities such as business development, eliminating slums, and increasing access to downtown, these major thoroughfares have done just the opposite. In addition to altering transportation patterns and the locations of centers of commerce, the construction of I-630 significantly affected neighborhood demographics, changing the social fabric of the surrounding communities (Pumphrey, 2010). According to Barth (2014), Little Rock neighborhoods that once thrived were torn apart and many people became displaced in their own town.

Construction on I-630 began in April 1959. The designers of the project viewed it as an innovative turn to the future that would provide easy access to new residential and commercial developments in west Little Rock. Tragically however, this path to the future razed a historic past; the predominantly African-American 9th Street district (Pumphrey, 2013). Over the course of 27 years, the interstate cut through the African-American business district and neighborhoods, destroying entire neighborhoods and green spaces, and displaced hundreds of blacks and working class whites (Barth, 2014).

As early as 1962, it became apparent that interstate construction was displacing residents and businesses, particularly in poor urban areas. Residential neighborhoods north of the highway became predominantly Caucasian, with moderate to high income levels, and higher education levels. By contrast to the south the population comprises mostly African-American and Latino residents and citizens who have lower socioeconomic status. The effects of the highway exacerbated growing divides and tensions between Little Rock communities (Barth, 2014; Kirk, & Porter, 2014; Weingroff, R., 2006 b).

The construction of I-630 has influenced the economic growth and social structure of the city of Little Rock and has been widely discussed and analyzed by scholars and community leaders in Arkansas. Pumphrey’s thesis covered the efforts to stop the construction of I-630 as well as the concerns that surrounded its creation. Pumphrey argued that there are many cases in other urban areas where city leaders and influential businessmen used urban freeways to isolate neighborhoods along racial lines (Pumphrey, 2013). As mentioned, I-630 was built through an area that had contained a major African-American business district and homes of many low-income residents. Recent census data indicates that I-630 continues to reify the racial and

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economic divide that was accelerated by its construction. Residents on the south side of I-630 face continuous and severe economic challenges. (Barth, 2014).¹

Pumphrey's research documents the prospective economic opportunities and social concerns that were voiced during the construction of I-630 (2013). The cultural divide of I-630 is best described in Dr. Jay Barth's lecture, *The Geography of Race* (2007). In the lecture, Dr. Barth describes two different models of desegregation; the Atlanta model and the Charlotte model. According to Barth, in the Charlotte model "regionalism reigned; populations were stable, the boundaries of the city grew with the population and governmental entities merged." This model, he claims, forced blacks and whites to work and live together within school districts. Dr. Barth argues that the presence of I-630 caused a fundamental shift in segregation patterns, leading to Little Rock moving from the Charlotte model to the Atlanta model, in which aggressive white flight left behind the majority poor and black cities (2007).

Pumphrey argues that, unlike other urban redevelopment and renewal programs which the city embraced early on, segregation between races and classes was not its intention. Rather, urban renewal programs purposely started the trend toward creating racially homogenous neighborhoods. The presence of I-630 merely reinforced existing segregation (Pumphrey, 2013). She also points out that the plans for I-630 have existed since the 1930s, and the original plans follow much of the same route that exists today. Original critics of the interstate highway system foresaw problems arising due to the lack of "comprehensive metropolitan planning" (Mohl, 2002: 15-16).

This disconnect between city planners and residents was most likely not racially motivated. Rather, "highway engineers favored a policy oriented toward solving problems through technical expertise; and they had neither the skills nor the inclination to deal with leaders speaking for neighborhoods, flower gardens, parks, natural beauty, or non growth" (Pumphrey, 2013: 14). Although it is uncertain whether construction of I-630 was overtly racially motivated, it failed to appropriately consider African-American communities, while the needs of the white owned businesses and white residents were considered. For instance, major landmarks in the city such as the Arkansas Children's Hospital and MacArthur Park were saved during the construction, while large sections of the historically black downtown were destroyed (Koon, 2011).

Interestingly, during most of the project's history, it was relatively uncontroversial. Voters in the 1950s approved the project and the city began to build the first section, which went from University Avenue to Park Street. The construction of this portion was viewed as not being particularly disruptive (Pumphrey, 2013: 33). The intention was to complete the highway by 1972, but opposition surmounted against the most controversial portion of the highway; the last section running from Park Street to what is now I-30. Virtually all of the opposition to this section came from affluent whites who lived in and around the Quapaw neighborhood. There were almost no blacks at the meetings about the highway, even though this portion still crossed through several black neighborhoods. Later, Little Rock citizen Fred Cowan spoke out on the issue of increased racial segregation as a result of the interstate. Cowan expressed the concern

¹Counterintuitively, researchers such as Dr. Jay Barth and David Koon suggest that Caucasian residents might have fled Little Rock altogether had an interstate been built around the city instead of through it (Koon, 2011; Barth, 2014).

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that the route would “encourage even more segregation of housing as it has in other cities” (Pumphrey, 2013 p. 43).

Despite low early levels of discourse between planners and those affected, the issue of segregation was not entirely absent from community dialogue during the project. During a public hearing on the construction of I-630, citizens addressed the possibility that it would create more segregation, as freeways leading to suburbs had done in other major cities (Pumphrey, 2010). Despite the public concerns, the interstate was completed in 1985, creating a socio-economic divide that has yet to be reversed (Barth, 2014). Since neighborhoods were torn down, revitalization was necessary. However, when the neighborhoods began to reform, the separation by race was obvious. Barth (2000) has created a map of Little Rock that represents populations based on race. Moreover, when discussing I-630 with citizens in Little Rock, more often than not, the topic of race surfaces (Koon, 2011). Ultimately, I-630 represents both a racial and socio-economic divide in the city of Little Rock.

Civic engagement later played an important role in the history of I-630 in Little Rock. In the 1960s and 70s, many communities near I-630 fought its construction because they felt, among other reasons, that it would entrench racial segregation in the city, depress property values near the interstate, and move economic activity towards the suburbs and western Little Rock (Pumphrey, 2014). Similarly, many communities and community organizations nationwide have sought to fight against the installation of these massive structures. One of those organizations locally was the Arkansas Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). It was founded in 1970 as an advocacy group for the purpose of helping and caring for low to moderate income families and communities (Barth, 2012).

ACORN, along with the Quapaw Quarter Association, and the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, became interested in engaging in the fight to resist the I-630 highway construction (Pumphrey, 2010). During a major phase in the construction of I-630, ACORN filed a lawsuit against federal and state highway officials to halt work in Little Rock (Pumphrey, 2013). They claimed that the Environmental Impact Statement for the project was “not sufficiently detailed to meet the standard of the National Environmental Policy Act, because each impact statement was too ambiguous, too vague, too general, and too conclusionary” (Pumphrey, 2013 p.48). They were successful, but only temporarily, with work resuming on I-630 in 1979.

Despite the eventual completion of the highway, ACORN grew to be a well-known grassroots organization throughout Arkansas and has resulted in many smaller community organizations today, including its spin-off, ACO (Pumphrey, 2010). ACO has worked for decades to listen to the concerns of citizens and to help them communicate with public officials (Pumphrey, 2013). The organization depends upon and builds social capital relationships within and between neighborhoods, which has had the effect of strengthening communities south of I-630 (Potapchuk, Crocker, & Schechter, 1997). One such neighborhood was Dunbar. The Dunbar community became known as a black neighborhood and has been widely considered to be a blighted area (Kirk & Porter, 2014). The article *Organizing for Social and Economic Issues* by the University of Southern California credits the slow pace of the highway project to resistance from minority groups in the Dunbar neighborhood and resultant struggles between city officials and residents (Pumphrey, 2010).

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In her study *Neighborhood Disorder and Local Participation: Examining the Political Relevance of "Broken Windows"* (2013), Jamila Michener looked closely at the connections between physical characteristics of a neighborhood and the impacts they had on political behavior. Michener took her study beyond the "broken window" theory of Wilson and Kelling, which proposes physical disorder has direct influence on social disorder, often in the form of crime. Instead of looking just at actual physical conditions and how this affects behavior, Michener focused on residents' perceptions of these conditions. She found that these perceptions eventually influence how residents choose to invest "political energies into solving a problem" (p.779).

Pumphrey (2014) states that urban interstates cause residents to rely less on public transportation. The respondents in our focus group and surveys brought up these same issues, reporting a lack of public transportation options and inattention to economic development in their neighborhoods.

At times, there seems to be an attitude of defeatism surrounding the concerns of African-American citizens in Little Rock. In 1972 during a prominent public hearing on the future of I-630, only four African Americans were in attendance out of a reported 350 people (Pumphrey, 2013). This could suggest that African Americans did not care enough to voice their opinions, but this could also indicate a disconnect between local government and the African-American population.

In cities where marginalized communities are found, there tends to be a disconnect between those communities and the local government (Graham & Phillips, 1998). In many of these areas, a community member holds a seat on the city board of directors, thus ensuring the community's voices are heard and that their needs are met. Despite this, marginalized groups continue to face the issue of underrepresentation in local government (Williams, 1998).

An annual survey done by UALR reported in 2006 noted how the residents living south of I-630 feel about the disintegration of the health of their neighborhoods and their mistrust of the education system and the local government (Barth, 2007). On a positive note, this same survey found that 80 percent of those questioned continue to trust that they can have a positive impact on their community (Barth, 2007). In recent years, there have been a growing number of social scientists that have studied the impacts of social forces on an individual's political behaviors and attitudes (Anderson, 2009). Looking beyond census demographics and collecting individual perceptions of community members can offer deeper insight into causes of behavior of people in a neighborhood.

The low rate of civic engagement among underprivileged urban residents is especially important when examining policy implementation. According to Dr. Jay Barth (2012), Arkansas recently ranked 39th in the U.S. in civic participation--also referred to as social capital (p. 36). Barth attributes a lack of civic engagement and further progressivism to a social capital deficit, defined by norms of social trust, volunteering, and civic participation. Barth (2012) notes that, "locales with higher levels of social capital...are more likely to be more thoroughly democratic, procedurally and in policy outcomes" (p. 36). A study after the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) was implemented shows the direct effect a diminished low-income voter turnout can have on lawmakers (Avery, J., & Peffley, M., 2005). The study reports that

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even after controlling for the various political and socioeconomic leanings in states, its most remarkable finding is “that upper-class bias in turnout had substantively and statistically significant effect on many of these policy choices” (p.58).

Lower opportunity costs and higher levels of productivity both lead to greater political participation (Frey, 1971). Looking beyond voting, there are two major, yet distinct, categories for why citizens contact local officials. The first is particularized referent contacting, or communication that is about issues of narrow concern to an individual or their family. The second is generalized referent contacting, or communication that is about issues affecting the broader community (Hirlinger, 1992). Citizens who engage in particularized contacting are more likely to perceive a connection between their needs and their political ties. They are also more likely to be young (Hirlinger, 1992). Those who engage in generalized contacting are more likely to perceive efficacy in their contact. Again, the concept of efficacy emerges as a determinant of engagement. Political ties were also an important determinant of generalized contact (Hirlinger, 1992).

A study by J. Celeste Lay (2006) shows that over the past 30 years rates of civic engagement in low-income communities have declined, as shown especially in voter turnout rates. However, the report demonstrates that voter decline is not uniform across all low-income populations (Lay, 2006). Although civic engagement in low income urban residents has declined, voting rates in low-income rural regions remain relatively steady and low-income residents in rural areas are more likely to be civically engaged than their urban counterparts (Lay, 2006). One reason Lay (2006) asserts for this difference is that residents of urban neighborhoods are more likely to witness wealth disparities, whereas the socioeconomic gaps in rural communities tend to be much smaller. The urban dwellers therefore are less likely to believe their actions can affect positive change in their communities (Lay, 2006). This mistrust in government, reflected in overall voter decline among low-income individuals, Lay (2006) states is more apparent in urban centers and correlates to a precipitous decline in voting in low-income urban residents (Leighley & Nagler, 2001; Lay, 2006).

Further review of the literature suggests that homeownership increases participation of low-income families in neighborhood associations and civic involvement (Manturuk, Lindblad, & Quercia, 2012). Findings demonstrate that renters who become homeowners showed an increased level of involvement after they purchased a home (Manturuk et al., 2012). It was found that policies that supported low-income homeownership, that were sustainable in nature, were the best suited for promoting civic engagement among low-income families and individuals (Manturuk et al., 2012).

There is a clear association between economic status and civic participation. Amy Widestrom (2015), asserts that economic segregation affects civic engagement and creates a class gap in regard to both political participation and political engagement. However, Widestrom (2015) clarifies that the low voter-turnout trend among low-income residents cannot merely be attributed to individuals' choices and is more likely a result of the economic segregation of geographically divided residential areas, where environments either foster or hinder political engagement. The author explains that higher-income citizens live in an environment that encourages civic participation, whereas low-income citizens are discouraged from civic

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engagement (Widestrom, 2015). This class gap Widestrom (2015) describes is key in that “its existence helps perpetuate a vicious cycle of engagement and responsiveness among the prosperous and a vicious cycle of isolation and disengagement among the impoverished” (p. 5). Widestrom (2015) explains that the lack of civic participation in low income neighborhoods severely diminishes these residents’ ability to “hold representatives accountable” (p. 18). Furthermore, the author maintains that this aforementioned diminished ability could lead to “political outcomes and policy decisions that represent a small segment of the population and that may perpetuate a continuous cycle of segregation and political alienation among those most in need of political attention and policy action” (Widestrom, 2015, p. 18).

In a 2009 study, Mary Anderson conducted a study looking at how sense of community, as measured by something called the Sense of Community Index (SCI), correlates with and impacts political attitudes (Anderson, 2009). After surveying over 800 individuals and gathering their individual perceptions, Anderson’s results suggests if connections within workplaces, organizations, churches, etc., are stronger, there might possibly be more dialogue about political issues. Her findings show that the “environment in which we operate can influence political behavior” at the local level (p. 604). As Anderson concludes, “differences in social experiences influence our political behaviors and attitudes, and therefore deserve to play a central role in our accounts of political behavior” (p. 623). If social experiences and environments are related to political attitudes and behavior, such findings could support or explain our findings with the area south of I-630.

Methodology

In order to collect the data used for this report, Class 10 of the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service was divided into groups of three to five students. Each group conducted one focus group, and collected about 40 individual surveys per group. In total, the cohort conducted 12 focus groups and over four hundred and fifty surveys. The surveys and focus groups employed a mixed method approach - the data obtained was part qualitative and part quantitative. Questions were formatted as fixed-question, open-response, bringing additional strength to the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Focus groups were conducted with the assistance of a variety of Little Rock organizations, including churches, community organizations, and businesses. These organizations included Philander Smith College, Quapaw Methodist Church, the Better Community Development Center, and Grace Temple Church.

A convenience sampling method was utilized to recruit survey participants. The research team identified public resource centers and private businesses located with the target area in the City of Little Rock. In order to reduce non-response rate of the interview surveys, and to assure the safety of the student interviewers, surveys were conducted in high traffic open spaces, such as libraries, barbershops and local grocery stores.

The project was approved by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock’s Institutional Review Board in the late summer of 2014. Before they went into the field, student team members were carefully trained about research ethics through course readings and in-class discussions.

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Research team members explained the project to potential participants and assured them of confidentiality before requesting verbal or written consent to participate.

Twelve focus groups were conducted, soliciting the opinions of approximately 80 participants in addition to the survey respondents. These discussions were recorded through audio recording as well as hand-written notes. After transcribing and coding these audio recordings, student researchers analyzed the data to identify codes and themes that could be used to interpret the data. The editors actually reviewed every single survey and analyzed them afresh to complete this final report.

Data Limitations

Two data limitations were identified in this study. First, surveys were gathered using a non-randomized probability sample, otherwise known as a convenience sample. Though this approach is not the most rigorous design possible, this sampling method is routinely used for a variety of purposes, such as political polling and marketing (Fowler, 2014; Grinnell, Williams, and Unrau, 2014). This method had the benefit of being practical and suited the purposes of the study, allowing the students to ensure efficiency, flexibility, and safety in conducting their research. We were able to reduce selection bias by conducting survey at diverse locations in order to reach different demographics within the community and by conducting a large number of surveys (See Appendices A and B).

The second limitation was that the study included individuals who worked or attended church in but did not live in the target area for this study. It is possible that participants who work or worship in the area, but do not live there have a different perspective on conditions in the target neighborhoods and may have different opinions about government responsiveness than residents. It is also possible that the opinions of those who did not live in the area may be based on hearsay, rather than personal experience. That being said, it may actually strengthen the research to have information from people who live in the target area as well as those who just work or worship in the target area, as it gives a more complete perspective on conditions in the area.

The sample size achieved is more than adequate to draw generalizations for the population living south of I-630. For a population of 100,000, at a confidence level of 95%, the sample size needed would be 383. This study far exceeded that level, given that over four hundred and fifty citizens on the south side of Little Rock were surveyed. In addition, twelve focus groups were conducted, lending further strength to the conclusions.

Nevertheless, this study is significant in terms of scope, methods and topic, and provides a significant contribution to the knowledge of the relationship between members of the Little Rock community south of I-630 and their local government representatives.

Findings from Focus Groups

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The results of the focus groups indicated that there was a high level of unfamiliarity and distrust between residents of neighborhoods south of I-630 and their elected officials. Residents also indicated a high level of concern about a variety of issues, including crime, safety, dissatisfaction with vacant and abandoned housing in the area and an inadequate allocation of resources, all of which require a high level of trust and communication to resolve.

Major themes also included police/community and government/community relations, differences in neighborhoods between south and north of I-630, and neighbors perceptions and grievances. Many study participants indicated that they would be open to more communication with their elected officials, which shows that they are willing to put in the work necessary to resolve their issues.

Familiarity with Mayor and City of Board of Directors

Many focus group participants were not familiar with the Mayor or the City Board of Directors. Additionally, many participants stated that they did not feel like either of those entities adequately represented their neighborhoods' needs and interests. In fact, participants frequently stated that the Mayor and City Board only hear those individuals with political or monetary influence. More than one focus group found that even when those entities listen to the requests of the community, in the residents view, nothing appears to get done, or it takes very long to get done.

Unresponsive City Officials

Following up on that theme, a resounding issue raised in focus groups, supported by survey data, is that residents in the neighborhoods south of I-630 generally feel that local government does not address their concerns and needs. Many residents are discouraged and exhausted from the constant fight to be heard by city officials. A woman in attendance at a focus group voiced her frustration with the area not even receiving basic services such as street cleaning. She noted,

“South End is never on the schedule unless we have to petition for it. And I don't mean just make a simple call. I mean petition.”

One participant stated,

“since they not around here, they not gone' do nothin'. Well, I ain't gone say they not gone do nothin; but they not gone put attention to it like they should, so that's one thing.”

Many other focus group participants echoed this sentiment, with one participant noting that although she felt that the Mayor would be willing to listen, he would be unlikely to put forth an effort to actually address their concerns. Participants also noted that they have similar issues with the City Board of Directors, with one participant stating that,

“There are members of the Board who are actively hostile to ideas that are brought up and it’s more because they’ve decided that rather than listen to what the issues are that my constituents are seeing and some possible solutions, this is what I believe, and that’s it.”

Participants also noted that they have tried several different methods to communicate with their elected officials. They have been to meetings, written letters and emails, and called them on the phone. However, they explained that it is very difficult to get officials to really “hear them.” Other respondents gave some alternative ways in which citizens can communicate to their officials and get them to pay attention to them, such as getting the media involved, and going as a group to express their demands. However effective these additional methods may be, they do not reduce the perception of unresponsiveness by local government to the issues facing the community south of I-630.

City Board meetings and the Little Rock City Board of Directors were a big topic of debate in all focus groups. Many residents who spoke in the focus groups felt that the Board meetings are not useful because members of the Board are not legally required to act upon the needs that citizens expressed during the meeting. Many focus group respondents believe that the board only works with those with political or financial power.

The lack of communication between neighborhood residents and city officials was a recurring theme. Focus group participants also indicated that they felt as if the Mayor and the Board of Directors only make their presence known when it is time for an election. One participant indicated that they would like to hear from their elected officials more often, saying,

“you know, we hear from them when it’s re-election time. I mean, I mean really this is not a complaint of bein’ negative, this is just the truth. It, you know, it oughta be a card or something’ come at some point, or somethin’, you know, a postcard.”

A Tale of Two Little Rocks: Disparity between the Neighborhoods south of I-630 and those to the north and west

The disparity in the services and quality of life between the south and north of I-630 was a recurring theme in the focus groups. Ultimately, we discovered that residents south of I-630 perceive a division within the city of Little Rock, with those to its south feeling neglected and underserved. Participants repeatedly expressed differences between the two sides of the interstate, and gave detailed testimonies of such differences. As one woman put it,

“we are just on the backburner for everything.”

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The man concerned about sidewalks, mentioned above, explained the very different treatment he received when bringing up an issue to elected officials. He said,

“When I went before the board about the sidewalk, a guy stepped up right after me and said ‘this may not be as important as the sidewalk, but I want to talk about this golf course.’ So [an important city official said] ‘Okay [another important city official] take him down the hall to talk about so and so,’ and there they went.

Assuming that the above incident occurred as reported, it reflects a difference of treatment, which citizens may feel has to do with living on the “wrong side” of I-630. For example, one focus group made reference to the Two Rivers Park Bridge, and park revitalization projects in developed and wealthier communities in Little Rock. Some focus groups went so far to say that they felt that the City was not spending money equitably, and that wealthier and newer parts of town got much more attention from the city than the neighborhoods south of I-630.

Public Safety, Crime and Police

Participants also indicated a high level of concern regarding public safety and a general distrust of police in their neighborhoods. Residents expressed concerns over the level of crime in their neighborhoods, as well as a perceived lack of police presence. Theft and robbery were crimes that were frequently mentioned.

Participants said that police officers come when asked for help “sometimes.” Ironically, many residents noted they would only call law enforcement for certain crimes. Residents often chose not to report crimes they viewed as petty, such as cars parked on their grass, would not. Thus, residents expressed that they cannot count on local police officers. Participants shared several instances in which they had to resolve issues on their own given the delayed response of police, even though one participant presented the idea that police are so busy looking for problems that they fail to respond when people in the neighborhood actually need them, saying,

“I don’t understand why they keep riding up and down the block. It’s like they lookin’ for somethin’.”

Among focus group participants, the perception of the police force was not particularly positive. Several participants spoke of calling the police after a robbery or some other illegal activity, and receiving a slow response, or no response at all. In several instances participants offered examples in which police officers and other officials had “disrespected” them. One woman was robbed and asked to use the phone in the police office and was not allowed. When able to come in direct contact with police officers, many focus group participants felt that they had no familiarity with the residents of the area and that the police officers were “rude.”

In addition to response time, participants felt that the nature of how police officers arrive on the scene south of I-630 is different than other parts of Little Rock. It was expressed that participants felt that police officers arrive in an extreme amount of protective gear and with a

squad of patrol cars. Most respondents agreed that this is unnecessary, especially when the same nature of response is not consistent all over Little Rock.

Despite the recent construction of a new police substation, many participants did not have a high level of confidence that there would be any positive impact on crime rates in the neighborhood. Some participants indicated that they felt that the money would have been better spent on creating a safe space for youth to spend time after school. Yet, some residents indicated that did feel more secure in their neighborhood after the opening of the 12th street station. That being said, it is the view of the authors that more efforts towards community policing, such as police on horses, on bikes, on segways, and on foot would enhance relations between residents south of I-630 and the police.

Neighborhood Associations and Neighborhood Watch

Some participants stated that they felt as if their neighborhood associations addressed issues effectively, which speaks to the importance of building a strong community in order to initiate positive changes in a neighborhood.

When one participant was asked about additional concerns in their neighborhood, the participant indicated that they have a neighborhood watch, and

“we band together, we know what’s goin’ on, and whenever we have a problem, we call, you know, we call the police.”

Cleanup and Infrastructure Improvements

As a result of difference in the attention of the local government between the south and north of I-630, the residents who participated in the focus groups claim that major cleanup and improvement of infrastructure is necessary in their community.

Most residents complained about the declining infrastructure in the neighborhood. There were a range of concerns regarding general maintenance and investment in neighborhood infrastructure. Many residents discussed that roads are in bad condition, there are many unrepaired and deep potholes, lighting and sidewalks are in disrepair many houses and lots are abandoned, and the area as a whole needs improvement and cleanup. Focus group respondents also mentioned potholes and broken street lights in need of repair, sewer issues, broken sidewalks, a need for trash cans and improved trash pickup, and more public transportation. Other infrastructure related issues included that curbs are small and torn up, and this forces people to walk in the the street, even if they are handicapped. Further the bus stops are inadequate, the ones available are difficult to use.

Several residents in multiple focus groups voiced the need for sidewalks to be installed or repaired in the few areas where they existed. Sidewalk condition is a safety concern, as

students were told many times that people, including children, and disabled people are walking home from work or school, are forced to walk in the street.

One gentleman discussed how he had been petitioning city hall for several years to have sidewalks placed on a particular street within his neighborhood. His desire for sidewalks is based on the walkability of the neighborhood, as well as safety and beautification concerns. He described how schoolchildren are forced to walk in the street to and from their school buses which is a great safety hazard. His frustration was intensified because of the willingness of the government to create bike lanes all over town, as well as three dog parks within a small radius.

Lack of Jobs and Economic Development in the Community

One common concern was that few jobs are actually available in the neighborhoods south of I-630. This means that many residents of these neighborhoods have to rely on public transportation to travel to other areas in order to work. Unfortunately, participants noted that public transportation in the area is often unreliable, which makes it extremely difficult for participants to work.

A number of respondents indicated that the lack of investment in their neighborhoods has greatly affected economic growth and development leading to a lack of jobs and career possibilities. They felt there are more opportunities in other parts of Little Rock where the city has invested in economic development. Participants alluded several times to the fact that there is a big need for employment opportunities and job training. Younger respondents noted that living in the South side is more affordable than living in other parts of Little Rock; however, there are limited job opportunities close to the affordable housing. Many respondents recommended that the City increase bus lines between south Little Rock and other parts of the issue. This remark indicates a clear connection between three key interrelated issues: jobs, housing and transportation.

In addition to economic investment, participants expressed that they believe that expanding job opportunities will help crime to decrease.

Healthy Recreation

The need to focus on empowering young people in the area was raised repeatedly in focus groups in numerous ways.² Some citizens suggested a need for more after school activities, and more teen and youth centers.³ In addition, some residents requested more art centers. Respondents agreed that South Little Rock needs more healthy recreation options for youth and

² Dr. Bowman worked on a city panel in the fall to select a consultant to develop a youth master plan for the City of Little Rock. She is aware the city is concerned about this issue. Nonetheless, we are trying to objectively report the results of our research.

³ The editors are aware that many free and low cost activities are available for young people through the city park system. However, perhaps more publicity of those options is needed in the areas south of I-630.

children. Of course, they also noted that parents and adults have to get involved for these programs to thrive. For many, engaging the youth is tied to the issue of crime as a method of prevention.

Concern About Vacant Lots and Abandoned Buildings

One of the most pressing concerns of focus group participants was the number of vacant lots and abandoned homes in neighborhoods south of I-630. It was expressed that these vacant lots and houses not only represent a significant fire hazard, but they also decrease the value of surrounding properties and are often used as havens for drug users, the homeless, and prostitutes. Residents asked for the repurposing of lots and vacant houses. Participants believed that these factors would reduce crime, deter prostitution, and improve the overall quality of life in these neighborhoods. The combination of deteriorating streets and sidewalks combined with a lack of upkeep of vacant houses was a destructive one.

“There is no buy in in the community: no pride of ownership. Many of the houses in the area are rental properties owned by people who live out of state. There are weed lots, many abandoned, and [...] burned out houses. Roofs caving in, windows busted, carports and sheds falling down. There is trash in the yards, and no one seems to want to do anything about it.”

Respondents noted that it is not uncommon to see vacant homes and overgrown lots left behind by unidentifiable owners. These unsightly properties contribute significantly to negative neighborhood morale. The abandoned houses and lots often attract rodents, provide havens for drug users, the homeless and prostitutes. In addition the abandoned houses are potential fire hazards, and bring property values down for the entire neighborhood. Participants indicated that handling the issue of vacant lots and homes by simply tearing down the existing structures was not an adequate response. Many focus group participants lamented the fact that abandoned homes are torn down by the city instead of being “restored or repurposed.” One participant summed the problem with this approach up by stating,

“From what I can tell, the city just tears them down, ridding us of our past as well as our hope for the future.”

Community’s Lack of Effort to Make Improvements

An interview with a city employee stationed at a neighborhood watch center indicated an interesting perspective. Her perspective was that the community was not taking responsibility for its own problems, and that the burden of change lay on them, not the city. This employee stated that the issue was not the availability of resources, but the community’s lack of effort to make improvements. This interviewee made the point that it does not matter whether or not local government is responsive to the public, if the public is not speaking to its government. What has

to happen, according to this interviewee, is that the people who live in these neighborhoods have to step up and decide that living in these conditions is not okay, and that they have to take action to change them.

Similar sentiments emerged from focus groups. Focus group respondents wanted people to come together to create a “shared voice” on some issues. They wanted to see more people supporting local businesses, for example, and a greater sense of community and civil engagement.

Findings from Surveys

The Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students administered 398 short surveys, and 67 long surveys for a total of 465 surveys. It is important to note that some survey respondents left questions blank or answered questions outside of the survey design. As a result, the number of respondents may vary in the following discussion of the survey results. Of the 465 respondents, 83% lived or worked in the neighborhoods located between Battery and Fair Park and south of I-630, and 13% did not live or work in those neighborhoods.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents living or working in the targeted neighborhoods.

Do you live or work in the neighborhoods located between Battery and Fair Park and south of I-630?	Response percentage
Yes	83%
No	13%
N/A	4%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

All respondents were asked a series of introductory questions regarding their familiarity with the Mayor of Little Rock and the Little Rock Board of Directors. Of the 464 respondents, only 49% indicated that they were familiar with the Mayor of Little Rock, while only 42% indicated that they were familiar with the Little Rock Board of Directors.

Table 2: Respondents’ familiarity with city officials (Mayor and Board of Directors).

Are you familiar with the office of the Mayor of Little Rock?	Response percentage
Yes	49%
No	48%
Maybe	0.2%

N/A	2.8%
Are you familiar with the Little Rock Board of Directors?	Response percentage
Yes	42%
No	56%
N/A	2%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

Respondents to the short survey were then asked to indicate whether they believed that the Mayor of Little Rock and the Little Rock Board of Directors would listen to their concerns and help them. These respondents were also asked to elaborate and explain why they felt that these officials would or would not help them. Of 398 respondents to the short survey, only 32% said that they thought the Mayor of Little Rock would listen to them and help them. Of those respondents, 29% indicated that they believed the Mayor would help them based on a personal experience or opinion, while 22% indicated that they believed the Mayor would help them because it is his job or responsibility to do so. Of the 38% of respondents who said that they did not think the Mayor would help them, 23% held that belief due to personal experience with the Mayor, while 19% stated that he either does not care enough to act, is too busy, or is too focused on his own agenda.

Table 3: Respondent beliefs regarding the willingness of the Mayor of Little Rock to listen and help them with problems.

Do you think that the Mayor would listen to your concerns and help you?	Response Percentage	Why or Why Not?	Response Percentage
Yes	32%		
		<i>Personal experience</i>	29%
		<i>It's his job/responsibility</i>	22%
		<i>No answer</i>	20%
		<i>Other</i>	12%
		<i>Easy to reach</i>	6%
		<i>He wants to get re-</i>	5%

		<i>elected</i>	
		<i>Part of his constituency</i>	5%
No	38%		
		<i>Personal experience</i>	23%
		<i>Too busy/doesn't care/has own agenda</i>	19%
		<i>No answer</i>	17%
		<i>Neighborhood is not a priority</i>	13%
		<i>I'm just one person</i>	9%
		<i>Other</i>	9%
		<i>Poor/not wealthy enough</i>	7%
		<i>Difficult to reach</i>	2%
		<i>No confidence in government</i>	2%
Maybe/Don't Know	28%		
N/A	2%		

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

When asked whether they felt that the Board of Directors would listen and help them, respondents also indicated a low level of confidence, with only 38% stating that they felt the Board of Directors would help them. One quarter of respondents felt that the Board of Directors would help them based on personal experiences, while 20% expressed the belief that the Board of Directors should help them because it is their job or responsibility. Of the 26% of respondents that said that they did not believe that the Board of Directors would help them, 18% stated that their belief was due to personal experiences with the Board of Directors.

Table 4: Respondent beliefs regarding the willingness of the Little Rock Board of Directors to listen and help them with problems.

Do you think that the Board of Directors would	Response Percentage	Why or Why Not?	Response Percentage
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listen to your concerns and help you? Why or why not?			
Yes	38%		
		<i>Personal experience</i>	25%
		<i>No answer</i>	24%
		<i>It's their job/responsibility</i>	20%
		<i>There to serve/help</i>	12%
		<i>Other</i>	10%
		<i>Smaller area makes it easier to address needs</i>	5%
		<i>They live in the neighborhood</i>	3%
No	26%		
		<i>No answer</i>	22%
		<i>Personal experience</i>	18%
		<i>Too busy/don't care</i>	10%
		<i>I'm just one person</i>	8%
		<i>Not the "right" neighborhood</i>	7%
		<i>Don't know them</i>	7%
		<i>Other</i>	7%
		<i>Not rich enough</i>	5%
		<i>Lack of response</i>	4%
Maybe/Unsure	27%		
N/A	8%		

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

Respondents who participated in the long version of the survey were asked an additional question about their familiarity with the Little Rock City Manager. Only 30% of respondents to this question indicated that they were familiar with the Little Rock City Manager. This lack of familiarity is reinforced by the responses to the question about whether the respondents knew the City Manager’s name, which only 22% respondents answered yes to. Respondents were also asked whether they knew the names of their City Director, at-large City Directors, and the Mayor. Of these offices, the Mayor had the highest name recognition, with 31% of respondents stating that they knew his name. Only 24% of respondents knew who their City Director was and only 9% of respondents knew the names of any at-large City Directors.

Table 5: Public officials’ name recognition.

Public Official’s Title	Yes, Know Name	No, Do Not Know Name	No Answer
Mayor	31%	57%	12%
City Director	24%	58%	18%
At-Large City Director	9%	75%	16%
City Manager	22%	60%	18%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

Additionally, these respondents were asked about their understanding of the duties of the Mayor, the Board of Directors, and the City Manager. The most common understanding of the Mayor’s role in city government was that he is responsible for running or leading the city, with 29% of respondents identifying this as the Mayor’s primary role. However, 21% of respondents also indicated that the primary duty of the Board of Directors is to govern the city and listen to citizens and 26% respondents indicated that the role of the City Manager is to manage or govern the city. This may indicate that there is a lack of understanding regarding the hierarchy of city government.

Table 6: Duties of elected city officials.

Public Official’s Title	Roles and Duties	Response Percentage
Mayor		
	<i>Run/lead the city</i>	29%
	<i>No answer</i>	26%
	<i>Meet needs of community</i>	14%

	<i>Public face of the city</i>	11%
	<i>Assist growth of city</i>	6%
	<i>Oversee Board of Directors</i>	5%
	<i>Don't know</i>	5%
	<i>Other</i>	5%
	<i>Getting over on people</i>	2%
City Director		
	<i>No answer</i>	40%
	<i>Govern city/listen to citizens</i>	21%
	<i>Don't know</i>	19%
	<i>Govern sectors of city</i>	7%
	<i>Advise Mayor and City Manager</i>	6%
	<i>Other</i>	4%
	<i>Getting over on people</i>	1%
City Manager		
	<i>No answer</i>	39%
	<i>Manage/govern city</i>	26%
	<i>CEO of city/operations</i>	17%
	<i>Don't know</i>	13%
	<i>Gives permits</i>	1%
	<i>Getting over on people</i>	1%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

After answering these questions about familiarity with and specific duties of city officials, respondents to the long survey were asked a series of questions about issues related to maintenance, safety, and city improvements. These questions focused on whether the respondent would make a call to report an issue or incident, who the respondent would call, and how confident they are that their issue would be addressed in a timely manner. When asked if they would call to report pot holes or drainage issues in their neighborhood, 55% of

respondents indicated that they would. This number increased slightly to 61% when respondents were asked whether they would call the city to report something illegal or suspicious in their neighborhood.

Table 7: Respondent willingness to report issues to the city.

Would you call the city to report pot holes or drainage problems?	Response	Response percentage
	Yes	55%
	No	27%
	No answer or unsure	18%
Would you call the city to report illegal or suspicious activity in your neighborhood?	Response	Response percentage
	Yes	61%
	No	18%
	No answer or unsure	21%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

When respondents were asked to identify who they would call in the event of an issue with pot hole or drainage, 40% (17) indicated that they would call someone at City Hall to handle the problem. The second most common response was to call 311, which 24% (10) of respondents indicated that they would do. As is to be expected, when the question shifted to whom the respondent would call in the event of illegal or suspicious activity, 63% (42) of respondents indicated that they would call 911 or the police. These results indicate that respondents have a general idea of which departments are appropriate to contact in different situations.

Table 8: Departments that would be called to deal with an issue.

Who would you call at the city to report a pot hole or drainage problem?	Response	Response percentage
	The City/City Hall/City Council	40%
	311	24%

	N/A or unsure	21%
	Bruce Moore	5%
	Mayor	5%
	Street Department	2%
	911	2%
Who would you call at the city to report illegal or suspicious activity in your neighborhood?	Response	Response percentage
	911/Police	63%
	N/A or unsure	22%
	Neighborhood alert center/non-emergency police line/UALR police	10%
	311/411	3%
	City Hall	1%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

Respondents were also asked about whether they have ever called 911 for an emergency. If they had, respondents were then asked a series of questions regarding their experience. Only 37% of respondents indicated that they had ever called 911 for an emergency. Of those respondents that answered follow-up questions about their experience, 52% indicated that they had called 911 in response to a violent crime and 30% indicated that they had called 911 to report a break-in. The majority of respondents who had called 911 about an emergency, 56%, indicated that their experience had been a positive one, while 32% indicated that their experience was just okay. Regardless of their experience, 96% respondents indicated that the proper city department responded to their emergency in a timely manner.

Table 9: Percentage of respondents that have called 911 for an emergency and the reason for the call.

Have you ever called 911 for an emergency?	Response percentage	Type of emergency	Response percentage
Yes	37%		

		<i>Shotgun/crime/violence/accident</i>	52%
		<i>Break-in</i>	30%
		<i>Health issues</i>	13%
		<i>Issues with neighbor</i>	4%
No	51%		
N/A or unsure	12%		

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

Before transitioning into questions about improvements that have already been completed in the neighborhoods south of I-630, respondents were asked whether they believe that neighborhoods south of I-630 receive the same service from the City of Little Rock as neighborhoods north of I-630 and west of University Avenue. Only 21% of respondents said that the two areas of the city receive the same level of service, while 52% indicated that they did not believe that the two areas receive the same level of service. When asked to explain the difference in the level of service, 44% of respondents indicated that they believed the difference was due to neighborhoods south of I-630 having lower levels of wealth or being considered the “wrong” neighborhood for investment.

Table 10: Attitudes towards differences in City service level and perceived causes

Do you believe that neighborhoods south of I-630 receive the same level of service from the City of Little Rock as neighborhoods north of I-630 and west of University Avenue?	Response percentage	If not, please explain the difference between the two areas of the city.	Response percentage
Yes	21%		
No	52%		
		<i>Not rich enough/wrong neighborhood</i>	44%
		<i>No answer or unsure</i>	27%

		<i>Higher crime rates/lower police presence/worse maintenance</i>	17%
		<i>Untimely intervention</i>	7%
		<i>Other</i>	5%
N/A or unsure	27%		

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

The respondents were then asked to indicate what were the top three most pressing issues facing their neighborhood, which, according to them, needed assistance from the city government on. The Class 10 students collected a total of 750 responses from the 465 respondents, the majority of which related to crime or violence issues (26%). 12% of the responses discussed several housing-related issues, such as the presence of abandoned houses and/or lots and the lack of affordable houses in the neighborhoods, and 12% of the responses concerned streets maintenance or cleanliness issues. Moreover, 9% of the responses expressed worries around the lack of care for young people in terms of after-school programs and/or better education possibilities; lack of care for the elderly; and worries around the lack of proper access to different forms of welfare, such as food and/or health. 8% of the responses contained concerns about the lack of effective/timely police intervention during an emergency and the lack of rapport of the police with the community, 8% of the responses collected by the students related to homelessness, poverty and hunger issues; and another 7% of the responses expressed preoccupation about the lack of jobs and the high unemployment rate in those areas.

Table 11: Percentage of responses indicating different issues that the respondents found as pressing in their neighborhoods, feeling the need for assistance from the city.

What are the top three most pressing issues facing your neighborhood that you think you need assistance from the city government on?	Response percentage
Crime/ Violence	26%
Abandoned houses/ Not enough houses/ Housing-related issues	12%
Streets repair/upkeep/cleanliness	12%
More care for youth and elderly/ Better access to welfare	9%

Lack of timely/effective police intervention/ Lack of police rapport with the community	8%
Homelessness/ Poverty/ Hunger	8%
Unemployment/ Lack of jobs	7%
Drug dealing/dealers	5%
Sidewalks building/repair	5%
Traffic/speeding	4%
Lack of business incentives/intervention	2%
N/A/ Unsure	1%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

Only 15% of the respondents answered the question related to their reactions to the construction of the new police substation on 12th Street. Of those 68 respondents, 38% said that it looks nice, that it is a nice addition to the neighborhood, and that it is needed and helpful to the area. 32% stated to be indifferent to or to not have any opinion on the matter. Finally, 12% complained about the construction, claiming that the money could have been spent somewhere else more urgent.

Table 12: Percentage of responses indicating different the reactions of the respondents to the construction of the new police substation on 12th Street.

What are your reactions to the construction of this new police substation?	Response percentage
I like it/ Pretty nice/ Nice addition/ Needed/ Helpful to the area	38%
Indifferent/ Don't have any opinion	32%
Money could have been spent somewhere else more urgent/ Waste of money	12%
Hopeful about it	7%
Too much police in the area now	7%
Horror/ Gentrification	3%
N/A/ Unsure	1%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

Finally, the respondents were asked about their opinion on the addition of the new bike lanes on 12th Street. 12% of the respondents answered this question. Of those 54, 48% stated that they consider the new bike lanes nice, and that they add something more to 12th Street. 16% declared that they do not like it, and that they do not know if it is truly useful. Finally, 15% of the respondents stated that they consider the new bike lanes to be dangerous, and that they make the traffic bad.

Table 13: Percentage of responses indicating different opinions of the respondents to the addition of the new bike lanes to 12th Street.

What do you think of the addition of the new bike lanes?	Response percentage
Nice/ More to it	48%
Don't like it/ Not sure if useful	16%
Dangerous/ Make traffic bad	15%
No one uses them	11%
N/A/ Unsure	10%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students.

To conclude, the respondents were asked if they believed that the community had been involved in deciding the addition of the bike lanes to 12th Street. 11% of the respondents answered to this question. 65% stated that they do not believe that the community played a part in the decision-making process, while 26% affirmed that they did believe that the community was consulted prior to the addition of the new bike lanes.

Table 14: Percentages indicating if the respondents believed or not that the community was involved in deciding to put bike lanes on 12th Street.

Do you believe that the community was involved in deciding to put bike lanes on 12th Street?	Response percentage
Yes	26%
No	65%
N/A/ Unsure	9%

Source: Surveys conducted by Clinton School of Public Service Class 10 students

Proposed Solutions

Some potential solutions for improving the relationships between elected officials and communities south of I-630 include getting the community involved prior to making decisions about new construction. Citizens also encouraged elected officials to seek out their constituents, rather than the other way around. Further, numerous residents suggested using city funds to repurpose vacant lots into community gardens, parks, playgrounds, soccer fields or youth centers.

Citizen respondents asked for the repurposing of vacant lots, increase of job opportunities and work training, and the development of youth programs. Many residents would like to see the city take initiative with programs to help those who cannot afford the upkeep of their homes, as well as look into the rehabilitation of abandoned homes. Residents believed that initiatives like those named above would improve the overall quality of life in the neighborhoods south of I-630.

Much of the ambivalence toward city officials by citizens living south of I-630, in the view of the editors, may likely be attributed to limited exposure and opportunity to build trust between citizens and elected officials. We are hopeful that increased communication and exposure between elected officials and this community could greatly improve relations and trust. In the view of the authors, small gestures like taking significant time to interact with residents south of I-630 and engage with people on the street in combination with renewed attention to the key concerns of citizens living south of I-630 could have a very positive, impact on perceptions of local government.

Directions for Future Research

In order to develop a more complete understanding of community members' perceptions of local government, as well as the issues facing the community, future research may include additional in-depth face to face interviews with community workers. Future research could also map out the neighborhoods more systematically to make results more reliable and more generalizable. In addition, it may be desirable to conduct some focus groups only with people who work in the area, and other focus groups with people who live in the area, and to more clearly identify those distinctions in the survey instrument itself.

Conclusion

This study represents a significant contribution to the knowledge regarding the relations between members of the community south of I-630 and local government representatives. Results were consistent across all twelve focus groups. In addition, the results of this study were consistent across both the focus groups and the survey results, lending credibility to the findings.

University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service
I-630 Study
March 9, 2015

In 2009 the Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University conducted a study to gauge American's confidence in their elected officials. In general, local government garnered lower than average levels of confidence. Respondents identified "six leadership qualities that have the greatest impact on Americans' leadership confidence: trust, competence, working for the greater good, shared values, results, and being in touch with peoples' needs and concerns" (Rosenthal et al., 2009). The results of the study conducted by Class 10 of the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service suggest that city officials can enhance confidence by working on issues like trust, working for the greater good, and listening to peoples' needs and concerns.

The World Bank Annual Meetings, held in October of 2014 included discussion about development and the role of citizens. According to panelists at these meetings, there is realization on the part of city governments that a transparent and accessible process could lead to improved and long lasting progress in terms of development. The World Bank meeting focused specifically on ways to improve relationships between local government entities and their citizens (Gigler, 2014). Increasing trust must be a main objective and this can occur if there is increased communication and transparency. A government available to listen must also be ready to respond. Civic participation by the citizens who are affected is vital. Including the civil society organizations in the partnership will help with communication, cultural norms and enhancing accountability of policy makers (Gigler, 2014).

Residents living south of the interstate appear to believe, whether rightly or wrongly, that local government officials are not concerned about their problems. Residents repeatedly cited a lack of influence, a lack of economic resources and a lack of power or privilege as reasons why the Mayor and the City Board neglect their issues. Accordingly, our research indicates that I-630 not only creates a physical disconnect, but an information barrier as well. The individuals we spoke to had a weak relationship with local government which led to negative opinions, and a lack of faith in elected officials. Clearly, better public official/community and police/community relations are critical to the improvement of the area.

Aside from local government relations, the major findings of this study is that individuals living or working in neighborhoods south of I-630 feel that lack of jobs and economic opportunity are of pressing concern in their communities. They mentioned lack of jobs and job training as significant barriers to developing their communities. Further, significant concerns were expressed about broken sidewalks, inadequate lighting, abandoned houses, houses in severe disrepair, and the need for neighborhood cleanup in their communities. Crime in the community emerged as a key concern. Neighborhoods south of I-630 desperately need cleanup, improved infrastructure and repurposing of vacant lots.

The editors of the paper believe that the words of one focus group participant summarize the most important ideas contained in this paper. As this respondent pointed out poignantly,

"it may not seem that we all want nice things, but we all do."

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I-630 Study
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Appendix A: Survey Collection Sites

Arkansas Food Bank	Grace Temple Church
12th Street	Forest Park Elementary
Philander Smith College	Miracle Wash Coin Laundry
The Root Cafe	River Cities Center Bus Stop
UALR Community Health Fair	UALR Campus
Hillary Rodham Clinton Children's Library	Shopping Center on University Avenue
Local Soup Kitchen	Gaines Street Baptist Church
Laundromat (Main Street)	Walgreen's (Main Street)
South Park Street	14th Street
Little Rock Central High School	Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site
South Schiller Street	Louisiana Avenue
Hair Salon (University Avenue)	Pawn Shop (University Avenue)
Insurance Agency (University Avenue)	Hippie Shop (University Avenue)
Sue Cowan Williams Library	Uncle T's Groceries (Daisy Bates)
Gambles (Wright Avenue)	Kay Hall & Sons Produce (Wright Ave.)
Esquire Barber (Wright Avenue)	St. Francis Home (Cedar & 27th)
17th & Spring	Family Dollar (Main & 19th)
Bus stop (Main and 15th)	22nd & Spring
Oak Forest Neighborhood Resource Center	Fairpark (UALR)
Adult Education Center (4800 W. 26th)	Fire station (22nd & Peyton)
Broadway St.	Bishop Leodies and Goldie Warren Family Life Center
City Market (4110 W. 12th St.)	Curlee's Boutique (4000 W. 12th St.)
12th St. Health & Wellness Center	Quapaw Quarter United Methodist

	Church (1601 S. Louisiana St.)
Corner of 14th & Main	Corner of 14th and S. Park
Corner of S. Chester and W. 12th	River Market
Kroger (Colonel Glenn & University Ave.)	UALR Health Fair
Main St.	Philander Smith College
Oak Forest Neighborhood Resource Center (3805 W. 12th St.)	UALR
Greater Christ Temple Pentecostal Church (1200 Lewis St.)	Arkansas Baptist College Adult Education Center (1418 W. Daisy Gatson Bates Dr.)

Appendix B: Focus Group Sponsors

Grace Temple Church
Philander Smith College
Central Little Rock Promise Neighborhood
Dream Center
Bullock Temple CME Church
Coalition of Little Rock Neighborhoods
Better Community Development
Arkansas Baptist College Adult Education Center
Quapaw Methodist Church