The Long-term Effects of Government Structure on County Roles as Regional Service Providers

Jayce L. Farmer
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
School of Public Policy and Leadership

Email: Jayce.farmer@unlv.edu

A paper presented at the 2017 Southern Political Science Association annual meeting – Conference within a Conference on Local Governance and Sustainability, January 12 – 14.

Abstract

This paper examines the effects of government structure on the 35-year service patterns for regional and general services across 1,532 U.S. counties. The findings reveal that unreformed counties on average produced less spending per capita than reformed counties across all service areas. Observing the two major distinctions in county executive authority reveals that elected executive governments spend on average more in total per capita than other government types. Counties with the elected executive form also produced the most spending on average than other government types for regional services. However, the magnitude for increases in regional spending was relatively small. The findings of this analysis speak to the institutional structures that shape the incentives of local public decision makers.

Introduction

The question of whether the structure of government matters in local government policy decisions continues to capture the interests of scholars (Lineberry and Fowler 1967; Schneider and Park 1989; Feiock, Jeong and Kim 2003; Carr 2015). While much of this inquiry stresses the implications of the municipal reform movement, some scholars have placed a special emphasis on what progressive reform meant for the American county (Benton 2002; Schneider and Park 1989; Svara 1996; DeSantis and Renner 1996). Specifically, the question for counties comes to whether those with reformed or modernized government structures have a greater capacity to produce government services than those with unreformed structures. It is no secret that the reform movement has had a long-lasting impression on the culture that drives the way local governments behave. However, a shroud of mystery still resides over how progressive reform has impacted the way county governments function today.

Historically, counties served primarily as the administrative arms of the states (Benton 2002; Menzel 1996). They were traditionally thought to be lesser versions of local governments charged simply with providing the basic civic necessities of society (e.g. vital statistics and law enforcement). Yet, our modern impression of these entities views them as fully functional units charged with providing the amenities expected of an urban civilization. Furthermore, counties being region-wide institutions that encompass multiple jurisdictions, are frequently charged with the responsibility of portraying the role of the regional service provider. Given that counties are often essential in the allocation of regional goods such as land use, development and public transit, one must consider the importance and implications of their institutional settings in policy decisions. As institutional structures shape the incentives of public decision makers, such entities can be key in determining the benefits that dictate the choices of leaders for regional policy outcomes (Feiock 2002).

Originally, counties were administered by a collective body of elected officials, but owing to the reform movement of the Progressive Era, counties began to place their administrative leadership under the control of an executive official. Ideally, this monistic philosophy of administration would produce the leadership necessary to make counties more responsive to citizens. Prior research in this area shed light on this claim by suggesting that counties with executive officials produce more services than those administered by elected boards (Schneider and Park 1989; Benton 2002; Farmer 2011). Therefore, one must consider the link between the functional evolution of counties as service providers and the government structures overseeing these functions. The purpose of this paper is to address this consideration by looking at the connection between county structure and service provision in general, and then by examining this connection considering counties as regional service providers. This paper approaches this two-pronged effort by asking: What is the relationship between county government structure and county service patterns across all policies, and what is the relationship between county government structure and service patterns across regional policies? Using a systematic approach, this paper first examines these relationships within the context of institutional reform, and then examines the isolated effects surrounding the two major distinctions in county executive authority (appointed versus elected executive officials).

As background, this paper first presents a brief discussion of the Progressive Reform movement and its meaning for counties. Second, it discusses the changing roles of counties with an emphasis on their evolution as regional service providers. Subsequent sections present hypotheses, methods of analysis and report relevant findings. Finally, a discussion is presented that concludes with important theoretical implications and recommendations for future research.

Progressive Reform and Its Meaning for Counties

During the Progressive era, reformers prescribed several changes to municipalities that sought to do away with inefficiencies and corruption. One targeted outcome of these prescriptions was to professionalize the position of the public official to combat the problems associated with the patronage of urban political machines (Feiock, Jeong and Kim 2003). Municipal reformers called for a restructuring of the municipal landscape by replacing political influence with merit-based civil service. By changing the structure of municipal governments, reformers sought to reassign executive responsibilities from the elected mayoral officer to an appointed executive official. This effort resulted in the implementation of the institution of the council-manager form of government.

Under the council-manager plan, appointed city managers as opposed to elected mayors maintain the chief administrative authority of the city. The rationale behind this plan involved removing the high-powered political incentives of elected officials and replacing them with incentives shaped by professional norms, professional standards, and technical expertise (Frant 1996). These incentives provided appointed managers with longer time horizons that safeguard against the lack of commitment to the exercising of the public trust (Miller 2000). While it is argued that the outlook of mayors does not go beyond the next election, city managers are viewed as being insulated from external political pressures (Feiock, Jeong and Kim 2003; Lineberry and Fowler 1967). The longer time horizons of the professional administrator enable them to be innovators of strategy as opposed to respondents to political demands. The ideology of municipal reform rests on the philosophy that the political-administrative dichotomy could correct the corruption and inefficiencies brought forth by the incentives of political opportunism. For cities, this philosophy places a heavy emphasis on how the incentives of government form shape the strategic choices made by executive officials (Carr 2015).

For counties, the philosophies and rationality of reform place a heavy emphasis on the functionality of the government organization (Carr 2015; Benton 2002b; Menzel 1996). This is not to say that counties were immune to the corruption of the political machines, but rather many of their problems emerged from their weaker abilities to fully serve the public. Reformers therefore sought changes within counties due to the lack of professionalism among these entities that inhibited them from functioning like "modern" governments. This meant that the absence of a professional executive severely hindered counties from having adequate levels of public responsiveness and accountability. Likewise, the organizational and administrative makeup of counties inherently limited the scope and function of these entities. The archaic and fragmented nature of counties precluded them from having the centralization and flexibility that would enable them to respond to citizens' changing service demands (Menzel 1996; Benton 2002b). Consequently, the meaning behind county reform focused mainly on the empowerment of counties to become active public service providers (Benton 2002b; DeSantis and Renner 1994; Choi et al. 2010).

Counties were originally designed to serve as the administrative arms of the state. Thus, their abilities to function were subdued by their limited home rule in the areas of structural, functional and fiscal authority (Benton 2002b). Modernizing the American county government involved enhancing county levels of autonomy in these three areas. Structural changes included giving counties the authority to choose their form of government. Here, counties could move away from the traditional commission form of government with no executive leadership and choose between a commission-administrator and a commission-elected executive form of government (Benton 2002b). Meanwhile, functional changes allowed counties to expand and shift the provision of services from traditional functions as explicitly authorized by their states to a wider range of governmental services (DeSantis and Renner 1993). The call for fiscal reform involved providing counties with the financial flexibility to implement measures to stabilize their budgets. This included such things as giving counties the authority to diversify their revenue structures, issue bonds, adjust their budgetary policies, and improve their expenditure auditing and purchasing practices (Menzel 1996; Benton 2002b).

Benton (2002b) notes that the greatest need for county reform was to overcome structural limitations. Traditionally, county governments functioned under the commission form of government. This form of government consists of a plural executive body typically consisting of commissioners or administrative officers elected by partisan elections (Svara 1996; Duncombe 1966). The higher turnover in political leadership, the ambiguous managerial authority of administrators, and the conflicts and corruption associated with partisan politics, have all been predicted as contributing factors in the ineffectiveness of leadership within commission led counties (Svara 1996; Streib and Waugh 1991). This ineffective leadership was viewed as inadequate for counties to assume the responsibility of providing a broadened range of services. Reformers sought to overcome this by pushing for counties to be permitted to abandon this structure of government and move toward structures that were designed to provide more direct and strengthened leadership. If counties were to overcome the obstacles of ineffective management, then they would need government structures that provided strong unified positions of executive responsibility. Therefore, "the modern or reformed form of county government that is probably best able to satisfy the expanding service needs of a growing population is one that has either an appointed or elected executive as well as a charter" (Benton 2002b, 473). To this day advocates of progressive reform continue to defend this sentiment and its importance through institutionalized standards and practices as traditionally upheld in the *Model County Charter*.

The Changing Roles of County Governments as Service Delivery Agents

Prior research has frequently explored the underlying question of what is the role of government form in county efforts to act as service delivery agents. Much of the literature on U.S. counties recognizes how they have emerged as full-scale providers of government services (Benton and Menzel 1993; Benton 2002b; 2003; Park 1996; Schneider and Park 1989; Choi et al. 2010). The traditional role of counties dictated that they function as state administrative arms, providing services as only mandated by their states. Such services, referred to as traditional services included basic governmental functions such as health, vital statistics, law enforcement and welfare. However, overtime counties have increasingly expanded their roles to those that provide urban or municipal-like services (local services) that include such functions as the operation of parks and libraries, fire protection, public utilities, and solid waste disposal (Benton 2003; Benton and Menzel 1993). While urbanization and suburbanization have led to larger and more diverse populations, counties have also come to face regional problems that transcend municipal boundaries. To this end counties have emerged as the regional providers of services such as region-wide transportation, land use regulation, planning and zoning, and community development (Benton 2002a).

Linking County Government Structure to the Expansion of Service Delivery

As counties evolved as service providers, scholars have questioned the implications of government form. For example, Schneider and Park (1989) examined factors that contributed to counties broadening their range of service functions. Among other factors, they found that reformed county governments (those with an executive head official) functioned more like municipal service providers. Park (1996) presented similar findings in his examination of county expenditure growth over four periods in time. Within this analysis, reformed county governments were demonstrated to be positively associated with county expenditure growth. Others also provided results that brought consensus to the notion that the reformed government structure was associated with growing county services (DeSantis and Renner 1994; Benton and Menzel 1993; Benton 2003; Farmer 2011).

While the research on government form generally agrees that reformed counties will have greater service spending than unreformed counties, little consensus can be found regarding the question of whether the type of executive leadership makes a difference. The findings of Schneider and Park's analysis were furthered by their examination of the differences in spending patterns among county executive types. They found that of the executive headed counties, those with elected executives expended more on services than those functioning under other government forms. Yet, a later examination by DeSantis and Renner (1996) found that county appointed administrators were the ones who expended more on services as opposed to elected executives. However, their evaluation observes county expenditures within one time period, while Schneider and Park attempted to analyze spending patterns across time. The time factor is a key issue as observations across time can provide a broader historical picture of county growth. Likewise, if we are to rely on any of the logic derived from the municipal literature on government form, then Schneider and Park's findings make sense. That is, elected officials are more likely to be highly responsive to popular demands, and more likely to adopt policies with highly visible outcomes (Clingermayer and Feiock 2001; Carr 2015).

Linking County Government Structure to Regional Service Provision

Counties have increasingly been called upon to act as region-wide service providers that address problems and issues that transcend the jurisdictional boundaries of municipalities. Within this capacity, counties are faced with the challenge of having to reconcile the demands of all county residents (both incorporated and unincorporated). Counties are the logical choice for these types of issues as they have legal countywide authority that supersedes state grants of powers to other local governments (Benton 2002a). Likewise, their unique linking and coordinating capabilities (Benton 2002a) enable them to provide a type of centralized regional governance that is well suited to resolve countywide dilemmas. Therefore, counties become the first choice for cross-jurisdictional services such as sewer, transportation, and emergency response.

As the need for the provision of regional services grew, counties sought home rule authority that would enable them to pass legislation that permitted them to modernize their government structures. Expenditure data examined by Benton (2002b) confirmed this notion. Specifically, counties that were permitted to adopt a modernized form of government spent more per capita on regional services than counties that maintained the traditional commission form. Anecdotal evidence provided by others also suggests the existence of a link between reformed county governments and greater regional service spending, especially for development (Park 1996; Schneider and Park 1989). Although the category of development services may not constitute the same meaning as regional services, there is some cross over between these two policy areas. While development is usually defined to assess economic environments, it also generally includes services of a regional nature, such as transportation, land use and business attraction (Choi et al. 2010; Feiock 2004; Peterson 1981; Feiock 2002). Therefore, if reformed or modernized counties tend to place more emphasis on development spending, then we could also assume that they would likely place more emphasis on regional spending as well.

Assumptions regarding the effects of executive leadership types point to rational choice and political market explanations that argue that the incentives of executives create entrepreneurial tendencies that spark them to be more efficient in the supplying of regional goods (Feiock 2007, 2002, 2004; Lubell, Feiock, and Ramirez 2005; Ramirez 2009). These arguments heavily coincide with the innovator and facilitator models of chief executives (Svara 1996). Executives have selective incentives, whether political or professional to become public entrepreneurs in building coalitions and orchestrating policy outcomes. For elected executives, the political incentives of enhancing their chances for reelection are what drive them to find creative ways to respond to median voter preferences. For appointed officials, professional incentives intertwined with the desire to improve their careers are what drive them to become strategic planners and be innovative in addressing local deficiencies (Feiock 2007). Studies that place an emphasis on the implementation of development provide some validity to these assumptions (Feiock, Jeong, and Kim 2003; Feiock 2004; Park 1996; Schneider and Park 1989). For example, Feiock, Jeong and Kim (2003) found that population decline and the economic base were important factors in the implementation of certain development policies for cities with elected officials, while strategic planning played a bigger role for council-manager cities. Likewise, Clingermayer and Feiock (2001) also contributed to this argument when they found a direct positive relationship between mayoral leadership and the adoption of various economic development policies. When it comes to evidence regarding direct spending, Schneider and Park (1989) found that counties with elected executives spent more per capita on development than those with other government forms.

Despite scholarly efforts to address the link between county structure and county service provision, little has been revealed that clearly ties the types of institutional arrangements to counties evolving as regional service providers. Although some research has provided evidence suggesting modernized counties as the predominant providers of regional services, the question remains regarding the distinction between county executive leadership types. Likewise, the lack of clarity regarding this issue can to some degree be contributed to analytical observations taking place within one period of time. The lack of multiple observations across time contributes to the omission of important behavioral trends that can provide important insight regarding long-term temporal effects.

Hypotheses, Data, and Method of Analysis

This study examines the relationship between county service spending patterns and county institutional arrangements by presenting two sets of questions. The first questions explore this relationship from a broad perspective and ask whether government structure effects county service expenditure patterns in general, and is there a difference in service patterns between counties that have appointed executives and those with elected executive? Given the provided literature in this area, much of the research suggests that not only do modernized counties spend more in the provision of services, but modernized counties with elected executives spend the most. Therefore, it is expected that non-modernize counties will have an inverse relationship with county service spending, while both executive types will have positive effects. Meanwhile, it is expected that elected executive governments will have the strongest positive relationship in this area.

The second part of this analysis focuses primarily on counties as regional service providers. These questions ask whether government structure affects county services patterns for regional services, and is there a difference in regional service patterns between counties headed by appointed officials and those headed by elected executive officials? Previous research suggests that the modernization of counties will positively influence the provision of regional services. As with the first set of questions, logic dictates that counties with executive head officials will have the expertise and capacity to expand their service base to address the regional needs of the citizenry. Consequently, non-modernize counties should produce an inverse relationship with spending for regional services. Regarding the distinction between executive types, much of the literature suggests that counties with elected officials provide the institutional incentives that stimulate the entrepreneurial behavior needed to promote regional policies. The selective incentives embodied in the position of the elected official drives them to behave more opportunistically and become public entrepreneurs or innovative facilitators who are willing to build political coalitions with external stakeholders to resolve cross-jurisdictional dilemmas. Therefore, the expectation for this question is that counties with elected executives are expected to have the strongest positive relationship with county regional service spending.

Model and Data

Following prior work that assesses county expenditure patterns, this analysis uses a time-series cross-sectional design to assess effects that occur across both time and county areas to observe county expenditure patterns (Choi et al 2010). It assesses multiple panels of counties using a fixed effects linear regression routine that assumes the effects to be non-random with homogeneity in the coefficients across panels. All models were compared to a random effects estimator and are accompanied by a Hausman test that assesses the efficiency between the two models.[1] An evaluation of the data revealed evidence associated with violations of heteroscedasticity. Therefore, the analysis employs linear regression estimators with panelcorrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995). The models also include a lagged dependent variable to account for unknown inertial effects that can cause current shifts in the dependent variable that might otherwise go undetected (Wooldridge 2009). The dependent variable is per capita expenditures at the currently observed time *t*, while all independent variables are at time *t*-1.

Dependent Variables

The presented questions are examined through an analysis of per capita spending for a sample consisting of all U.S. counties with a population of 25,000 or greater in 2012. County level expenditure data were collected for the years 1977 through 2012 from the U.S. Census Historical Finances of Individual Governments taken from the quinquennial Census of Governments surveys. Therefore, this examination evaluates 1,532 counties every five years, producing 12,255 observations across eight time periods.[2] Total county expenditures examine county level spending across an aggregation of all county service areas. Meanwhile, regional expenditures aggregate spending across a variety of policy areas that include economic development, air transportation, mass transit (non-air), housing and community development, environmental protection, natural resources/land use, parking facilities, sewer, public works, and education.

Key Independent Variables

The analysis takes place across two stages to examine the three primary forms of county government: commission, commission-administrator and commission-elected executive.[3] The first stage of this analysis uses *commission form* as a dichotomous variable that captures whether a county is unreformed having a commission form of government with no head executive official, as opposed to reformed. The second stage examines the isolated effects of the variations in reformed governments to examine the implications of the two major distinctions in county executive authority. This stage employs two dichotomous measures, where *commission-administrator* captures whether a county has an executive head official that was appointed by the county's legislative body, and *elected executive* captures whether a county has an executive head official that was elected at large. Data for these explanatory variables come from the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) Profile of County Governments 1972, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Municipal Yearbook for the years 1983 through 2005, and the ICMA's Form of Government Survey for the years 1988, 1997 and 2002.

The analysis also includes a set of control variables that captures demographic and economic effects, as well as other local government institutional factors that prior studies have deemed empirically important for county level policy decisions (Choi et al. 2010; Carr 2006; Carr and Farmer 2011; Farmer 2011; Park 1996). The quantitative measurements, descriptions and sources of all included variables are highlighted in table 1.

Table 1 about here

Results

Table 2 reports estimates generated by the fixed effects models. The first set of columns includes the effects generated by the model that examines unreformed institutions, while the second set examines the isolated effects of the variations in reformed institutions. Both sets of columns display results for total expenditures and regional expenditures respectively. The Hausman statistic for all runs indicate that the fixed effect models are indeed more efficient than the random effects models. While the results generated by the linear regressions display interesting effects as suggested by the coefficients, conventional outputs such as these can be substantively ambiguous and can provide little insight as to the practical implications behind the quantities of interest (King, Tomz and Wittenburg 2000). Therefore, these results are supplemented by a series of post-estimation analyses that provide for a more substantive interpretation of the results. Consequently, the results as displayed in table 2, are interpreted using the post-estimation marginal effects that are provided in table 3.

Table 2 about here

Table 3 about here

Table 3 places a special emphasis on the quantities of interest by providing the expected values and marginal means for per capita county expenditures. These findings highlight the average effects of the explanatory variable on per capita spending in the average county. While holding other explanatory variables constant, these calculations illustrate how per capita spending within a given county changes as the key independent variable is altered from its minimum to its maximum value. For the first stage of analysis, table 2 produces an inverse effect between commission form and total per capita spending. Table 3 provides some detail to the extent of this effect by revealing that if all counties had a commission form of government, the long-term average per capita value for total county spending would go down from *$733.49* to $*672.44*. In other words, if you had two otherwise average counties, one with a commission form and one with another institutional arrangement, the commission headed county's per capita spending would be *$61.05* less than its counterpart. Meanwhile, the expected value for total per capita spending for the average county is *$575.92*.

The next quantities of interests fall under the evaluation of the isolated effects of the two reformed government types. Again, looking back at table 2, we can see that both the commission-administrator and the elected executive forms of government produce positive relationships with total per capita spending. However, table 3 provides some detail as to how much these effects vary. Given the results, if all counties were to have a commission-administrator form of government the average for total per capita spending would go up from *$684.03* to *$719.84*. This produces a net increase in the long-term average for total per capita spending by *$35.81* for counties with the commission-administrator form. Meanwhile, the average value of total per capita spending increases from *$682.89* to *$788.54* when all counties are treated as if they have the elected executive form of government. In this light, a county having an elected executive form of government would be predicted to spend on average *$105.65* more than another comparable county without this government form. This suggests that not only does the elected executive form have the greater positive effect, but its average effect increases total per capita spending by almost *$70* more than that of the commission-administrator form.

Surprisingly, there is no significant relationship between the commission form of government and regional expenditures per capita. Likewise, no long-term significant effects were produced for this policy area when we observed the commission-administrator form. However, the elected executive form produced a significant positive relationship with regional spending. This finding indicates that having an elected executive form of government increases per capita spending for regional services from *$35.65* to *$40.41*. All other things being equal, if we observed two average counties, one with an elected executive form and one with another government form, the elected executive's per capita spending would be *$4.76* higher than its counterpart's per capita spending.

Discussion

The key question regarding this analysis is what is the connection between county service spending patterns and the shape of a county's institutional arrangement? While the general question incorporates broad county government spending, an additional question focused on this relationship in terms of regional service spending. As expected, the commission form of government revealed less spending for overall county services than other government forms. This finding coincides with prior works that indicated that county governments with this type of arrangement spend less than other government forms (DeSantis and Renner 1996; Schneider and Park 1989; Benton 2002b).

Meanwhile, both types of the reformed county governments performed as expected while producing positive relationships with general government spending. However, the elected executive on average produced a much greater amount for spending per capita than that of the commission-administrator form of government. This result is consistent with those of Schneider and Park (1989). While their work revealed that elected executives spend more, the statistical results of the current work lend support by highlighting the magnitude of the differences in spending.

The implications behind these finding speak directly to the institutional incentives of government arrangements. Benton (2002a; 2005) argues that reformed governments provide the professionalism and leadership that make the difference in how good counties perform. Therefore, the progressive leadership exercised by these executives give them the capacity to directly influence policy making (Benton 2005). Yet, the institutional differences between the executive types might stem from incentives encompassed within the nature of the position. Greater spending for elected executives can be attributed to the high-powered political incentives rooted in the desire to become re-elected. Political incentives can promote policy choices with greater allocative efficiency that increase the likelihood that decisions will be greatly desired by the public (Frant 1996). Thus, the results of the current findings could be tied directly to the position of the elected officials being more likely to promote visible spending to appease constituents.

The County Elected Executive and Regional Policy Choices

Although the commission and commission-administrator forms revealed no significant relationships with county regional spending, the elected executive form behaved as expected. As suggested in prior works, elected executive counties produced a significant positive relationship with spending for this service area. However, the degree to which the elected executive government form increases spending was relatively small on average. Nevertheless, this still produces an interesting finding regarding the influence of selective incentives. Given such motivating factors, the elected executive is inclined to act as a public entrepreneur to successfully orchestrate coordination activities with regional actors. This finding may be rooted in theoretical frameworks that dictate that the incentives of political leadership shape the abilities of officials to deal effectively with external actors (Clingermayer and Feiock 2001; Feiock 2007). Accordingly, Clingermayer and Feiock (2001) argue that political institutions such as partisan elections provide local executives the ability to mobilize external interests in support for certain regional policy initiatives such as economic development. Holding to this logic, the institutional incentives of these political structures are what influence actors to effectively bargain with and coordinate the efforts of external stakeholders (Feiock 2007; Svara 1996). Successful regional endeavors that result in strong positive development can have great political value for officials seeking to extend their tenure in office.

While success in orchestrating policy arrangements can incentivize the desire to act as a public entrepreneur, strong incentives can also be found behind the need to avoid political turmoil (Miller 2000). External stakeholders can bring political difficulties by-way of strikes, service stoppages or by simply minimizing political support (Farmer 2015; Miller 2000). The desire to neutralize these difficulties can encourage officials to seek policy efforts with higher allocative efficiency that appease the median voter. The institutional incentives driving elected officials to become leaders of region-wide efforts can lead to the desire to obtain credit for minimizing externality problems that directly affect local constituents (Farmer 2015). If nothing else, they might be driven to conceive alternative policy strategies to overcome politically harmful regional dilemmas.

Before we can make a definite determination in the direction of regional policy decisions, future work must be conducted that fully explores the nature and dimensions of regional governance structures. That is, we must consider the multi-dimensions of regional institutions, and the importance of the county's role in regional governance. While an analysis of spending patterns provides clues as to the institutional differences regarding regional decisions, such choices must be observed considering the environments in which the county government operates. The administrative bodies of counties often function within complex environments that are no longer (if they ever were) defined within the black and white parameters of the political-administrative dichotomy. If we factor in the cross-jurisdictional responsibilities and authority of counties, we may find that they have even greater administrative complexities than their municipal counterparts. Perhaps analyses from this unique perspective might enhance our understanding of counties as their roles as government service providers continue to evolve.

Notes

1. For brevity, the models and results for the random effects estimators are omitted from this analysis and are available from the author upon request.

2. Cibola County, NC only produced 7 observed time periods, as the 1977 observation was missing from the U.S. Census data. All other counties are observed across 8 time periods.

3. Due to inconsistencies in reporting on county government structure over the 35-year period of observation, the data for this analysis make no distinction between county managers and county administrators. However, this research recognizes that administrators can have considerably less formal administrative powers than county managers (DeSantis and Renner 1993). However, the lack of research that explores the long-run effects of county institutional arrangements on county policy choices provides a valuable opportunity for this analysis to highlight the linkages between local government structure and county expenditure levels.

References

Beck, Nathaniel., and Jonathan N. Katz. 1995. What to do and not do: With time-series cross sectional data. *American Journal of Political Science, 89,* 634-647.

Benton, J. Edwin. 2002a. *Counties as Service Delivery Agents: Changing Expectations and Roles*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

———. 2002b. County Service Delivery: Does Government Structure Matter? *Public Administration Review* 62(4): 471-79.

———. 2003. The Impact of Structural Reform on County Government Service Provision. *Social Science Quarterly* 84(4): 858-74.

———. 2005. An Assessment of Research on American Counties. *Public Administration Review*, 65(4): 462-74.

Benton, J. Edwin; and Donald C. Menzel. 1993. County Services: The Emergence of Full-Service Government. In *County Governments in an Era of Change*, ed. David R. Berman. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Carr, Jered B. 2015. What Have We Learned about the Performance of Council-Manager Government? A Review and Synthesis of Research. *Public Administration Review* 75(5): 673-89.

Carr, Jered B, and Jayce L. Farmer. 2011. Contingent Effects of Municipal and County TELs on Special District Usage in the United States. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 41(4): 709-33.

Choi, Sang Ok, Sang-Seok Bae, Sung-Wook Kwon, and Richard C. Feiock. 2010. County Limits: Policy Types and Expenditure Priorities. *The American Review of Public Administration* 40(1): 29-45.

Clingermayer, James C.; and Richard C. Feiock. 2001. *Institutional Constraints and Policy Choice: An Exploration of Local Governance*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

DeSantis, Victor S., and Tari Renner. 1993. Governing the County: Authority, Structure, and Elections. In *County Governments in an Era of Change*, ed. David R. Berman. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

———. 1994. The Impact of Political Structures on Public Policies in American Counties. *Public Administration Review* 54(3): 291-95.

———. 1996. Structure and Policy Expenditures in American Counties. In *The American County: Frontiers of Knowledge*, ed. Donald C. Menzel. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Duncombe, Herbert S. 1966. *County Government in America*. Washington, DC: National Association of Counties.

Farmer, Jayce L. 2011. County Government Choices for Redistributive Services. *Urban Affairs Review* 47(1): 60-83

———. 2015. Regional Collaboration. In *Encyclopedia of Public Administration and Public Policy 3rd Edition*, eds. Melvin J. Dubnick and Domonic A. Bearfield. New York: CRC Press.

Feiock, Richard C. 2002. A Quasi-Market Framework for Local Economic Development Competition. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24(2): 123-42.

———. 2004. Politics, Institutions and Local Land-use Regulation. *Urban Studies* 41(2): 363-75.

———. 2007. Rational Choice and Regional Governance. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29(1): 47-63.

Feiock, Richard C., Moon-Gi Jeong, and Jaehoon Kim. 2003. Credible Commitment and Council-Manager Government: Implications for Policy Instrument Choices. *Public Administration Review* 63(5): 616-625.

Frant, Howard. 1996. High-Powered and Low-Powered Incentives in the Public Sector. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 6(3): 365-81.

King, Gary, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg. 2000. Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation. *American Journal of Political Science* 44(2): 347-61.

Lineberry, Robert L., Edmund P. Fowler. 1967. Reformism and Public Policies in American Cities. *The American Political Science Review* 61(3): 701-16.

Lubell, Mark, Richard C. Feiock, and Edgar Ramirez. 2005. Political Institutions and Conservation by Local Governments. *Urban Affairs Review* 40(6): 706-29.

Menzel, Donald C. 1996. *The American County: Frontiers of Knowledge*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Miller, Gary. 2000. Above Politics: Credible Commitment and Efficiency in the Design of Public Agencies. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 10(2): 289-327.

Park, Kee Ok. 1996. Determinants of County Government Growth. In *The American County: Frontiers of Knowledge*, ed. Donald C. Menzel. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Peterson, Paul E. 1981. *City Limits*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ramirez, Edgar E. 2009. Local Political Institutions and Smart Growth: An Empirical Study of the Politics of Compact Development *Urban Affairs Review* 45(2): 218-46.

Schneider, Mark, and Kee Ok Park. 1989. Metropolitan Counties as Service Delivery Agents: The Still Forgotten Governments. *Public Administration Review* 49(4): 345-52.

Streib, Gregory, and William L. Waugh, Jr. 1991. Probing the Limits of County Reform in an Era of Scarcity: A National Survey of County Administrators and Executives. *Public Administration Quarterly* 15(1): 378-95.

Svara, James H. 1996. Leadership and Professionalism in County Government. In *The American County: Frontiers of Knowledge*, ed. Donald C. Menzel. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Tomz, Michael, Jason Wittenberg, and Gary King. 2003. Clarify: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 8(1): 1-30.

Wooldridge, Jeffrey M. 2009. *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach, 4th Ed*. Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning.

Table 1 Descriptions and Sources of Modeled Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max	Variable Description	Data Source
Dependent variable						
Per capita total expenditures	692.610	747.179	1.29	10,245.65	Annual total per capita county spending on all county services.	Historical Finances of Individual Governments (U.S. Census Bureau 2015)
Per capita regional expenditures	36.091	69.027	0	2,373.86	Annual total per capita county spending on regional services.	Historical Finances of Individual Governments (U.S. Census Bureau 2015)
Institutional arrangement variables						
Commission form	---	---	0	1.00	Whether a county has a commission form of county government (no = 0; yes = 1).	ACIR (1972), ICMA Municipal Yearbook (1983 through 2007) and ICMA Form of Government Survey (1988, 1997 and 2002).
Executive types						
Commission-administrator	---	---	0	1.00	Whether a county has a commission-administrator form of county government (no = 0; yes = 1).	ACIR (1972), ICMA Municipal Yearbook (1983 through 2007) and ICMA Form of Government Survey (1988, 1997 and 2002).
Elected executive	---	---	0	1.00	Whether a county has an elected executive form of county government (no = 0; yes = 1).	ACIR (1972), ICMA Municipal Yearbook (1983 through 2007) and ICMA Form of Government Survey (1988, 1997 and 2002).
Controls						
Log population	11.079	0.989	7.89	16.11	The natural log of the total county population.	U.S. Census (1970 through 2007)
Population growth	0.014	0.016	-0.28	0.15	The annual growth rate of a county population from 1972 to 2012.	U.S. Census (1970 through 2007)
Per capita taxes	196.038	237.201	0.26	3,529.10	Total annual taxes collected by a county per capita.	Historical Finances of Individual Governments (U.S. Census Bureau 2015)
Median house hold income growth	0.045	0.020	0	0.09	The annual growth rate of a county's median house hold income from 1972 to 2012.	U.S. Census (1970 through 2007)
Private employment growth	0.029	0.023	-0.05	0.24	The annual growth rate of the number of private non-agricultural business establishments from 1972 to 2012.	U.S. Census (1970 through 2007)
Number of general purpose governments	13.809	14.921	1	151	The number of general purpose governments in a county (number includes the county).	Census of Governments (U.S. Census Bureau 1977 through 2012).
Number of special purpose governments	12.275	20.123	0	465	The number of non-educational special purpose governments in a county (special districts and public authorities).	Census of Governments (U.S. Census Bureau 1977 through 2012).

N = 1,532 counties across 48 states.

Table 2 Fixed Effects Linear Regression Estimates for Total County and Regional County Per Capita Expenditures, 1977 through 2012

	Non-Executive Head		Executive Head	
Variables	Total Expenses	Regional Expenses	Total Expenses	Regional Expenses
Key Independent Variable				
Commission (non-executive)	-61.058***	-1.185	---	---
	(9.618)	(1.227)		
Commission-administrator	---	---	35.817***	0.035
			(10.742)	(1.269)
Elected executive	---	---	105.64***	4.761**
			(16.725)	(1.985)
Control Variables				
Log population	50.943**	9.446***	55.762**	9.796*
	(25.546)	(5.591)	(24.946)	(5.572)
Population growth	2177.75	-47.361	2112.07	-51.963
	(2513.38)	(101.69)	(2509.61)	(101.71)
Per capita county taxes	0.353***	0.604***	0.350***	0.599***
	(0.107)	(0.014)	(0.108)	(0.014)
Median house hold income growth	1760.93***	91.392**	1770.53***	91.533**
	(250.67)	(35.843)	(251.31)	(35.778)
Private employment growth	-2234.98	-102.98*	-2143.38	-95.899
	(1610.90)	(61.363)	(1607.01)	(61.687)
Number of general purpose governments	0.839	0.140**	0.776	0.136**
	(0.657)	(0.062)	(0.656)	(0.062)
Number of special purpose governments	-0.186	-0.041	-0.248	-0.045
	(0.197)	(0.028)	(0.199)	(0.029)
Per capita total county expenses (t-1)	0.804***	---	0.801***	---
	(0.043)		(0.044)	
Per capita regional county expenses (t-1)	---	0.594***	---	0.594***
		(0.096)		(0.096)
Intercept	-400.14	-97.602	511.01*	-103.07*
	(269.54)	(59.979)	(266.70)	(59.821)
R-square	0.86	0.64	0.86	0.64
F-test	3479.10	319.39	3110.56	292.64
Prob. > F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Hausman X2	311.93	1865.00	363.31	1872.04
Prob. > X2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N Observations	12,255	12,255	12,255	12,255
Clustered on panels (counties)	1,532	1,532	1,532	1,532
t Time periods (1977 to 2012, with five year gaps)	8	8	8	8

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Significance code: *p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01. The Hausman null assumes the random effects model to be more efficient than the fixed effects model.

Table 3 Expected Values and Marginal Means of County Institutional Arrangement Effects on Per Capita County Expenditures

Variables	Total Expenses	Regional Expenses
Non-Executive Head		
Expected value	575.92	---
Commission		
Minimum	733.49	---
Maximum	672.44	---
Average increase	-61.05	---
Executive Head		
Expected value	723.10	38.57
Commission-administrator		
Minimum	684.03	---
Maximum	719.84	---
Average increase	35.81	---
Elected executive		
Minimum	682.89	35.65
Maximum	788.54	40.41
Average increase	105.65	4.76

Note: The key independent variables were held to their maximum value. All other variables were held to their mean. The expected value was calculated using *Clarify* (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2003), using 1,000 simulations.