

# Bureaucratic Impermanence: How, When, and Why the Central Institutions of Local Government Choose Self-Termination

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# A Story of Seneca



*Seneca NE: 2010 Population 33*

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- The issue went to the Village Board, which found an old town law that actually banned the practice but was unenforced for decades
- The board, then unanimously voted to ban livestock in city limits altogether

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- It got 13 signatures, exactly enough to put the issue on the ballot in 2014.
- *“We just don’t want people telling us what to do. It was bound to be this and that (from the Village Board). We just want to be left alone.”* – resident Terri Hartman



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- So what's left? About 30 people in two factions who despise each other.

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- More generally, there is this idea that government, once created, is exceptionally difficult to get rid of (Coate and Morris 1999, etc.)
- This is not necessarily true: research shows that federal agencies are regularly created, restructured, and even destroyed (Corder 2004, Bickers and Stein 1995, etc.)

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- *This literature studies the termination of extensions of government, but not the central government itself.*

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- 40 states have some kind of disincorporation code on the books
- Disincorporation can be *involuntary* or *voluntary*, which usually happens when cities are struggling

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The question, therefore, is descriptive: which is the most common? Which rationales are the most likely to “succeed?” Do certain theories complement or compound each other? How can we evaluate this?

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- Process: Create a list of possible disincorporations → gather news coverage of each place and categorize

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- Extensions: *disincorporation*  $\rightarrow$  *outcomes*