

POLITICAL PARTIES IN STATE AND NATION

Party Advantage and Party Competition in a Federal Setting

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ABSTRACT

Research on party competition in the United States suffers because existing measures do not allow for an examination of national-level competition in the states. We view this as a significant oversight, and argue that party competition in the United States must be evaluated within a federal context. Toward that end, we develop measures of partisan electoral advantage and competition based on margin of victory in state and national offices for the legislature and executive. These measures allow us to examine, for the first time, patterns of competition for both state and national offices within and across the states. The patterns seen in the data are interesting and preliminary insights promising. We believe the measure developed here will permit a more expansive and theoretically interesting examination of party competition, and that these descriptive analyses point to a wide variety of interesting future pursuits.

KEY WORDS ■ elections ■ federalism ■ party competition ■ political parties

Introduction

Examinations of the importance of partisan competition are extensive and varied, representing a significant segment of the scholarly literature on political parties and party systems. This focus stems from the perceived role of competitive parties as an integral ingredient in facilitating healthy democratic government. For scholars in the American Politics subfield, the call to study partisan competition is stated most forcefully in V. O. Key's *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949). Here Key reminds us of the potential

dangers of one-party state political systems, which, as he illustrates, are often plagued by factions, issueless politics and demagoguery.

In the United States context, work on party competition has proceeded in all electoral arenas, following the contours of the constitutional framework into examinations of competition at federal, state and local levels. Yet while recognizing partisan elections take place within the structure of federalism, surprisingly few analyses of party competition incorporate this important contextual feature into their analytical framework. Rather, these efforts have overwhelmingly tended to focus only on party competition at one level – either national or state – to the exclusion of the other.¹ The result is that despite a large body of literature covering a significant variety of topics, state and national electoral competition are rarely discussed within the context of the same electoral setting. Given the close interconnection between state and national electoral politics, and the simple fact that in the US federal system even national offices are contested in the states, we view this to be a significant oversight in the literature on partisan electoral competition. In this article we attempt to offer initial insights into this important topic by examining the dual nature of partisan competition in a federal setting.²

Integrating State and National Party Competition in the States

It is possible that we overstate the likelihood of meaningful within-state variation in partisan electoral competition for state and national offices. After all, one result of the federal structure of elections is that the constituencies for state and national offices can be identical, or at least markedly similar. For electoral competition to vary significantly within a state these very same constituencies must be exposed (and respond differently) to variations in short-term campaign forces at each level. Such variation might also require that the influence of long-term forces be suppressed or activated at different times or according to differing electoral environments.

Judging from the existing literature, we see ample reason to believe these possibilities exist, and that levels of partisan competition for national offices and state offices deserve comparison at the analytical and political level of the state. The basic flavor of party competition in each state is itself a product of national political forces as well as factors unique to the state (Jewell and Morehouse, 2000). While electoral forces shape partisan competition – at both the national and state electoral levels – the unique historical, cultural and political settings of the states may serve to either enhance or diminish their effects.

Moreover, a substantial body of research supports this viewpoint, illustrating the importance of national politics that take place in a subnational setting. This relationship is particularly strong regarding nomination and election campaigns, and thus to some degree the competitiveness of the

national party system. At the presidential level, the growing importance of primary elections as vehicles for achieving party nominations has increased the importance of the varying state political environments in the presidential selection process (Wekkin, 1984). Home-state advantage plays a role in presidential elections, helping presidential and vice-presidential candidates (Garand, 1988; Lewis-Beck and Rice, 1982), and the partisan and ideological setting of the states lend structure to presidential elections (Maggiotto and Wekkin, 2000; Rabinowitz et al., 1985). With regard to congressional elections, members of the US House and Senate sit at the very intersection of state and national politics, running for national office in subnational settings that reflect differences on national issues, as well as idiosyncratic state and local concerns. The degree to which they can blend these national and local interests is often a determining factor in election outcomes (Jewell and Morehouse, 2000). To a considerable degree, national party competition is shaped by state-level forces.

Similarly, the state political settings are also shaped by national political pressures. Aggregate outcomes in the states are shaped by levels of support for the president (Simon et al., 1991), and presidential coat-tails are seen at the state legislative level (Campbell, 1986). Changes in the strength of state party organizations have also been documented, with the trend being toward increasing nationalization of these entities (Herrnson, 1993). Again, we see ample reason to believe that a relationship between national and state levels of partisan competition is part and parcel of the broader interdependence between state and national politics.

Perhaps the best argument for considering national and state party competition together in the states is the literature on segmented partisanship. This body of work considers patterns of divergent individual-level partisan identification at the state and national levels (Maggiotto and Wekkin, 1992). Researchers in this area have shown that it is not uncommon to find individuals who possess different partisan attachments within our federal system. This is true of the mass public (Barth, 1992; Perkins and Guynes, 1976) and of political elites (Bruce and Clark, 1998; Clark and Lockerbie, 1998; Hadley, 1985; Neimi et al., 1985). While this research shows that few individuals are truly split partisans, a significant proportion of the population reports differing partisan attachments (such as weak Republican at one level and Independent at the other). Those individuals with different partisan loyalties at different levels of government are, in fact, responding to different political contexts. Parties contest offices in a number of different constituencies, which may lead them to project different profiles in each of these constituencies. As applied to the discussion of party competition, the literature on segmented partisanship reinforces the notion that the vitality of any given party at each level of competition may differ, even among the same population.

The result of these myriad influences running in both directions is to reinforce the observation that political behavior is often contextually

determined, and that the state institutional and political environments are important entities in shaping individual and party behavior (Brace, 1995: 4; Maggiotto and Wekkin, 2000). More specifically, it lends credence to our observation that partisan competition at the state and national levels is related within the electoral context of the states, and that the extent of this connection will vary across the state electoral settings depending on responses to historical, political and social forces. We believe that a full understanding of partisan competition in the states requires an explicit recognition of the dual nature of competition, and thus an examination of competition at both levels within the states. In this article, we attempt an initial exploration. We focus first on constructing a measure capable of offering insight into competition in a federal setting.

Approaches to the Measurement of Party Competition

Issues related to measuring party competition are discussed most prominently within the confines of the state politics literature. As Bibby and Holbrook (1996: 103) note, analyses of political competition generally follow two different aspects of competition: inter-party competition for control of government and electoral competition for votes in elections.

The most widely utilized measure of competition focuses on the former: partisan control of the governorship and state legislature. Developed by Ranney (1976), this measure combines four indicators, each designed to tap individual aspects of Democratic control of government: the proportion of seats won in state House and Senate elections, the Democratic percentage in the gubernatorial election and the percentage of the time the governorship and state legislature were controlled by the Democratic Party. Yet while the Ranney index has received the lion's share of attention, it is not ideally suited to all analyses of competition. One issue is the possibility of a significant gap between measurement and the conceptualization of competition. King (1989) notes that the Ranney index is weighted heavily in favor of the legislative components. Given that gubernatorial elections represent the most visible and important opportunity for state electorates to express their partisan views, we find this a seriously limiting factor in the ability of the Ranney index to tap the overall competitive nature of a state's party system.

The more general issue revolves around how one chooses to conceptualize competition. Here, we side with those who believe the focus should be placed on the importance of electoral competition, rather than party dominance in government. By measuring the number of seats held in the legislature and the proportion of time that the executive and legislative branches are held in the same party, the Ranney index uses *outcomes* as the measure of competition. This makes it difficult to distinguish between a state where one party dominates absolutely (i.e. no significant electoral threat from the minority party) and one where both parties are viable but one is winning

more often (i.e. significant electoral contests, but the dominant party wins most contests).

Recent work by Holbrook and Van Dunk (1993; hereafter HVD) provides an alternative perspective that we believe fits more closely with a conceptualization of competition in an electoral setting. Drawing on Fenno (1978), the authors make the point that for a measure of competition to be meaningful it should represent the degree to which elected officials feel pressure from the electorate (HVD, 1993: 959). The Ranney index offers little in the way of help on this dimension, and is at best an indirect measure of competition in partisan elections.

Following this distinction, HVD offer a measure of partisan electoral competition based on several constituency-level indicators: the percentage of the popular vote won by the winning candidate, the winning candidate's margin of victory, whether or not the seat is 'safe', and whether the race was contested or not. By using electoral results, this measure is much more likely to reflect concern about electoral viability and pressure from opponents. A seat is competitive at the level of the constituency if that constituency tends to split evenly between the major partisan camps.

We agree with the constituency-based focus offered by HVD and believe their measure provides an important conceptual improvement in evaluating party competition across electoral environments. Yet, like Ranney, this measure is not without its limitations. One significant issue is the lack of a gubernatorial component. To the degree that Ranney suffers for undervaluing the role of gubernatorial contests, the HVD measure suffers more for excluding it completely. It does not seem reasonable to us that a measure of state electoral competition can exclude all partisan voting for the state's most visible and (generally) hotly contested office.

In addition, the components of the HVD measure make it difficult to use when there are a small number of cases within a category. Application of these criteria in a single race for governor, for example, may make the 'safe' component go to 100. Alternatively, a small state senate with staggered terms may have a relatively high number of uncontested seats, which would increase that counter as well as the 'safe' percentage. For our purposes here – examining both national and state party competition within the states – this is a decided disadvantage, as the measure does not work well beyond the realm of the lower national House (and even there does not work well in small states).

One issue with the HVD measure is the role of uncontested seats. Recall the four components of their measure: winner's vote share, winning margin, percent safe seats and percent uncontested. Uncontested seats are weighted heavily under this scheme. The winning vote share will be 100, the winning margin will be 100, the seat will count on both the safe tally and the uncontested tally. At the national level, such an overcounting might not be an issue given the low numbers of uncontested seats. However, application of this measure at the state level is potentially more problematic because of the

large number of state legislative seats that go uncontested each election. Not surprisingly, the HVD measure is strongly associated with the level of uncontested races. Their top 5 competitive states averaged 4.7 percent uncontested, while their 5 least competitive states averaged 68 percent uncontested. Similarly, safe seats are overcounted in HVD, showing up in three of the four components. The issue is not whether one should consider uncontested seats or safe seats in a measure of party competition. The question is whether these seats should be disproportionately weighted.

An Alternative Conceptualization of Party System Competitiveness

To examine party competition in a federal setting we need a measure that can function within a federal context – that can be applied at both levels within the states. Such a measure would benefit from keeping the best aspects of both Ranney and HVD while downplaying their more important limitations. In our view, this means retaining the focus on partisan electoral competition offered by HVD, but including an executive component in the calculation. Ideally, this measure would also provide both directional and overall competition analyses, as in Ranney. Finally, it must be portable to the national level. We believe a simple yet functional alternative exists that fits these criteria and possesses several other qualities that allow for a more realistic and accurate portrait of how parties interact in a federal setting.

We propose a measure that is a simplification of HVD, but that provides more information about the competitive nature of the state party system. We start with one component of the HVD measure (margin of victory) and modify it to allow for directionality (i.e. Democratic versus Republican advantage), the inclusion of the executive office in the calculation and portability to national party competition in the states. Our measure of party competition is based solely on election performance. We use vote margin as the foundation of our measure because we believe this taps most accurately into the conceptual underpinnings of partisan electoral competition: whether or not elected officials feel pressure from the electorate and whether those running for office have a reasonable chance of winning.

In relying on margin of victory, we drop the other three components of the HVD measure. While, technically, dropping these components means we lose information relative to HVD, we believe we gain far more than we lose. Focusing on margin of victory isolates the primary ingredient of competition and mitigates some of the problems inherent in the HVD measure. Most importantly, this allows for measurement of party competition at the national level within the states. Given the high correlation between winning vote margin and the HVD overall measure (0.972), we believe the actual loss of information created by dropping the other three components has no substantive impact.

Having made the decision to focus on margin of victory, we then modify the HVD approach in several ways. Rather than using the winning candidate's margin of victory, we first calculate vote margin to allow for directionality in partisan competition. Specifically, we use the Democratic Party candidate's vote share as an anchor and calculate margin of victory differently, depending on whether the Democrat won or lost. If the Democrat won, the vote margin is: percent Democratic vote – percent second place vote share. If the Democratic candidate lost, we modify the calculation accordingly: percent Democratic vote – percent winner's vote share.³ The result is a measure of partisan electoral competition that focuses first on Democratic Party advantage. The measure runs from a theoretical endpoint of total Democratic failure (–100) to total Democratic Party dominance (+100), with perfect competition at the zero point.⁴ This information is most consistent with the directional information on party advantage provided by Ranney, but contains the constituency-level focus advocated by HVD. We believe there is intrinsic value in the directional measure, as one of the more interesting questions in comparing party competition at the state and national levels involves the direction and degree of the competitive advantage. A non-directional measure may indicate similar levels of competition for state and national offices, but mask the fact that the national offices have a Republican advantage while the state offices have a Democratic advantage. Moreover, as we will discuss in greater detail, one additional benefit of this approach is that we can easily fold the measure around the zero point to provide an overall measure of competition. Thus the first advantage of our approach is readily apparent. By calculating the measure from a directional foundation, we allow for different aspects of party system competitiveness (party advantage or overall competition) to be examined, depending on the question at hand.

In addition, we include the executive in our measure. Our rationale for this is straightforward: to the degree that the governor is the most visible elected official in the state, the level at which gubernatorial races can be contested by both parties sends a strong signal about the nature of party competition in the state.⁵ Hotly contested gubernatorial races may raise controversial issues and offer significant insights into the nature of politics and policy in a state. Such races may be important signaling devices to state legislatures about specific issues, as well as more general parameters regarding which areas of policy to address and which to leave off the legislative agenda. Thus, in our view, an attempt to measure the degree of partisan electoral competition that does not include some gubernatorial component cannot provide a complete or accurate portrayal of the dynamics of the competitive setting in the states.

Most importantly, our approach allows us to calculate two sets of competition measures: one each for state and national competition in the states. We can do this because of our decision to drop most of the HVD measurement components and focus on vote margin as best tapping the underlying

nature of competition. As noted earlier, one disadvantage of using an indicator such as seat safety in a measure of competition is that it is difficult to use when there is a small number of cases within a category. Application of this criterion in a single race for Senate (or President), for example, may make the 'safe' component go to 100. This is particularly important in the senatorial case, where the number of senators is small and the terms are staggered. While generally not an issue when focusing solely on state senate races (though the problem does arise in states with small senate delegations), it is quite problematic when trying to examine party competition in the US Senate.⁶ For our purposes here – examining both national and state party competition within the states – this is a decided disadvantage, as we must have a measure that works well beyond the realm of the lower national House.

Consistent with our arguments about including the state executive, we also include a presidential component in our national measure. Correctly or incorrectly, there is little doubt that each party's presidential candidates are seen as the standard-bearers of their parties, and that perceptions about the viability of parties in the presidential arena exert a significant impact on shaping perceptions of the parties more generally. This is particularly important within the confines of the electoral college system, wherein it is common strategic practice for each party to start the presidential election by counting some states as 'locks', others as 'unwinnable', and then focus on the 'battleground' states to decide the election. This very strategy implies that the parties understand they are more or less competitive in certain state arenas when it comes to presidential politics. Presidential elections take place in a federal setting, and, accordingly, any measure of national party electoral competition must incorporate a presidential component.

Having discussed the parameters of our state and national measures, the calculations are quite straightforward.⁷ We first determine the Democratic margin of victory or defeat in each constituency (state House, state Senate, governor; US House, US Senate, president) for the years 1980 to 1987.⁸ This results in six measures of constituency-level competition for the 8-year period – one for each state and national constituency. The 8-year period allows for a minimum of two elections for each office in each state, minimizing the influence of specific candidate or election effects.⁹ The margin for each separate constituency is then averaged by office (house, senate, executive) within states and across years. Consistent with HVD, all initial calculations are made at the constituency level, and then aggregated to a state level average for each office. These averages were then combined as follows to form our baseline measures of state party advantage (state legislative chambers and governor) and national party advantage (US legislative chambers and the presidential vote in the state):

$$\text{Party Advantage} = \frac{(\text{House} + \text{Senate} + \text{Executive})}{3}$$

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We weight the three arenas of electoral competition equally in our measure. All of the House races are equal to all of the Senate races, and both are equal to the executive contests. The alternative would be to weight each individual race equally, no matter the office. The flaw of this approach would be the dilution of high-profile races (such as president or governor) when mixed in with the larger number of legislative races. For this reason, and because the literature offers no reason to consider a different weighting scheme, we treat each type of electoral contest as having an equal contribution to the measure of party advantage.¹⁰

One additional advantage of this measure is that its foundation allows for the possibility of significant support for a minor party or independent candidate. It is possible, for example, that such a candidate may draw support disproportionately from one candidate over the other, thereby shrinking the gap between the Democratic and Republican candidates and shifting the nature of electoral advantage and competition. We account for this possibility by basing the initial calculations of Democratic advantage on total votes cast, rather than the Democratic percentage of the two-party vote. Thus, when there is a third party or independent presence, the measure of advantage shifts accordingly, with the result being a more competitive score.

Party Advantage at the State and National Levels

We refer to this measure as party advantage rather than competition in order to reinforce the directional nature of the construct. Consistent with our constituency-level focus on Democratic margin of victory or defeat, party advantage measures the degree to which one party dominates state or national electoral politics in the state. The results of this analysis are given in Table 1. Given that the measure is directional, zero represents the point of maximum competition. This point is marked on the table with a dotted line. As state scores move away from zero in either direction (where positive scores reflect the degree of Democratic advantage and negative scores indicate Republican advantage), the overall level of party competition decreases and the electoral advantage of one party over the other increases accordingly.

The first two columns of Table 1 give the states ranked by their respective scores on the state party advantage measure. One thing that is quickly apparent is the large proportion of the states with advantage scores greater than zero – that is, where the competitive environment favors Democrats. Of the 48 states examined here, 33 have positive scores on the state measure. This imbalance can also be observed by looking at the range of scores. The largest Democratic advantage (Arkansas) is a score of just over 57 (meaning the average Democratic margin of victory across the three offices under review is 57 percent), while the largest Republican advantage is nearly -23. The mean of the state measure is 11.6.¹¹

Table 1. Party advantage at the state and national levels, 1980–7

<i>State</i>	<i>Advantage- State</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Advantage- National</i>
Arkansas	57.26	1	Hawaii	37.09
Georgia	55.42	2	Massachusetts	21.37
Mississippi	52.46	3	Georgia	16.93
South Carolina	45.86	4	Tennessee	16.13
Massachusetts	45.64	5	West Virginia	15.89
Alabama	43.12	6	Alabama	14.12
Maryland	40.25	7	Kentucky	14.00
Kentucky	35.46	8	Maryland	11.86
Hawaii	34.33	9	New York	8.76
North Carolina	33.07	10	Rhode Island	7.71
Rhode Island	27.35	11	Ohio	5.67
Texas	26.45	12	Michigan	5.56
Virginia	24.63	13	Wisconsin	5.27
Nevada	18.61	14	South Carolina	4.21
Michigan	16.68	15	Illinois	4.12
West Virginia	15.40	16	Texas	3.76
Missouri	14.74	17	Mississippi	3.57
New York	13.37	18	Washington	3.10
Ohio	12.90	19	Arkansas	2.67
Minnesota	12.80	20	New Jersey	2.46
Maine	11.14	21	North Dakota	1.16
New Mexico	11.12	22	Delaware	0.50
Montana	10.83	23	Connecticut	0.45
Tennessee	10.20	24	North Carolina	0.12
Connecticut	8.33	25	Missouri	0.05
Wisconsin	6.80	26	Minnesota	-0.23
Alaska	3.23	27	Florida	-0.65
Oregon	2.09	28	Oklahoma	-1.44
Washington	1.40	29	Montana	-1.45
Arizona	0.90	30	California	-1.97
California	0.64	31	Pennsylvania	-4.03
Pennsylvania	0.57	32	Iowa	-6.81
Iowa	0.04	33	Oregon	-7.22
Vermont	-0.59	34	New Mexico	-8.86
Illinois	-2.06	35	Virginia	-10.24
Colorado	-2.32	36	Indiana	-11.46
North Dakota	-3.85	37	Nevada	-11.70
Delaware	-4.89	38	South Dakota	-12.77
Oklahoma	-5.38	39	Arizona	-14.73
Indiana	-5.50	40	Vermont	-14.96
Kansas	-5.70	41	Colorado	-14.98
Florida	-6.98	42	Maine	-19.16
New Jersey	-7.08	43	New Hampshire	-24.18
Idaho	-12.77	44	Idaho	-24.25
Utah	-16.86	45	Kansas	-26.04
New Hampshire	-18.20	46	Alaska	-27.37
South Dakota	-21.40	47	Utah	-35.70
Wyoming	-22.62	48	Wyoming	-38.44

Note: The correlation between state and national party advantage = 0.66.

The location of states on the state party advantage ranking is as one would expect, given the politics of the period under consideration.¹² States with highly competitive parties for state offices include California, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Vermont and Illinois. States with the largest Democratic advantage include Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Massachusetts. Republican-dominated states are Wyoming, South Dakota, New Hampshire, Utah and Idaho.

The last two columns of Table 1 give the national advantage measure for each state. In significant contrast to the state measure, the scores on this measure are more balanced between Democratic and Republican advantage. Twenty-five of the 48 states have a positive score (reflecting a Democratic advantage). The largest Democratic advantage (37.09) is matched by the largest Republican advantage (-38.44). The mean of the national measure (-2.35) is much closer to perfect competition and almost 16 points less than the average of the state measure.

Just as with the state measure, the location of the states on this list conforms to the nature of the political world at the time. The most competitive states in races for national offices include Delaware, Connecticut, North Carolina, Missouri, Minnesota and Florida. The largest Democratic advantage is seen in Hawaii, Massachusetts, Georgia, Tennessee and West Virginia. Republican advantage is largest in Wyoming, Utah, Alaska, Kansas and Idaho.

Party Advantage Across Electoral Levels

One of the driving notions behind this article is the idea that the competitive environment for different offices may vary, even among the same general constituency. Having calculated separate measures of national and state party advantage for each state, we can begin to address this point.

Figure 1 shows the two party advantage measures graphed in the same space. Those states nearest the intersection of the two zero point reference lines are those with the greatest degree of competition across levels. California, Pennsylvania and Iowa are examples of this class of party competition. States located along a 45 degree line running from the lower-left to the upper-right have roughly equal levels of competition at both levels. As states fall away from this line, they show increasingly large disparities between national and state party advantage. For example, Arkansas has a Democratic advantage at both state and national levels. However, at the state level Democrats dominate (a score of 57), while at the national level their advantage is almost non-existent (2.67). Overall, Figure 1 demonstrates that party advantage differs not just across states but also within states across levels of electoral contests. That is not to say that these two concepts are unrelated. Indeed, the correlation between the state and

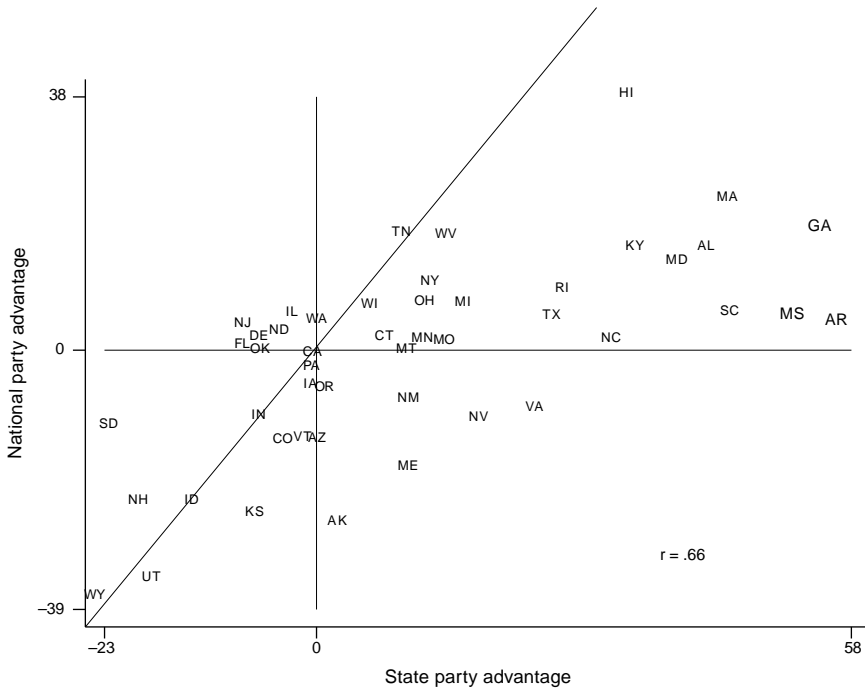


Figure 1. National and state party advantage

national measures is 0.66. The differences that exist, however, are too large to be a product of noise in the electoral process.

Party Competition at the State and National Levels

The measure of competition examined thus far is conceptually closest to the Ranney index, in that it shows direction of competitive advantage. We feel that this directional aspect of the measure provides information that is valuable to understanding the nature of party competition. Much of the literature, however, has relied upon a non-directional measure of competition (the folded Ranney index and the HVD measure are the most relevant examples) and, indeed, a measure of this type is more appropriate for certain types of analysis. One of the advantages of our approach is that we can transform our directional party advantage measure into a non-directional measure of overall party system competition by folding the measure around the point of maximum competition.¹³ The resulting measure has a theoretical range of -100 to zero, with zero indicating perfect competition and -100 indicating a perfect domination by one party.

State rankings on this competition measure are given in Table 2. The first two columns have states ranked by their scores on the state competition measure. The most competitive states by this indicator are Iowa, Pennsylvania, Vermont, California and Arizona. The least competitive states are Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Massachusetts. The mean score on this measure is -17.28 , indicating that, on average, one party has an electoral advantage of 17 points when examining elections to the state House, Senate and governor. This measure of competition clearly overlaps with existing non-directional measures of state party competition. Our folded measure has a correlation of 0.71 with the published HVD scores (which are based only on the legislative contests in 1982–6) and a correlation of 0.63 with the folded Ranney index.¹⁴ Based on the validity of these previous measures, we are clearly tapping into the competitive environment of the state party systems. That our measure includes an executive component makes it an even more accurate representation of party competition.

Again we note the importance of our approach for gaining leverage on national competition in the states. The last two columns of Table 2 list the states ranked by their score on the national competition variable. The national context is more competitive, with a mean of -10.94 . This is hardly surprising, and lends further face validity to our approach. The most competitive states on this measure are Missouri, North Carolina, Minnesota, Connecticut, Delaware and Florida. The states with the lowest levels of competition for national races are Wyoming, Utah and Kansas (Republican advantage) and Hawaii and Massachusetts (Democratic advantage).

Party Competition Across Electoral Levels

Just as we were interested in the level of party advantage across differing electoral contexts, we are interested in similar variations in party competition. The results in Table 2 provide some measure of this comparison. Of the five states with the lowest levels of party competition, only one makes the list of the 10 lowest levels on the national score. The five states at the low end of the national list are likewise distributed across the state list. Overall, there is no overwhelming relationship between the measures of party competition at the state and national levels. Indeed, the correlation is only 0.13.

This low correlation masks interesting variation in the relationship between state and national party competition across the states, as indicated in Figure 2. Here, we have plotted the states based on their scores on these two folded measures. Figure 2 illustrates a cluster of states in the upper-right quadrant that have relatively high levels of competition on both measures. Most states fall within this quadrant, indicating that for a substantial subset of states competitive state parties tend to exist alongside competitive national parties. Yet also visible in the figure are the significant number of

Table 2. Party competition at the state and national levels, 1980-7

<i>State</i>	<i>Competition- State</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Competition- National</i>
Iowa	-0.04	1	Missouri	-0.05
Pennsylvania	-0.57	2	North Carolina	-0.12
Vermont	-0.59	3	Minnesota	-0.23
California	-0.64	4	Connecticut	-0.45
Arizona	-0.90	5	Delaware	-0.50
Washington	-1.40	6	Florida	-0.65
Illinois	-2.06	7	North Dakota	-1.16
Oregon	-2.09	8	Oklahoma	-1.44
Colorado	-2.32	9	Montana	-1.45
Alaska	-3.23	10	California	-1.97
North Dakota	-3.85	11	New Jersey	-2.46
Delaware	-4.89	12	Arkansas	-2.67
Oklahoma	-5.38	13	Washington	-3.10
Indiana	-5.50	14	Mississippi	-3.57
Kansas	-5.70	15	Texas	-3.76
Wisconsin	-6.80	16	Pennsylvania	-4.03
Florida	-6.98	17	Illinois	-4.12
New Jersey	-7.08	18	South Carolina	-4.21
Connecticut	-8.33	19	Wisconsin	-5.27
Tennessee	-10.20	20	Michigan	-5.56
Montana	-10.83	21	Ohio	-5.67
New Mexico	-11.12	22	Iowa	-6.81
Maine	-11.14	23	Oregon	-7.22
Idaho	-12.77	24	Rhode Island	-7.71
Minnesota	-12.80	25	New York	-8.76
Ohio	-12.90	26	New Mexico	-8.86
New York	-13.37	27	Virginia	-10.24
Missouri	-14.74	28	Indiana	-11.46
West Virginia	-15.40	29	Nevada	-11.70
Michigan	-16.68	30	Maryland	-11.86
Utah	-16.86	31	South Dakota	-12.77
New Hampshire	-18.20	32	Kentucky	-14.00
Nevada	-18.61	33	Alabama	-14.12
South Dakota	-21.40	34	Arizona	-14.73
Wyoming	-22.62	35	Vermont	-14.96
Virginia	-24.63	36	Colorado	-14.98
Texas	-26.45	37	West Virginia	-15.89
Rhode Island	-27.35	38	Tennessee	-16.13
North Carolina	-33.07	39	Georgia	-16.93
Hawaii	-34.33	40	Maine	-19.16
Kentucky	-35.46	41	Massachusetts	-21.37
Maryland	-40.25	42	New Hampshire	-24.18
Alabama	-43.12	43	Idaho	-24.25
Massachusetts	-45.64	44	Kansas	-26.04
South Carolina	-45.86	45	Alaska	-27.37
Mississippi	-52.46	46	Utah	-35.70
Georgia	-55.42	47	Hawaii	-37.09
Arkansas	-57.26	48	Wyoming	-38.44

Note: Correlation between state and national competition = 0.13.

states with striking disparities. Some are much less competitive at the state level than at the national level, with, not surprisingly, southern states being particularly prominent here. Others have the reverse trend (Alaska, Kansas, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming). Massachusetts and Hawaii fall into the lower-left quadrant, indicating that these states are not particularly competitive at either the state or national level.

Party Advantage and Party Competition in a Federal Setting

Thus far we have examined our measures of party advantage and competition separately and across levels of electoral context. In this section, we offer some initial descriptions of the similarities and differences between the two conceptualizations of the party environment. We begin by examining advantage and competition as they exist together in the states. As is clear from the information presented up to this point, the two measures tap different aspects of party competition. Our measure of party advantage illustrates the degree to which one party dominates the other at the electoral level. In its folded form, the direction or partisan bent of electoral politics is removed in order to gain leverage on overall levels of party competition. Of course, the two measures are to some degree mirror images of one another; to the degree that a state has a one-party dominant system, it will show up as uncompetitive on the competition score. This is not to say, however, that they tap into the same aspects of the parties in the states. A party system that is dominated by one party is not competitive – by definition. Yet *across the states*, patterns of party advantage and competition may vary in ways that provide insight into the competitive environment at each level.

Figure 3 illustrates this point in an intriguing fashion. The top portion of the figure is a scatterplot of state party advantage and state competition; the bottom segment gives the data for the national measures. At each level, the states fall on the scatterplot to form an inverted 'V', with the apex of the data points being at zero – perfect competition. Movement to the left of the apex indicates a decline in competition toward Republican advantage; movement to the right illustrates Democratic party advantage. Taken together, these illustrations reveal important differences in the competitive environment at the national and state levels. Note first the scatterplot for state party advantage and competition. The lopsided nature of the data points indicates quite strongly the character of electoral competition for state offices during the 1980–7 time period. Not only do Democrats hold the competitive advantage in most states, in many of these states the advantage is startling. The striking correlation of -0.83 indicates that, across the states, for party competition to increase, it must do so almost solely as a result of Republican party advances.

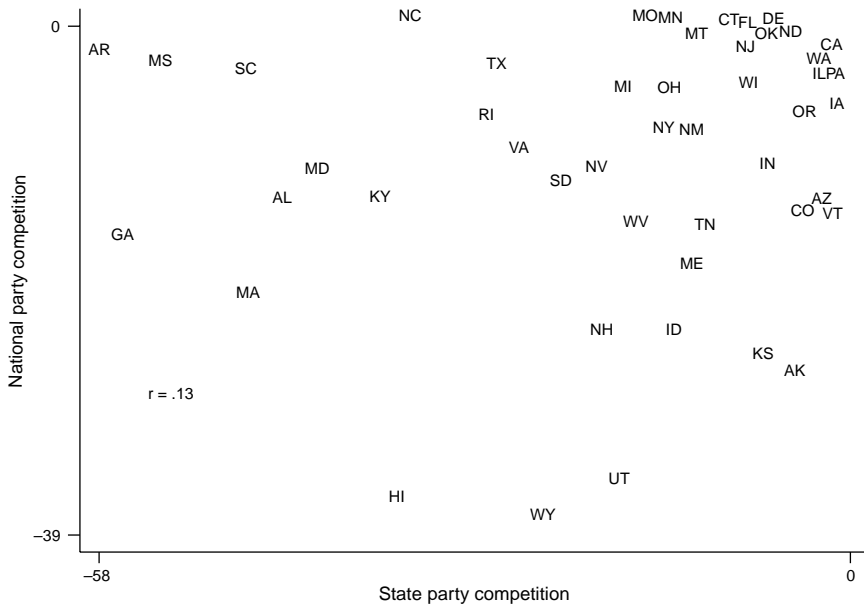


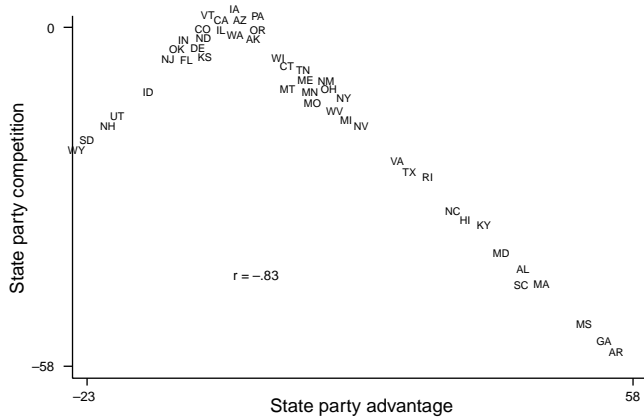
Figure 2. National and state party competition

The bottom portion of the figure illustrates a very different scenario for national competition during this time period. Overall, there is far more balance across the states. Some states are strongly Republican, a smaller number of states are Democratic dominant, but most cluster around perfect competition. States that show an advantage for one party are counterbalanced by states on the opposing vector. The positive correlation ($r = 0.34$) between party advantage and competition illustrates that opposing scenarios exist at the state and national levels. To the degree that states become more Democratic in terms of electoral advantage, overall levels of national party competition across the states increase. The larger story, though, is one of balance. Across the states, there is far more balance in the electoral environment for national offices.

Conclusion

In this work, we have proposed an addition to the party competition literature that offers a number of advances over existing work. We believe the measure developed and described here will permit a more expansive and theoretically interesting examination of party competition. The primary feature of our measure is the ability to calculate party advantage by level of

State measures



National measures

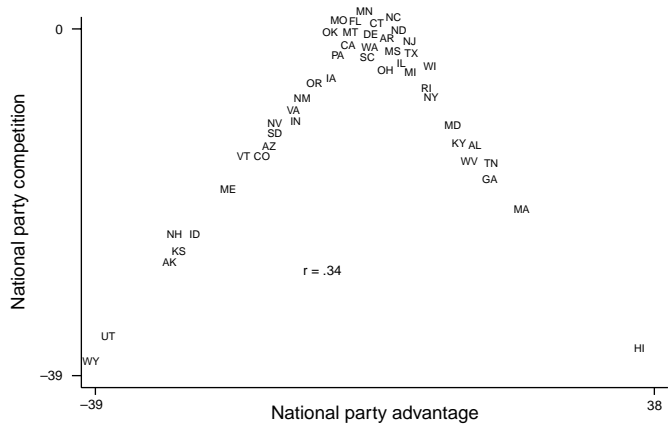


Figure 3. Party advantage and party competition

Technically, the data points falling away from the apex of perfect competition should form straight lines. Placement of states has been modified slightly to facilitate readability.

electoral contest (state and national) for a given state. This is an important advance, because it allows us to examine the nature of party competition as it truly exists in a federal setting. A second major feature of our measure is that it can be examined both directionally and non-directionally. We can, therefore, make a distinction between the level of advantage that a specific party may have and the overall level of competition in the state party system.

Our analysis at this point is largely descriptive, but the patterns seen in the data are interesting and preliminary insights promising. First, the results reinforce our understanding of the range of party standing in the states. States vary from being dominated by one party to being highly competitive.

This is true at both the state and national levels. Second, we have established that important differences exist in the way the party advantage within a state varies with the level of offices being contested. A party's 'lock' on a particular state may well be limited to a certain class of offices. Third, our results reveal that a number of states have party advantage that varies not only in degree, but also in direction. These states represent perhaps the most intriguing political environment. Finally, our analyses highlight a region of the country on the cusp of major political change. In our analysis of the 1980s, the south is largely Democratic at the state level, but the level of Democratic electoral advantage had dropped at the national level. As we expand this analysis to more recent years, we expect to see the most dramatic changes among the southern states. Importantly, we will be able to document the influence of both state and national movements on this change.

The descriptions examined here also point toward a variety of interesting future pursuits. A mainstay of the party competition literature is the theorized impact of competition on voter turnout. To date, this has only been examined with data on state-level competition. Including national-level competition may provide additional and more theoretically satisfying insight into the competition-participation relationship. Moreover, the increased level of information derived from measures that may differ across electoral levels allows us to examine what factors drive these differences, allowing for a much richer understanding of the nature of demographic patterns, partisanship, ideology, candidate and campaign effects on the state electoral landscape. Finally, as more data become available we can examine changes in party advantage and competition over electoral eras and what drives these changes at different levels of electoral competition. Taken together, we believe these analyses have the potential to add significantly to our understanding of the factors that influence the competitive character of party systems in a federal electoral setting.

Notes

- 1 See Gimpel (1990) and Jewell and Morehouse (2000) for exceptions.
- 2 We do not suggest that the literature does not recognize the connection between state and national contests. With regard to varying levels of party competition within the states, however, the discipline is largely silent, focusing on competition at the national level (e.g. realignment) to the exclusion of the state level (e.g. influences on policy outputs), and vice versa. For examples of research that brings the two levels together, see: Campbell, 1986; Garand, 1988; Herrnson, 1986; Holbrook, 1991; King and Browning, 1987; Lewis-Beck and Rice, 1983; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1986; Simon et al., 1991; Stein, 1990; Tompkins, 1988; Wright and Berkman, 1986.
- 3 In almost all cases, the measure is percent Democratic vote – percent Republican vote. However, this modification allows for instances when a third party or independent candidate performs better than one of the major party candidates.

While these cases are relatively rare, they are more likely in state legislative races.

- 4 Imagine a two-party system where Democrats lose every race with 100 percent of the vote going to the Republican Party: $0-100 = -100$. The converse has Democrats winning every race by unanimous votes: $100-0 = 100$. In a situation where all races are ties, the results would be: $50-50 = 0$, or perfect electoral competition.
- 5 We recognize that the legal power held by governors across states may vary dramatically, but in this context the visibility of the office is a much more important criterion. Indeed, governors with little legal power – such as now-President George W. Bush – can be major political (and partisan) forces.
- 6 Note that this concern holds for both gubernatorial races as well as for smaller states with fewer members of the US House of Representatives.
- 7 Aside from adding an executive component, calculations of competition scores proceed in a manner consistent with those used by HVD.
- 8 The state legislative data are from ICPSR 8907, while the national and gubernatorial data are from ICPSR 7757. Only general election returns are included, and multimember free for all districts were excluded. In states that have legislative chambers with mixed configurations of single and multimember free for all districts (within or across chambers), the results were included if there were at least three non-multimember districts in a given chamber. Nebraska is excluded because of the non-partisan chamber. Louisiana is excluded because of the non-partisan primary utilized in that state. Chambers that have all or a large proportion (more than 50 percent of the races we examined) of multimember free for all seats include lower chambers in Arizona, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming and upper chambers in North Carolina and Vermont. See HVD for analysis of similar competitiveness in multimember free for all seats.
- 9 We recognize that choosing these years results in a measure that is almost 20 years old. This is a characteristic it shares with other election-based measures of party competition. Unfortunately, updating the measure is far more difficult than might appear at first blush. While national data are easy to find, data on state House and Senate election returns are difficult (and in some cases, impossible) to compile in a comprehensive fashion. Still, we will continue to work on additional data collection in the hope of producing a subsequent manuscript comparing changes in advantage and competition across electoral eras. Having noted the time-bound nature of the measure, we also note our belief that this issue does not detract from the utility of the manuscript. The purpose of the manuscript is to illustrate that party competition in the United States must be evaluated within a federal context. To merely describe and evaluate competition based solely on state legislative races tells only part of the story. Moreover, it misrepresents the very nature of competition in the varying state environments. This should not be minimized, as the entire body of literature on US state party competition makes this error. We believe that the time-frame used to construct the measure does not interfere with our ability to make this important point.
- 10 One issue associated with any measure of competition that uses electoral performance as an indicator is the possibility of confusing aggregate competition and competition in individual races. Consider two states. In the first, every race is highly competitive. The resulting measure of party advantage would be near

zero, indicating a highly competitive party system in that state. In the second state every race is a 100 percent vote for one of the parties. Should the balance of these non-competitive races be approximately equal across the major parties, the resulting aggregate measure would be near zero, indicating (in a misleading fashion) a highly competitive state. One easy check to make sure this is not the case is to look at the distributions of the electoral margins, with an eye toward totally polarized states. In the years under review here, there are no states with such a polarized set of results.

- 11 While these scores may seem excessive, recall that states with a large imbalance of uncontested seats will have large party advantage scores. During this time period, almost 86 percent of Arkansas's legislative seats were uncontested in general elections. Of the Democrats who won office, 82.8 percent ran uncontested, compared to only 4.8 percent of the Republicans who won. As party systems become more competitive over time, fewer seats will be uncontested, and these margins will change accordingly.
- 12 The same analysis done for the 1990s would obviously produce results showing fewer southern states with Democratic dominance. In that light, our advantage measure for this period shows a South just prior to dramatic partisan change.
- 13 We compute the overall competition score by subtracting the absolute value of the party advantage score from zero.
- 14 Note that one reason for the lower correlation between our state competition score and that of HVD is because our measure includes an executive component. The correlation between the HVD measure and our counterpart using just state legislative contests is 0.88.

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