



Exploring the Nexus between County Government Structure and Fiscal Dynamics

Jing Peng, Denise Perez

The Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at *Florida State University*, Tallahassee, FL



Abstract

Resource allocation and economic considerations heavily influence the programs and legislative policies that policymakers prioritize. This research analyzes the dynamic relationship between governmental structures and public revenue by examining the relationship between county government form and county-level revenue and expenditures in Florida. Employing regression analysis, this study examines government data gathered through individual county websites and fiscal data collected through centralized databases in Florida, as well as public government financial reports for the 2019 fiscal year. The primary focus is on the key variables that shape county legislature, including the form of government (Traditional Commission, Commission-Administrative, or Commission-Executive), the number of commissioners, the number of districts, and election rules (whether commissioners were elected At-Large or Single Member). Our investigation reveals notable patterns regarding the allocation of funds and the influence of governmental forms on expenditure dynamics. Specifically, counties with a commission-manager government exhibit a trend of lower funding for transportation compared to those with traditional or executive forms. Additionally, an increase in the number of county commissioners correlates with elevated expenditures per capita, particularly in transportation costs and overall revenue. These findings underscore the need for policymakers to consider the implications of different governmental forms on resource allocation and public policy priorities. Ultimately, this research contributes to our understanding of governance strategies and facilitates evidence-based decision making in public administration.

Introduction

The structure of a county government plays a pivotal role in shaping the economic and social landscape of that region. In the United States, local government takes on one of three possible structures: Traditional Commission form, Commission Executive form, and Commission Administrative. In Florida, the most popular form of county government remains the Commission Administrator form, which bestows the power to execute policies on a county manager or administrator. Previous research has found that County managers and administrators have great influence over the legislation and the budget that is approved and passed, despite that power given only to the County Commissioners, who are elected at the county level, either by an at large or a single member voting system (Jewett, 2012). Research has also found that the form of county government can directly impact the quality of citizens' representation (Meier et al., 2005). This research poster examines the factors including county government structure and three other crucial dimensions, that define Florida counties' fiscal dynamics: County budget and expenditures. In doing so, more clarity can be shed on the effectiveness of different government structures in perpetuating equitable economical policies.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question: How do the structural characteristics of county government, including the form of government, the number of commissioners, the number of districts, and election rules, influence county-level revenue allocation, specifically in terms of transportation expenditures and overall expenditures, across Florida counties?

Secondary Research Question: To what extent do economic indicators, such as revenue, transportation expenditures, and budget balance, vary across different forms of county government (Traditional Commission, Commission-Administrative, and Commission-Executive) in Florida.

Figure 1

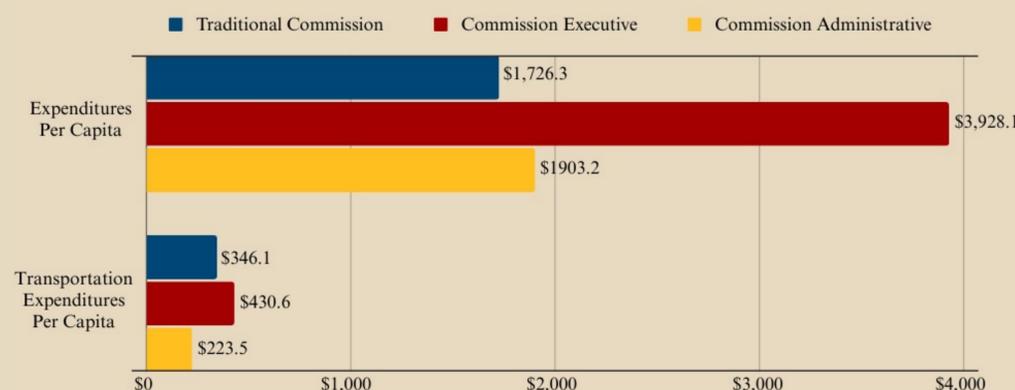
	2018-2019		
	Expenditure Per Capita Model 1	Transportation Per Capita Model 2	Revenue Per Capita Model 3
Form of Government (Administrative)	-226.832 (293.301)	-88.954** (41.147)	-215.83 (317.673)
Single Member	-1.311 (223.065)	35.822 (31.293)	23.746 (241.601)
Number of Commissioners	212.328*** (53.337)	17.873** (7.483)	226.240*** (57.77)
Median Household Income	0.020** (0.01)	-0.002* (0.001)	0.026** (0.011)
Observations	67	67	67
R2	0.301	0.289	0.311
Adjusted R2	0.256	0.243	0.266
Residual Std. Error (df =62)	834.056	117.008	903.363
F Statistic (df = 4; 62)	6.677***	6.298***	6.988***

Note
* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Figure by Perez, D. (2024)

Figure 2

Mean Expenditures and Transportation Expenditures Per Capita by County Government Form



References

- Jewett, A. (2012). County Government Structure in Florida. In Florida County Government Guide (pp. 7-25). Florida Association Of Counties
- Meier, K. J., Juenke, E. G., Wrinkle, R. D., & Polinard, J. L. (2005). Structural Choices And Representational Biases: The Post-Election Color Of Representation. American Journal Of Political Science, 49(4), 758–768. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1540-5907.2005.00153.X>

Methodology

The county government data was collected by analyzing the official county websites for all Florida Counties. This data includes whether the form of government was Traditional Commission, Commission-Administrative, or Commission-Executive, the number of commissioners, the number of districts, and election rules, whether they were elected At-Large, Single Member, or mixed. These county websites include election information, county government form, and the number of commissioners that represent every district in each county. All 66 Florida Counties' structure information was collected.

The economic data used was collected from the Office of Economic and Demographic Research. The OEDR was established by Florida legislature to be responsible for county survey research, database management, statistical analysis, and demographic information for Florida Counties. County level expenditures, revenue, transportation expenditures, and budget balance was collected using this tool for the Fiscal Year of 2021. All 66 Florida Counties' economic information was collected..

Results

- In our analysis, we discovered that counties with a Commission-Administrative form of government allocated less funding to transportation compared to those with traditional or executive forms, consistently observed across the 2018-2019.
- Our findings also indicate that an increase in the number of county commissioners correlates with a rise in public expenditure, including transportation costs and overall revenue.
- An adjusted R2 value of 0.24 indicates that approximately 24% of the variability in the transportation per capita is explained by the 4 independent variables listed in Figure 1. This indicates a moderate level of explanatory power.
- The adjusted R2 value for expenditure per capita is 0.26. Thus, approximately 26% of the variability can be explained by the independent variables.

Discussion

Overall, the form of county government has some effect on a county's budget expenditures and transportation expenditures. The government form with the lowest transportation expenditures per capita is the Commission Administrative. One explanation for this is that appointed community leaders, such as commissioners and mayors, tend to focus on infrastructure legislation because it is change constituents can directly see, thus increasing their chance at getting re-elected. County managers do not have this pressure to directly appease county residents, thus instead of transportation they might focus on other policies, such as socioeconomic reforms. A limitation of this study is that the independent variables utilized in this study can only explain approximately 30% of the economic variability. Future research should examine the role that state government plays in the budget distribution of local government.