AND THE BEAT GOES ON: VOTING ON THE FORM OF COUNTY GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS IN MIDST OF CORRUPTION

(with apologies to Cher and the late Sonny Bono)

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Abstract: The FBI sting operation in Mississippi, "Operation Pretense," uncovered many corrupt county supervisors who accepted bribes from road construction firms and suppliers in order to do business in their county districts, or "beats." Operation Pretense generated condemnation of Mississippi's county supervisors and led to an election in November 1988 on the question of replacing the decentralized beat system of governance with a more centralized *unit system*. Under the unit system, many of the routine activities of county government, including purchasing, personnel policies, and inventory control and storage, are removed from the direct control of individual supervisors, who continue to be elected to represent geographically defined "beats." In carrying out their responsibilities with respect road construction and maintenance, supervisors serve primarily in a policymaking capacity, collectively establishing priorities by simple majority rule and then delegating authority for executing their decisions to a hired professional road manager who supervises the day-to-day activities of county road crews. Only two of Mississippi's 82 counties operated under the unit system before 1988. Voters in 47 counties opted for the unit system and those in the remaining 35 counties chose to stay with the beat system.

We hypothesize that the payoffs of the supervisor offices were higher where corruption was expected, or at least condoned by the voters, and that supervisors and their competitors worked harder to get out the vote to become and remain a county supervisor, increasing turnout. We find that after controlling for the presidential vote in 1988 and other factors, the turnout for the beat-unit choice of county governance is positively correlated with corruption and the size of the potential rents to office. In addition, since the beat system is more likely to generate substantial gains for political entrepreneurs and since providing selective incentives to voters to increase the probability of moving to the unit system is a public good, we expect to find most of the turnout generating increases**,** over and above the concurrent Presidential election, to come from beat supporters, with little effort put forth by unit supporters to increase turnout over what it would be otherwise.

While 47 counties turned to the unit system in 1988, 22 counties petitioned to hold elections in 1992 to change the outcome of the vote in 1988 beat-unit election. All 22 were counties which had changed to the unit system in 1988, supporting our argument that the beat system provided special gains through corruption to the political elite, the unit system provided general gains that could were more difficult to capture by the political entrepreneurs.

> ***And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. This coolness arises partly from fear of the opponents, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not readily believe in new things until they have had a long experience of them. Thus it happens that whenever those who are hostile have the opportunity to attack they do it like partisans, whilst the others defend lukewarmly, in such wise that the prince is endangered along with them.***
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> **Nicolo Machiavelli, Ch. 6 *The Prince***

1. Introduction[1]: *The beat goes on, the beat goes on*

In each of Mississippi's 82 counties, five supervisors, who are elected to concurrent four-year terms and are responsible for administering all county governmental functions except the public schools and the criminal justice system, manage the county. These county supervisors dedicate most of their attention and budgetary resources to the construction and maintenance of county roads and bridges (Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart, forthcoming: 1). Mississippi county governments have operated under two basic forms of governance: the beat system and the unit system. In the beat system, county supervisors have almost complete control over the allocation of road funds within their districts or "beats," controlling contracts with vendors, personnel policy and even control and storage of inventories. Supervisors are independently responsible for setting and executing policies within their beats: "under the beat system, the board of supervisors performed both the legislative and executive functions of government. It levied taxes and approved each district's road budget, while individual supervisors directed the day-to-day roadwork in their beats (Crocket, 2003: 10)."

The decentralized system of decision-making gave each supervisor direct control over the allotment of county funds and county equipment, road crews and construction materials, such as dirt and gravel (Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart, forthcoming: 1–2). Under the unit system,

[1] Much of the discussion in the first three sections of this paper are based on Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart (2002 and forthcoming) and Karahan, Coats and Shughart (2006), but bears repeating here to give the reader an adequate background, especially in the institutions and institutional reform in Mississippi.

however, many of these routine activities are placed under the control of a county manager, while individual supervisors set county policies and priorities through majority rule and continue to represent their beats. It should be noted that only two of Mississippi's counties[2] operated under the unit system prior to the election in 1988 over the question of replacing the decentralized beat system of governance with the more centralized unit system.

What brought about the beat-unit election in November of 1988[3] was "Operation Pretense," an FBI sting operation in Mississippi that exposed many corrupt county supervisors who acquired bribes from road construction firms and other vendors in order to do business in their beats. Operation Pretense brought to light a variety of corrupt practices: bribery, extortion, mail fraud, bid-rigging, accepting kickbacks from suppliers, and authorizing purchases of materials never delivered and then splitting the bogus payments with vendors. The investigation began when a Pentecostal minister, co-owner of a construction supply business in central Mississippi, reported the kickbacks on purchase invoices demanded by certain county supervisors (Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart, 2004: 2). Fifty-four supervisors from 26 counties, along with one county road foreman, two state highway commissioners and 13 vendors were convicted on various felony charges. Only one indicted supervisor was found not guilty, a second was found mentally incompetent to stand trial and a third died while under indictment (Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart, forthcoming: 2–3).[4] Unlike the beat system, however, the unit system requires collusion of the county supervisors along with the county road manager to make corrupt contracts, raising the transactions costs for corrupt deals, and so, making corruption less likely.

In the beat-unit election in 1988, voters in 47 counties opted for the unit system and those in the remaining 35 counties chose to keep the beat system, as can be seen in Figure 1. Karahan,

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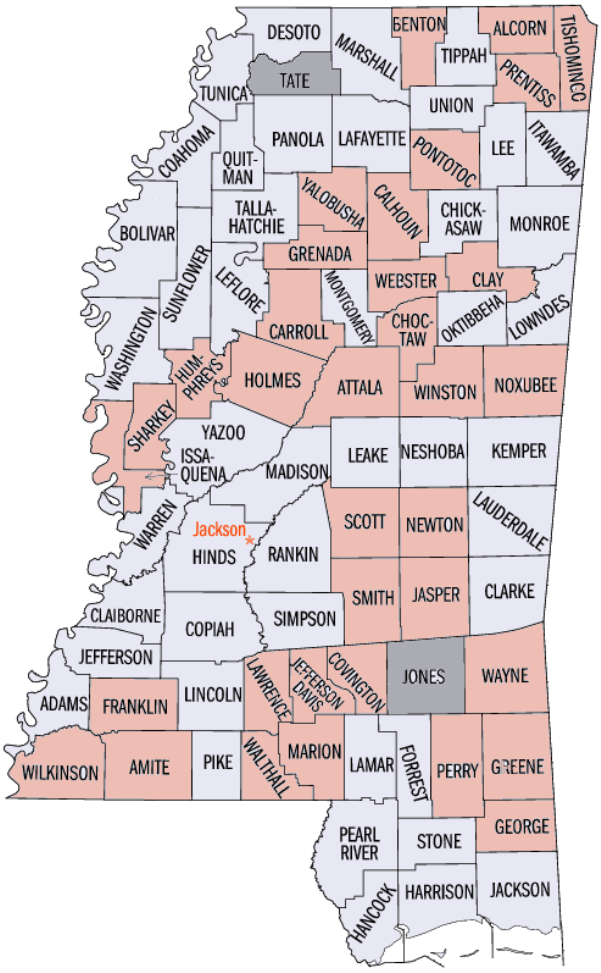
[2] The exceptions were Neshoba County, whose supervisors voted unanimously on July 2, 1984, to switch from the beat to the unit system (the transition was completed on September 1, 1986), and Coahoma County, where, according to Crockett (2003: 231), "the unit system has been in operation more than 55 years…." The unit system, under which county purchasing activities are subject to a greater degree of centralization and day-to-day direction of the activities of county road crews are delegated to a professional road manager, was promoted as a reform measure in the wake of the corruption revealed by Operation Pretense. Mississippi's voters were offered the choice between the unit and beat systems in 1988 and 1992. For additional details, see Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart (2002).

[3] There is an obvious problem with analyzing turnout for the beat-unit election which appeared on the same ballot as the race for U.S. President. Many people who show up to vote for president may merely make a random choice for the beat-unit decision. The turnout effort for the presidential race may swamp the additional effort by those wishing to influence the beat-unit choice.

[4] See Crockett (2003: 301–7) for information on the identities of the individuals charged under Operation Pretense and the disposition of their cases. The charges against many of the indicted vendors and public officials subsequently were reduced – and in a few instances dismissed – in return for cooperation in the FBI's investigation. The number of supervisors convicted in each county is listed in Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart (2004).

Figure 1. **Counties Choosing the Unit System and those Choosing the Beat System**



Razzolini and Shughart (2002) provide an empirical analysis of the 1988 election and a subsequent election revisiting the same issue. Importantly, Karahan *et al.* find no evidence that

the relative voting on the beat-unit choice in these two elections was influenced by revelations of public corruption.[5]

Figure 2 shows the 26 Mississippi counties in which one or more supervisors were convicted on Operation Pretense charges. While indictments ultimately were handed down against supervisors in only about a third of the state's 82 counties, the FBI cast a wide net. To avoid claims of entrapment, evidence of "predication" was required: "as a general rule, federal prosecutors will not charge anyone with a crime based solely on the testimony of an FBI agent or someone who is cooperating with an investigation as part of a plea bargain" (Crocket, 2003: 12). That requirement narrowed the investigation's scope to counties where agents had reason to believe that a supervisor either was predisposed to corruption or had already been involved in corrupt behavior. Vendors and other supervisors provided the corroborating evidence that helped the FBI determine which public officials had solicited or received kickbacks (Crocket, 2003: 9). In short, the federal investigation of county purchasing activities was carried out statewide, and was limited only to the extent that independent evidence of a propensity to corruption had to be in hand before undercover agents attempted to "sting" individual public officials by secretly recording offers or acceptances of unlawful payoffs.[6]

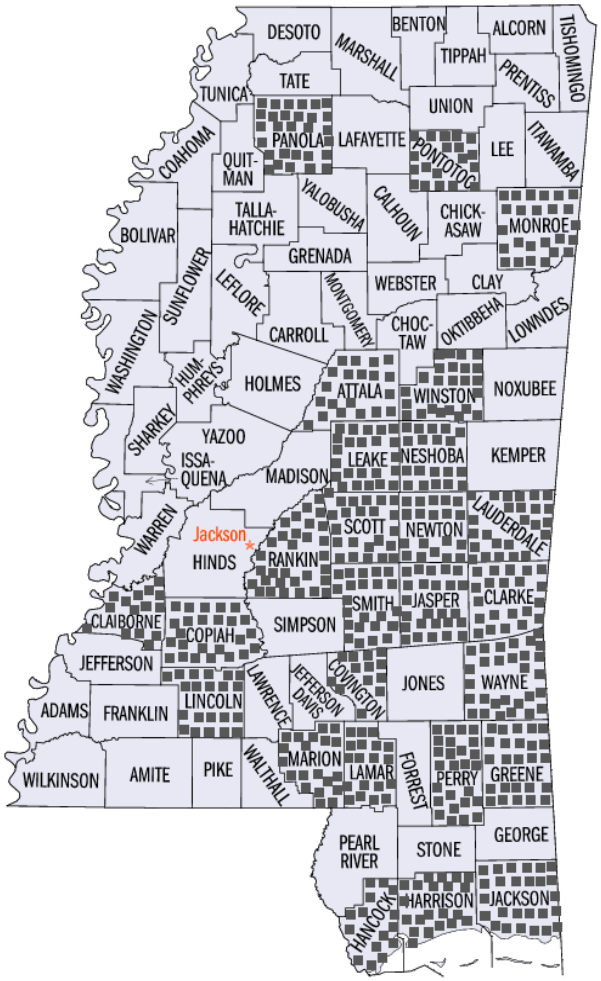
While Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart (2002) fail to find evidence of influence of corruption on the beat-unit choice, Karahan, Coats and Shughart (2006) find that corruption was a predictor of turnout in the 1987 county supervisor elections, having hypothesized that the payoffs to holding the supervisor offices were higher where corruption was expected, or at least condoned by the voters, and that supervisors and their competitors worked harder to get out the vote to become and remain a county supervisor.

In a previous paper on Operation Pretense, Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart (forthcoming) found that, other things being the same, county supervisors were more likely to be corrupt (1) in poor, rural, and less well-educated counties; (2) when corruption existed in

[5] Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart (2002) modeled the choice as beat votes divided by unit votes. Using then-available data, the choice was not seen to be influenced by measured corruption. Perhaps voters were both aware of the existence of public corruption and condoned it as well.

[6] The evidence gathered by FBI agents against supervisors in George and Marshall Counties, for example, apparently was insufficient for charges to be filed (Crocket, 2003). The treasuries of these two counties nevertheless received refunds of monies collected by FBI agents in fraudulent transactions with supervisors. All told, 19 Mississippi counties received $53,000 in such refunds (Crockett, 2003: 12). In Lafayette County, according to a 2003 supervisor candidate, Operation Pretense indictments against two supervisors may have been quashed as a result of political pressure on the local U.S. Attorney (interview of candidate by Shughart).

***Figure 2*. Corrupt and non-corrupt Mississippi counties**



Note: Squares indicate counties where one or more supervisors were convicted of corruption on charges brought under Operation Pretense. *Source*: Karahan, Razzolini and Shughart (forthcoming)

neighboring counties; and (3) in counties where supervisors were paid more. Because corruption is illegal and effort must be supplied to avoid detection, corrupt officials may tend to "choose goods whose exact value is difficult to monitor" (Mauro, 1998: 264). One of the corruption literature's stylized facts is that widespread corruption correlates strongly with poor macroeconomic performance. Mauro (1995), in a cross-national study, finds that one path from high corruption to low economic development is that productive public expenditures, such as

those on education,[7] take a backseat to high-profile, high-technology goods produced by a limited number of firms. Tanzi and Davoodi (1997) note that corruption provides incentives for policymakers to push public expenditures in directions where it is easier to collect bribes, biasing government spending in favor of military rather than civilian needs and toward large, high-cost construction projects and away from infrastructure maintenance spending and low-cost projects with potentially larger social payoffs. County road construction projects, such as those that consumed most of the attention of Mississippi's county supervisors, are just the sort of high-cost projects with difficult-to-monitor values that provide scope for governmental corruption.

In the present paper, voter turnout in the beat-unit elections is examined, hypothesizing that the candidates and potential candidates work harder to maintain the beat system while others may work to replace the beat system, generating higher turnout in counties with a history of corrupt ion. However, the beat system is more likely to generate rents for political entrepreneurs while providing selective incentives to voters to increase the probability of reforming county governance with the unit system is a public good. The governor of Mississippi in 1988, Ray Mabus, and the Mississippi Attorney General, Robert Whitehall, urged voters to vote for the unit system as the beat system tended to be more corruptible. Making general pleas statewide is very different than devoting significant local organizational resources to encourage likely supporters to go to the polls. However, there is usually insufficient incentive to provide public goods, so we would expect to find most of the turnout generating increases to come from beat supporters, with less effort put forth by unit supporters to increase turnout over what it would be otherwise.

In 1988 all of the 82 counties in Mississippi held elections to determine whether the counties would be beat-system or unit-system counties. In setting up the legislation that led to the beat-unit election in 1988, the Mississippi legislature stipulated that voters in counties that opted for the unit system would not be allowed to revisit the issue until 1995, though voters in the beat counties were to be given another chance to "repent" to re-vote on the beat-unit question at some unspecified future date. However, by the middle of 1991 complaints began to surface about the unit system and so, bending to political pressures, the legislature allowed voters to petition to hold new beat-unit elections in November of 1992. While 47 counties turned to the unit system in 1988, 22 counties petitioned to hold elections in 1992 to change the outcome of the vote in 1988 beat-unit election. This required a special bill in the legislature, as Mississippi's

[7] Educational expenditures generate outcomes whose values are notoriously difficult to monitor, however.

constitution does not provide for voter initiatives or referendums. Only 2 of those petitioning actually got enough votes to make the switch back to the beat system, Tate and Jones Counties. All 22 were counties which had changed to the unit system in 1988. Not one of the counties choosing the beat system in 1988 petitioned to change to the unit system, supporting our proposition that changing to the unit system is a public good.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we lay out the elements of a theoretical model that forges links between the value of public office, candidates' derived demand for votes, and the rate of voter participation. Our data and the empirical model of voter turnout in the 1988 beat vs. unit elections is presented in Section 3, and the estimation results are reported in Section 4. Section 5 concludes.

2. The derived demand for votes by candidates and voter participation: *Bums still cry, "Hey buddy, have you got a dime?"*

Rational voting

Two major themes in public choice frame our analysis: rational voting and rent seeking. Following Downs (1957), the ordinary approach to the analysis of voter turnout has been to focus primarily on the determinants of the electorate's vote supply. In that context, rational-choice considerations give rise to the "paradox of voting:" people vote in large numbers despite the fact that for most voters, the act seems to fail a strict benefit-cost test. Morton (1987) and Uhlaner (1989) look to groups and group leaders who provide members with incentives to go to the polls, but say little about why reason individuals provide this "group" public good (Olson, 1965, 1982) remains largely unanswered in their work.

A potential voter's decision to vote or abstain since Downs (1957) and Riker and Ordershook (1968) has been described in terms of the expected value of voting, so that one votes if that expected value is at least non-negative and abstains otherwise. The expected value of voting is composed of the expected value of changing the outcome by one's vote, the cost of voting and the intrinsic benefit of voting that is independent of the outcome of the election, or rather, the cost of abstaining. All of these terms have been criticized. Schwartz (1987: 118), observes that "saying that closeness increases the probability of being pivotal … is like saying that tall men are more likely to bump their heads on the moon." The probability of one vote being pivotal is so low as to be negligible in all but the rarest of cases. Aldrich (1993) on the other hand, assumes that the expected value of changing the outcome is zero, so that the vote-

abstain decision is determined by the balance of the costs of voting and the independent and intrinsic benefit of voting, arguing that both of these values are usually low, so that small changes in either factor can have substantial impacts on turnout. However, the costs of voting and the independent benefits of voting are difficult to observe in large samples.

Aldrich suggests, as did Cox and Munger (1989) and V.O. Key (1984 [1949]: 523–26) before him, that closeness is important to turnout, not because of changes in expected value of altering the election outcome from a single vote, but because closer elections increase the value to a candidate and his organization of getting out voters who are likely to support him. Candidates and their organizations have incentives to increase their efforts at mobilizing voters in close races. Politicians are strategic actors in the electoral process (Jacobson and Kernell, 1983); they alter the incentives of prospective voters. Heavier investments in getting supporters to the polls by candidates tend to raise turnout in the aggregate even if perceived closeness is wholly unrelated to the vote decisions of individual voters (Aldrich 1993).[8]

Rent seeking

If an elected office provides the holder with gains in excess of opportunity costs, or economic rents, the theory of rent seeking (Tullock, 1967) suggests that candidates will compete for the available rents. Candidates expend resources to attract voters in their competition for office, dissipating at least some of the rents of office-holding and increasing turnout. Crain, Shughart and Tollison (1988) examine why people vote, treating the individual voter's turnout choice as a side-effect of the competitive rent seeking by special-interest groups. Organizations can increase the chances of getting legislation beneficial to their members passed, or can reduce the chances of having legislation harmful to the group passed, by supporting the election of candidates favorable to their interests. Candidates in Mississippi's county supervisor races have incentives similar to those of the interest groups in Crain, Shughart and Tollison (1988). This is especially true in counties where corruption is accepted or condoned where winning contains the prospect of earning economic rents.

A candidate's payoff of running depends on the expected value of winning minus the costs of running. More supporters can be "delivered" to the polls, but at some marginal cost per

[8] Cox and Munger (1989) report evidence from U.S. House races suggesting that, holding campaign spending constant, closeness triggers greater electoral effort by political elites and that more effort increases voter turnout. In an earlier paper, Kramer (1970–71) finds that personal contacts between candidates or campaign volunteers and voters are effective in increasing turnout, but not voters' candidate choices.

additional supporter. The expected value of winning is the probability of winning times the value of the office. The closer the election, the higher will be the *change in probability* of winning, and so, the higher the demand for getting an extra supporter to the polls. In addition, the higher the rents of the office, the higher the demand for getting an extra supporter to the polls.

In their competition for voters, candidates may offer bribes to voters or merely perform services that lower the costs of voting or of not voting, reducing the costs of voting or increasing the intrinsic and independent benefits of voting. "Walking around money," offers of transportation to the polls and telephone reminders that "today is Election Day" increase the individual's net expected value of voting. The voters then supply support in greater numbers if candidates subsidize voter activity. Candidates, on the other hand, demand support based on the expected payoff of winning, which is essentially a model of the demand for votes by rent-seeking politicians and the individual supply of votes. The natural heterogeneity across individuals in the costs of voting and the intrinsic and independent benefits of voting, we have a normal upward-sloping supply curve of votes, so small increases in "mobilization effort" by candidates will entice additional voters to the polls. We assume that electioneering is subject to diminishing marginal returns, so that extra amounts of mobilization effort add successively smaller increments in turnout. The demand curve for votes is eventually downward sloping because the marginal productivity of support declines when expected vote shares get beyond dead-even, as the change in probabilities of winning diminishes.

Whether candidates secure votes by offering direct incentives to voters (money, liquor, cigarettes, transportation to the polls, food, promises to hire the voter or the voter's friends or family members, and so on), or through indirect incentives, such as advertising and campaign promises to make transfers to a group to which the voter belongs, higher values of office holding increase the demand by candidates for voter support. In other words, higher rents of the office lead to more vigorous competition for the office that dissipates the rents of the office and increases voter participation rates.[9] The model therefore predicts more voter participation both in close elections and in elections for offices that are more valuable. Opportunities for engaging

[9] In a more general model, one candidate's probability of winning would depend both on his or her electoral effort and that of all other candidates. Modeling electoral competition explicitly would determine candidates' relative expenditures in Nash equilibrium and, depending on the nature of the functional relationship transforming effort into votes, competition could lead to under-, over-, or exact dissipation of the available rents of public office. Complicating the model in this way would not change its implications for voter turnout, however.

in graft or other corrupt practices make public offices more valuable than otherwise. Candidates will compete more vigorously for such positions by offering selective incentives to voters, some of which incentives may cross ethical and legal bounds.

Not only will competition for office drive up turnout, but so will the competition between supporters and opponents of the current set of property rights which allow district supervisors to make road decisions with little accountability, especially those who see the beat system as a guarantee of income from corruption. In competing to maintain or change the status quo, each side will strive to get their voters to make it to the polls, again, turnout rises. Because corruption increases the value of office holding, it also increases the demand for votes on the part of incumbents wanting to retain their profitable positions of political power and of challengers attempting to unseat them. Not only do county supervisors have an incentive to obtain and retain their offices, they also have an incentive to maintain the status quo. All else equal, this produces more electoral effort and higher voter turnout in corrupt than in non-corrupt counties in an election on the governance system, and that is what we find in our empirical work.

3. The data and the empirical models: *La de da de dee*

We test the hypothesis that governmental corruption increases voter participation rates by analyzing the turnout, ***Turnout***, in the 1988 beat-unit election in the State of Mississippi, measuring turnout as a percent of the voting-age population, as the Mississippi voter registration figures seem unreliable.[10] Our data cover all of the state's 82 counties. In 26 of these counties, one or more supervisors had been convicted of corruption on charges brought to light by "Operation Pretense," an FBI sting operation that ran from March 1984 to late 1987. The demand for votes is therefore expected to be higher in corrupt than in non-corrupt counties independent of challengers' motivations. Rent seeking and rent defending are the opposite sides of the same coin, after all (McChesney, 1997). We use a binary variable, ***Corruption***, to measure whether on not a county is considered corrupt or accepting corrupt behavior by it's supervisors, which is one if any of it's county supervisors were indicted on corruption charges under Operation Pretense, and zero otherwise. We also use county voter turnouts in the 1988

[10] The official voter registration figures from Mississippi's Office of the Secretary of State show the number of registered voters to be greater than the voting age population by a wide margin for several counties.

U.S. presidential election, ***Presidential Turnout***, and in the 1987 county supervisors' election, ***Supervisor Turnout***, to control for county-specific turnout influences. Our measure or proxy for corruption rents is the per capita road miles in the county that are controlled by the county supervisors, which we denote simply as ***Miles***, (from 1993, the closest year for which detailed county/non-county road data was available). We also include the ***Closeness*** of the election, or the absolute value of the beat-unit vote difference divided by the voting-age population.

Our first set of models, then, estimate ***Turnout*** with three variations of controls for turnout in presidential and supervisor elections, based on equation (1),

$$\textbf{\textit{Turnout}} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \textbf{\textit{Corruption}} + \alpha_2 \textbf{\textit{Miles}} + \alpha_3 \textbf{\textit{Presidential Turnout}} + \alpha_4 \textbf{\textit{Supervisor Turnout}} + \alpha_5 \textbf{\textit{Closeness}} + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Our expectation is that the coefficients for all of our variables will be positive, except for ***Closeness***, because as the election gets closer, the metric gets smaller and we expect elections that are close to be fought more intensely. None of the coefficients are constrained to zero in model 1, the coefficients for ***Corruption*** and ***Miles*** are constrained to zero in model 2 and 3, respectively, due to expected collinearity.[11] In Model 4 we constrain the coefficients of ***Miles*** and ***Supervisor Turnout*** are constrained to zero, because of expected collinearity between ***Corruption*** and ***Miles*** and because the ***Supervisor Turnout*** coefficient is insignificant in all of the other models, and we wanted to make sure that any noise resulting from having an insignificant variable did not materially affect our results.

Model 5 is much like Model 3, except that the dependent variable is transformed by taking the difference between turnout in the beat-unit race and turnout in the presidential race in that election, or ***Turnout Difference*** = ***Turnout - Presidential Turnout***, and there is no need for a ***Presidential Turnout*** variable since that variable is included on the other side of the equation.

In addition to analyzing the turnout in the 1988 beat-unit election, we study the choice in the beat-unit elections by including the same factors we use in Models 1-5 to see how those factors affect the percent of the voting age population that voted for the beat system and then separately for the unit system. Define ***Beat*** and ***Unit*** as the percent of the voting age population that voted for the beat system and the unit system, respectively, in that county. Model 6, then is

[11] In their forthcoming paper, Karahan *et al.* (forthcoming) model county corruption in Mississippi as a function of Road Miles, among other factors. Given that Road Miles was a significant predictor of corruption, we have employed variance inflation factors (VIFs) and variable substitution to detect multicollinearity. The VIFs are under 2 in the present study.

$$\textbf{\textit{Beat}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \textbf{\textit{Corruption}} + \beta_2 \textbf{\textit{Miles}} + \beta_3 \textbf{\textit{Presidential Turnout}} + \beta_4 \textbf{\textit{Supervisor Turnout}} + \beta_5 \textbf{\textit{Closeness}} + \mu, \quad (2)$$

and Model 7 is

$$\textbf{\textit{Unit}} = \lambda_0 + \lambda_1 \textbf{\textit{Corruption}} + \lambda_2 \textbf{\textit{Miles}} + \lambda_3 \textbf{\textit{Presidential Turnout}} + \lambda_4 \textbf{\textit{Supervisor Turnout}} + \lambda_5 \textbf{\textit{Closeness}} + \gamma. \quad (3)$$

In 1992, 22 of the 47 counties which had chosen the Unit system in the 1988 election were allowed to re-examine their beat-unit choice if they petitioned to hold new beat-unit elections. Twenty-two of the forty-seven counties that had selected Unit systems petitioned for new beat-unit elections to be held in 1992. In order to hold an election to change the form of county governments, a petition addressed to the county board of supervisors with valid signatures of the lesser of 15% or 1,500 registered voters requesting a change in the governmental form (Wiseman, 2004).

Let us define a binary variable which we will call ***Petition***, that has a value of 1 if it holds a new beat-unit election through petition, and zero if it does not hold such an election. Using a logistic transformation (logit) of ***Petition*** to get a new variable that we will simply call ***Log Odds Petition.*** It should be clear that getting support to hold a new beat-unit election may be affected by whether or not the county has had corrupt supervisors, as measured by our binary variable, Corruption. Politicians who may wish to capture available rents from corrupt behavior will have higher incentives to seek a change in local political institutions in more corrupt counties. Similarly, the number of miles of roads controlled by county supervisors (on a per capita basis), ***Miles***, also provide an incentive for political entrepreneurs to seek changes in political institutions. Finally, the closer the previous election on the beat-unit choice, as measured (negatively) by ***Closeness***, the easier it is to change the system of governance back to the beat system, and the more likely it is to have a favorable petition to hold a new beat-unit election. However, it seems unlikely that either the Presidential Turnout or Supervisor Turnout variables would have much affect on the probability of having a successful petition to hold new beat-unit elections.

Model 8, a logistic regression model, examines the factors affecting the probability of a petition election being held, and is stated as

$$\textbf{\textit{Log Odds Petition}} = \delta_0 + \delta_1 \textbf{\textit{Corruption}} + \delta_2 \textbf{\textit{Miles}} + \delta_3 \textbf{\textit{Closeness}} + \theta. \quad (4)$$

4. Empirical Results: *La de da de da*

Our empirical findings can be seen in Table 1 which shows the results of the three OLS models which estimate ***Turnout*** along with the model estimating ***Turnout Difference***. While turnout in the previous year's supervisors' elections do not seem to be related to turnout for the beat-unit election, it may be because turnout in the supervisors' elections is related to the

Table 1. **OLS Turnout and Turnout Difference Models**

Dependent Variable:	**Model 1** ***Turnout***	**Model 2** ***Turnout***	**Model 3** ***Turnout***	**Model 4** ***Turnout***	**Model 5** ***Turnout Difference***
Variables	**Coefficient** (t-value)	**Coefficient** (t-value)	**Coefficient** (t-value)	**Coefficient** (t-value)	**Coefficient** (t-value)
Constant	0.080 (1.33)	0.0946 (1.50)	0.0068 (0.12)	0.081 (1.37)	-0.041 (1.59)
Corruption	0.049 (3.06)	---	0.043 (2.55)	0.047 (3.02)	0.050 (3.05)
Miles	1.717 (2.99)	1.48 (2.47)	---	---	---
Presidential Turnout	0.705 (5.32)	0.693 (4.97)	0.918 (7.82)	0.681 (5.48)	---
Supervisor Turnout	-0.042 (-0.55)	-0.0019 (-0.02)	0.0013 (0.02)	---	-0.099 (-1.34)
Closeness	-0.0016 (-1.77)	-0.0016 (-1.65)	-0.0018 (-1.90)	-0.0017 (-1.90)	-0.0014 (-1.62)
N	82	82	82	82	82
F	22.41	23.15	23.37	28.19	3.76
R^2	0.60	0.55	0.55	0.59	0.16
Adj. R^2	0.57	0.52	0.52	0.57	0.12

variables on the right-hand side (see Karahan, Coats and Shughart, 2006). After controlling for turnout in the presidential election (as some of the county-specific factors that affect turnout in the presidential race is likely to affect turnout in that county in other races, such as the beat-unit election in 1988), we see that both corruption in the county and the extent of the available corruption rents, as measured by road miles, positively affect turnout and the relationship is significantly different from zero. Similarly, the larger the absolute difference in beat and unit votes (as a proportion of the voting age population), as measured by our ***Closeness*** variable, the smaller the turnout—the political elite have little reason in driving voters to the polls or providing other incentives to increase their vote totals, as doing so is unlikely to affect the

outcome. Models 2 and 3 alternately constrain the coefficients of the ***Corruption*** and ***Miles*** variables.

The ***Turnout Difference*** model, shown as Model 5, is presented because the beat-unit election was on the same ballot as the U. S. Presidential election. In several counties, the beat-unit election received more votes than the presidential race, and of course, there were quite a few counties where people who voted for president abstained in the beat-unit race. We can think of Model 5 as estimating an error term that results when ***Presidential Turnout*** is used to estimate ***Turnout,*** but with the coefficients for ***Presidential Turnout*** constrained to one**.** The variables ***Closeness***, ***Supervisor Turnout*** and ***Corruption***, then, explain 16 percent of the variation in the difference between the beat-unit turnout and the turnout for the presidential election, and with similar coefficients as were estimated in Models 1-3. In all of the models ***Closeness*** is approximately significant at the10% level, with the expected sign, and rather consistent coefficients from model to model.

Table 2 shows the results of the beat vote percent model, Model 6, and the unit vote percent model, Model 7. It should be pointed out that since ***Beat + Unit = Turnout***, the coefficients of Models 6 and 7 sum to the coefficients in Model 1. We should notice that our independent variables are not very significant in the unit vote percent model, except for closeness, but its coefficient has the wrong sign, and so our model explains very little of the variation in Turnout, so a substantial portion of the variation in ***Turnout*** seems to come from the variation in beat instead of unit voters. This supports our contention that moving to the unit system is a public good.

Table 3 shows the results of the Log Odds Petition (logit) model, ***Model 8***. We see that more of the variation in whether a county had a petition to go back to the beat system depended on *Closeness*, with the other two variables affecting the Log Odds Petition variable in the predicted direction, but with standard errors that are too high for any reasonable degree of significance.

Table 2. **Beat and Unit Voter Percentage Models**		
Dependent Variable:	**Model 6** ***Beat***	**Model 7** ***Unit***
Variables	**Coefficient** (t-value)	**Coefficient** (t-value)
Constant	-0.11 (-1.88)	0.19 (3.88)
Corruption	0.044 (3.06)	0.005 (0.40)
Miles	1.86 (3.25)	-0.15 (-0.31)
Presidential Turnout	0.63 (4.74)	0.077 (0.71)
Supervisor Turnout	-0.072 (-0.94)	0.03 (0.47)
Closeness	-0.0043 (-4.67)	0.003 (3.51)
N	82	82
F	23.81	2.97
R^2	0.61	0.16
Adj. R^2	0.58	0.11

Table 3. **Log Odds Petition Logit Model**	
Dependent Variable:	**Model 8** ***Log Odds Petition***
Variables	**Coefficient** (p-value)
Constant	0.72 (0.44)
Corruption	0.39 (0.62)
Miles	38.15 (0.16)
Closeness	-0.15 (0.0013)
Wald Chi-Square df=3	11.61 (0.0088)
% Correctly Classified Observations	79.5

5. Conclusions: *History has turned the page*

While the Downsian model of turnout depends on the chance that the voter affects the outcome of the election, a more complete model of turnout suggests that it is less a matter of the supply of votes by the electorate, but rather the demand for votes by candidates and other political leaders that explains most turnout variation. In Mississippi, the unit system of county governance, by raising the transactions costs necessary to arrange corrupt payments relative to the beat system, has lower available rents. Because it is a less corruptible system, moving from the beat system to the unit system is a general public good as opposed to a special-interest collective good as is the case with the beat system. As Olson (1965) noted, political entrepreneurs, by providing selective incentives to their voters, drive collective action to produce special-interest collective goods. In 1988, more than half of the counties in Mississippi went from a very corruptible system of governance to one that is much more difficult to corrupt. Providing incentives to go to the polls for the general public good, the unit system, was the presidential race that was on the same ballot. However, in 1992, 22 of the 47 unit counties petitioned to have another vote on the beat-unit issue, but only 2 returned to the beat. We note that while almost half of the unit counties were able to get enough signatures to have new votes on the governance systems, none of the beat counties petitioned for re-votes, supporting our special-interest theory of governance selection.

We show that the turnout in the 1988 election between a county governance structure that was decentralized with few checks on the decision of the supervisor, the beat system, and the more centralized governance system which had more checks on the choices of supervisor, seems to be substantially correlated with both the level of corruption rents and whether the county governance had been found to be corrupt, as well as the closeness of the election, supporting our rent-seeking political elite explanation of voter turnout. We also see that the same variables we utilize in our turnout model similarly predict the percent of voting age population that voted for the beat. Interestingly, these variables do no seem to predict the percent of voting age population that voted for the unit system. The variation in turnout seems to come primarily from the variation in the beat vote, further supporting our special-interest theory of county constitutional choice.

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