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Party and Primary Competition in Kentucky State Legislative Races

By MALCOLM E. JEWELL*

Kentucky is a border state in the political as well as the geographical sense. It has neither the strongly competitive two-party system found in some northern states nor the one-party system characteristic of the South. Since the Civil War the state has voted for a Republican presidential candidate only four times.¹ It has had only five Republican governors, serving a total of twenty years.² The Republican party has never had a majority in both branches of the state legislature and only twice in one branch.³ In recent years the Republicans have held about one-fourth of the seats in the legislature.

Clearly Kentucky politics is dominated by one party but not to the total exclusion of the second. How much two-party competition is there within the various parts of the state? Professor J. B. Shannon has calculated that 59 of the state's 120 counties voted always or nearly always for the same party in presidential races from 1868 through 1956.⁴ But more information is needed about local elections in order to measure party competition adequately. In Kentucky and other states dominated by one party it is often asserted that primaries in the major party provide an adequate substitution for two-party competition. While vigorous contests in the Democratic gubernatorial primary are a familiar feature of Kentucky politics, less is known about the

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¹ In 1896, 1924, 1928, and 1956. Shannon & McQuown, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948* (1950); *Kentucky Government Directory* (1958).

² Republican governors were elected in 1895, 1907, 1919, 1927, and 1943. In the disputed 1899 election a Republican was elected but the verdict was challenged in the legislature by his opponent. After the Democratic contender had been assassinated, the Republican Governor fled the state and the Democratic Lieutenant Governor took office as Governor. Shannon & McQuown, *op. cit.*, *Supra* note 1, at 68, 74, 82, 96, 122.

³ The Republicans won the House of Representatives in 1895 and 1919. Shannon, "The Political Process in Kentucky," 45 *Ky. L. J.* 430 (1957).

⁴ *Id.* at 431-32.

degree and character of primary competition in both parties for lesser offices.

This is a study of two-party and primary competition in the six elections for the Kentucky House of Representatives from 1947 through 1957. It seeks to determine how much two-party competition there has been, to find the most competitive districts, to suggest what factors cause variations, and to make a similar analysis of competition in both party primaries. This study should provide information about the local organizational strength of the two parties in various districts where House members are chosen. Since legislative behavior is influenced by the legislator's sense of responsibility to the voter and his concern about re-election, this study should shed some light on the legislature.

This analysis of state legislative races has significance beyond the borders of Kentucky. Venturing into a long-neglected area, political scientists have recently studied party and primary competition for legislative seats in several other states. Their conclusions, not always unanimous, can be compared to the findings in Kentucky. By such small steps, progress can be achieved in the laborious process of creating a science of American state politics.

It is unrealistic to expect an election turnover or even close contests in most districts every two years. To gain a better perspective on legislative races, six consecutive, recent elections have been chosen for analysis. The House has been selected, rather than the Senate, because it provides a larger sample of districts, each small enough to permit isolation of those factors influencing competition. In the House, a few metropolitan counties are divided into two or more districts; other districts consist of one or two counties.⁵

PARTY COMPETITION

Only 243 of the 600 elections (40.5 percent) from 1947 through 1957 were contested by both parties. The Democrats

⁵ Information on voting in the forty-two county districts the only ones required to file information with the state, was gathered in the Secretary of State's office in Frankfort. Most of the information on other districts came from the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and the *Lexington Herald*. Gaps in the newspaper coverage of election returns were filled by correspondence with county clerks, whose assistance in completing the compilation is appreciated.

won 280 seats (46.7 percent) without opposition, and the Republicans won seventy-seven seats (12.8 percent) unopposed. These figures show a comparatively low degree of competition and suggest that in many districts one party has little or no effective organization.⁶ Despite Democratic dominance at the state level, there are substantial areas where that party is too weak to run a candidate for the legislature. V. O. Key has suggested that the growth of the primaries has tended to make the majority primary in any district the center of competition eventually weakening the minority party as it loses its function of choosing candidates.⁷ In keeping with this theory, Kentucky does have a compulsory primary, frequent primary contests, and a relatively low proportion of contested legislative elections.

It is probably more meaningful to analyze electoral competition by districts. In 87 of the 100 House districts, one party won six consecutive elections. In six of the remaining thirteen districts one party won five of the six elections, usually losing after a tight primary race in the majority party, while the minority did not always have a candidate in every race. In the other seven there was more frequent party turnover. Among the 87 districts always won by one party, there were only twelve in which the losing party always ran a candidate; nine of these were districts won by Democrats. The 25 districts in which there was either some turnover between parties during the period or two-party competition in every election (or both) may be classified together as the most competitive and will be referred to hereafter as two-party districts.

The remaining 75 districts, to be referred to as one-party, are divided into three categories: those with frequent two-party competition (three, four, or five times out of six), those with occasional two-party competition (once or twice), and those in which only one party ever ran a candidate. The numbers of districts in the respective groups are 20, 26, and 29. The num-

⁶ Studies of other states have shown a lower percentage of uncontested seats: Connecticut and Indiana, 5 per cent; New York, 13 per cent; Ohio, 19 per cent; Missouri, 21 per cent; and Iowa, 31 per cent. With the possible exception of Iowa, however, these states have closer two-party competition at the state level than Kentucky. Key, *American State Politics* 190 (1956). In one state usually dominated by a single party, New Hampshire, 59 per cent of the legislative seats were found to be uncontested. Lockard, *New England State Politics* 56 (1959).

⁷ Key, *op. cit.*, *Supra* note 6, at 169-96.

bers of Democratic districts are respectively 16, 19, and 24. Obviously the last category, in which during six elections only one party ran a candidate, represents the most extreme example of one-party districts. Party competition was nearly as feeble, however, in most of the districts where the minority party ran a candidate once or twice. In half of those districts the minority party never had more than 30 percent of the vote; in most of them it never had more than 40 percent. In districts where the minority party ran a candidate three or more times the races were usually closer.⁸

Figure 1 shows the districts in which one party won every election and had opposition less than three times. A comparison with Figure 2 shows that these extreme one-party areas include most of those traditionally monopolized by one party in the presidential voting. This is not surprising in a state with deeply-rooted voting habits. One nearly solid block of Democratic counties lies in the western part of the state and the second is in the northcentral part of the state, known as the outer bluegrass section. The major Republican-controlled counties are in the southern and southeastern areas of the state, excluding the major coal-mining counties stretched out along the southeastern border from Bell to Pike.⁹ Although none of these districts in which one party usually runs unopposed is in a metropolitan area, they are not exclusively rural. If the 80 non-metropolitan districts were ranked according to their percentage of urban population, the most extreme one-party districts would be widely distributed among them although with somewhat more among the most rural districts.

Most of the 25 two-party districts are found in three areas of the states. Six are in the narrow band of counties running from west to east in the center of the state. This is the neutral territory roughly separating heavily Republican and heavily

⁸ The elections of 1943 and 1945, in which the Republicans won unusually high numbers of seats (44 and 31), provided additional evidence concerning competition in these districts. The Republicans won eleven seats in 1943 and eight seats in 1945 among those thirteen districts with turnover during the 1947-1957 period. They won eight seats in 1943 and four seats in 1945 among the nine seats in which the Republicans always ran a candidate during the later period though never winning. The Republicans won five seats in 1943 and only one in 1945 among the 59 districts where the Party never won and did not always run candidates in the 1947-1957 period.

⁹ This is not the place to trace in detail the historical background of voting patterns in Kentucky. This is well covered in Fenton, *Politics in the Border States 14-81* (1957).

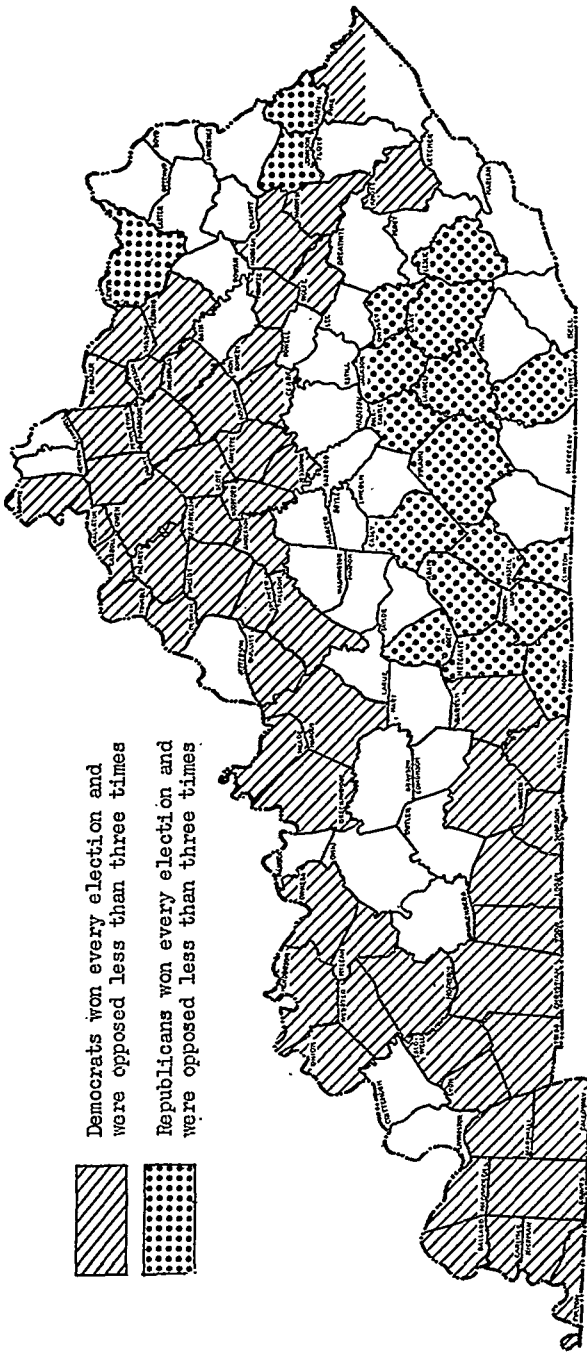


FIGURE 1

DISTRICTS IN KENTUCKY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES DOMINATED BY ONE PARTY, 1947-1957

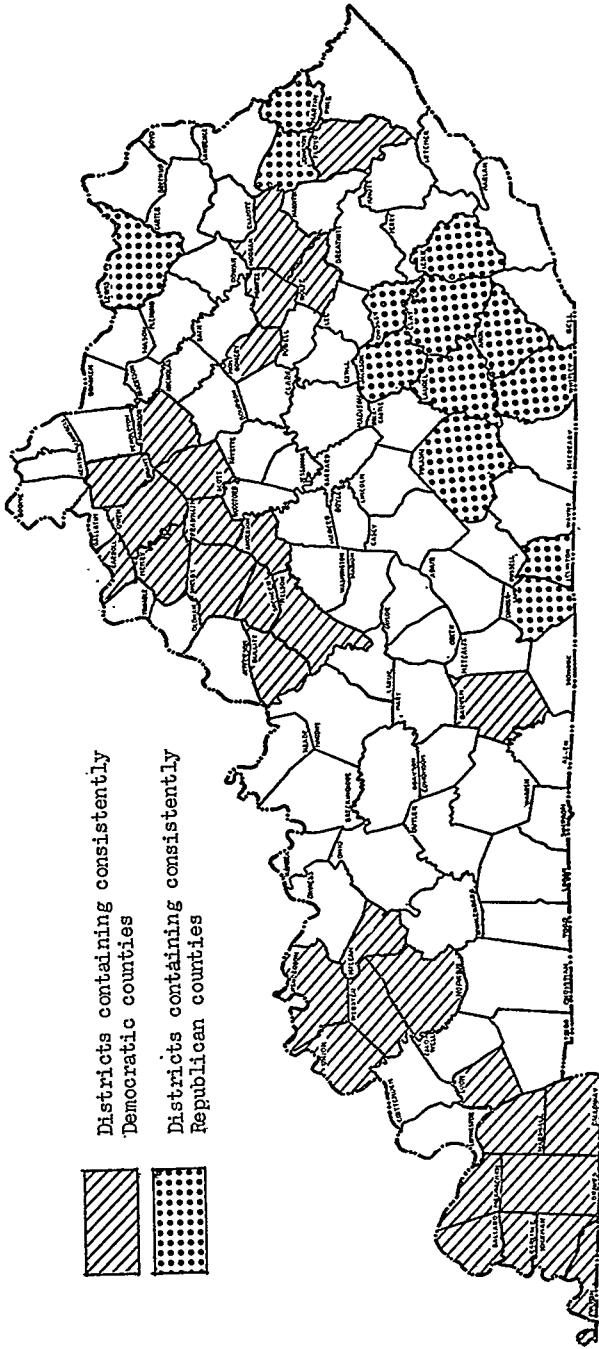


FIGURE 2

KENTUCKY HOUSE DISTRICTS CONTAINING ONLY THOSE COUNTIES WON BY SAME PARTY IN EVERY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OR EVERY ELECTION BUT ONE FROM 1868 THROUGH 1956

Democratic counties. In several of these districts party turnover has resulted only from sharp primary contests in the majority party. Five more two-party districts are in the southeastern coal-mining area, in counties that used to be solidly Republican but have voted Democratic in presidential elections since the New Deal era. Both parties almost always had candidates in the legislative races; the winner seldom got over 60 percent of the vote, and there was frequent party turnover. The third area is Jefferson County, the major metropolitan county and the site of Louisville. In all eleven Jefferson County districts both parties ran candidates at every election, and in three of these there was some party turnover. The three remaining two-party districts are in one-party sections of the state. One is in a metropolitan county, one elected a minority party candidate as a result of a closely-contested majority party primary, and one is a district combining a strongly Republican and a strongly Democratic county (a factor contributing to close competition in several other districts).

It is clear that metropolitanism is the major feature producing close and persistent competition between the two parties. Only the coal counties, undergoing a transformation of political affiliation, can match Jefferson County in party competition. There are nine legislative districts outside Jefferson County that are in areas classified as metropolitan by the Census Bureau. Although only one had two-party contests in every election, these districts ranked well above average in competition. In 60 per cent of the metropolitan districts there was either two-party competition in every election or some party turnover over the twelve-year period. The comparable figure for the non-metropolitan districts was 16 per cent.

The high proportion of two-party districts in metropolitan areas is clearly indicated; it corresponds with similar findings in a study of the Ohio legislature.¹⁰ The reason is not so readily apparent. There are some features of metropolitan life that probably help party competition. Large cities have a greater variety

¹⁰ That study, while using slightly different standards of measurement, showed that metropolitan districts had much more competition than non-metropolitan ones; among the latter a higher degree of urbanism usually produced more competition. In Ohio also the geographical pattern of party concentration made it difficult to measure how much of this competition was due to urbanism itself and how much to political factors. Eulau, "The Ecological Basis of Party Systems: The Case of Ohio," *1 Midwest J. of Pol. Sc.* 125-35 (1957).

of social and economic classes, greater population mobility, and fewer traditional voting habits; in small towns there is more frequent pressure to conform to the dominant political philosophy.¹¹ In the large city greater resources of finance and personnel are likely to be available to the party organizations. Moreover, the large numbers of votes at stake for national and statewide elections provide party organizations with incentive to present a full ticket of local candidates in order to stimulate voting.

Some of the reasons may be unique in Kentucky, where Democratic strength is based less on metropolitan areas and Republican strength less on rural areas and small towns than in most northeastern and midwestern states. While Democratic votes are widely scattered, Republican strength is limited to certain traditional counties already described and to the suburbs of the metropolitan areas.¹² The five metropolitan counties provided almost two-thirds of President Eisenhower's 96,000 plurality in Kentucky in 1956; Jefferson County alone provided over one-third of it.¹³ In this normally Democratic state the greatest cause of non-competitive districts is the shortage of Republican voters. It is not surprising that today there is a high proportion of two-party districts in metropolitan counties, particularly Jefferson.¹⁴

Despite the fact that all the metropolitan counties produced pluralities or near-pluralities for Eisenhower in both 1952 and 1956, the Republicans have sometimes failed to run candidates in metropolitan counties other than Jefferson, and those that ran have sometimes been badly defeated. The system of off-year elections used in Kentucky, a Republican asset in New Deal days, has recently handicapped the party, which has been unable to take full advantage of Eisenhower's victories.¹⁵ National

¹¹ *Id.* at 126-27.

¹² See Fenton, *op. cit.* *Supra* note 9, at 72-74, 78-81, for a brief discussion of suburban trends.

¹³ Kentucky Government Directory 64-69 (1958).

¹⁴ At the height of Republican legislative success, in 1943, the Republicans won nine of the eleven Jefferson County seats, and three of the other nine metropolitan seats.

¹⁵ See Key, *op. cit.*, *Supra* note 6, at 41-49, for a discussion of the handicap to a minority party in any state where gubernatorial elections are scheduled in nonpresidential years. The minority may escape one-sided losses when the other party is winning nationally but it never gets the direct assistance from a national victory that would help it to capture the governorship. Kentucky, one of the four states holding legislative elections in neither presidential nor congressional election years, makes a Republican victory in either the legislative or the gubernatorial races particularly difficult.

trends do appear to have had an effect on the Republican party's enthusiasm for running candidates. It ran the most candidates for the House (64) the year after the 1946 Republican congressional victory. After the Eisenhower victories, it ran 59 in 1952 and 52 in 1956. Other years the number varied from 47 to 51. Although the party did not regularly run more candidates in years of gubernatorial races, it did so in 1947 probably because the incumbent was a Republican. The Democrats have varied less in the number of legislative candidates but have run more in the years the Republicans have run fewer; the parties seem to read the same crystal ball.

PRIMARY COMPETITION

If over half of Kentucky legislative elections are not contested by both parties and only a few districts have any party turnover, it becomes important to test whether primary elections in the majority party are an adequate substitute for elections. To serve this function, primaries must be frequently held in districts with little two-party competition, they must be reasonably competitive, and they must at least occasionally present the voter with a choice of issues and records, not merely candidates. As a first step, it is necessary to discover how frequently primaries are held and what factors stimulate primary competition.

Table 1 shows in broad outline the extent of primary competition. Even if the races in which a party ran no candidate are excluded, the Democrats have a higher proportion of contested primaries and close contests than do the Republicans.

TABLE 1
CONTESTS IN PRIMARY ELECTIONS FOR KENTUCKY HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES, 1947-1957

| Degree of Primary Competition | Democratic Primary | | Republican Primary | |
|--|--------------------|----|--------------------|----|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Contests in which Winner Received Under 60% | 199 | 33 | 85 | 14 |
| Contests in which Winner Received 60% or More | 120 | 20 | 64 | 11 |
| Only One Candidate in Primary | 204 | 34 | 174 | 29 |
| No Candidate in Primary | 77 | 13 | 277* | 46 |

* There were 280 elections without any Republican candidate because three Republicans who won primary contests withdrew before the election and were not replaced.

Studies in other states have shown that legislative primary competition is greater when the prospects of victory are higher. Presumably, in districts where one party usually wins, there will be a maximum amount of competition for the majority party nomination, which usually is tantamount to election. In close districts there may be considerable competition in the primaries of both parties, but it may be tempered at times by the desire to avoid divisive intra-party contests that might cause an election defeat. In districts where one party usually wins, there will be a minimum of competition for the minority party nomination; in fact, it may be difficult to find any candidate to run in the election.¹⁶

Logical though it appears, this hypothesis needs to be tested against the facts in Kentucky. Most of the states examined in other studies have been characterized by closer party competition than exists in Kentucky. Moreover, one-party districts might be thought to have certain characteristics, such as low percentage of urban population, that could affect primary competition. The effect of election prospects on primary competition can be measured better in districts over the twelve-year period than in individual races. Potential primary candidates will presumably be influenced more by the recent record of the district than by the unpredictable November election returns.

In Table 2 the districts have been divided into categories using the same measure of party competition referred to previously. The districts are arranged to run in order from the winning party in the most one-sided districts, through both parties in the closest districts to the losing party in the one-sided districts.¹⁷

In general the table shows the expected results. Competition is most likely in the primaries of the winning party in those districts with no party turnover and without consistent two-

¹⁶ See Key, *op. cit.*, *Supra* note 6, at 171-80, for an elaboration of this hypothesis and examples from Missouri, Indiana, and Ohio. Similar conclusions about the relationship between election prospects and primary competition in Wisconsin are found in Epstein, *Politics in Wisconsin* 130-35, 200-01 (1958). Both Key and Epstein found that in the states they studied primary competition, though rising steadily as a party's electoral chances increased, fell somewhat for the majority party in those districts that were most one-sided. This particular feature is not evident in Kentucky, which has a higher proportion of one-sided districts than the other states studied.

¹⁷ Since primaries in which a party ran no candidate are excluded, there are of course no figures given in Table 2 for minority primary contests in districts where the majority always won without opposition.

party contests. Within this group, primary contests are somewhat closer but not more frequent in those districts with more frequent election opposition.

TABLE 2

PRIMARY CONTESTS IN KENTUCKY HOUSE DISTRICTS HAVING VARYING DEGREES OF TWO-PARTY COMPETITION, 1947-1957

| Degree of Party Competition | Party | Contests with Winner Under 60% | Contests with Winner 60% or More | Only One Candidate |
|--|--------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| 29 Districts which Never Had Party Competition | Winner | 52% | 15% | 33% |
| 26 Districts with Party Competition 1 or 2 Times | Winner | 46 | 26 | 28 |
| 20 Districts with Party Competition 3, 4, or 5 Times | Winner | 44 | 26 | 30 |
| 12 Districts which Always Had Party Competition | Winner | 21 | 32 | 47 |
| 13 Districts which Had Party Turnover | Both | 31 | 27 | 42 |
| 12 Districts which Always Had Party Competition | Loser | 6 | 25 | 69 |
| 20 Districts with Party Competition 3, 4, or 5 Times | Loser | 7 | 6 | 87 |
| 26 Districts with Party Competition 1 or 2 Times | Loser | 3 | 3 | 94 |

A moderate amount of primary competition, producing contests in more than half of the cases, occurred in the winning party when it always had election competition and in both parties in districts with turnover. The least competition occurred in minority-party primaries in districts without party turnover. Even though contests with no candidate are excluded, the degree of minority-party competition declines rapidly at the bottom of the table. In districts where the minority cannot consistently produce a candidate there is rarely any primary contest.

A breakdown of the figures in Table 2 shows little differences between Republican and Democratic practices, with one exception. In the districts that were safe for each party, the Republicans were somewhat more likely to have primary competition than were the Democrats.¹⁸

¹⁸ A study of primary competition in legislative and prosecuting attorney contests in Indiana over a thirty-year period led to the same conclusion: that the party which is stronger on a statewide basis has fewer primary contests in its safe areas than the weaker party has in its safe districts. Standing & Robinson, "Inter-Party Competition and Primary Contesting: The Case of Indiana," 52 *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 1077 (1958).

Although the relationship between primary competition and the prospects for electoral victory appears to be both logical and statistically obvious, it is necessary to consider other factors that might influence primary competition. A likely one is the question of incumbency. It seems possible that there would be less primary competition when the incumbent was seeking renomination. Studies made in a few other states have led to conflicting conclusions about the significance of incumbency.¹⁹ Since the frequency with which incumbents seek renomination might be affected by the prospects of electoral victory, it is necessary to keep the latter factor constant while varying the former.

In Kentucky incumbency seems to have a minor effect in discouraging primary competition, if electoral prospects are kept constant. In the 75 one-party districts, there were contests in 69 per cent of the majority-party primaries with an incumbent running; when there was no incumbent the figure was 70 per cent. There is somewhat more difference in two-party districts. Including the winning party in 12 districts with consistent two-party competition and both parties in the 13 districts with turnover, there were contests 53 per cent of the time with incumbents and 58 per cent of the time without them. These differences do not seem great enough to be significant. Oddly enough, in the safe Republican districts, there was a slightly increased chance of Republican primary competition when an incumbent was running. In the more closely contested districts the figures were the same for Democratic and Republican primaries. In the districts always won by the Democrats there were incumbents running in 57 per cent of the majority-party primaries; in Republican districts the figure was only 42 per cent. Presumably the Republican candidates had less incentive to seek an extended career in the legislature.

There are about ten two-county districts in which the legislative seat appears to be rotated between the two counties at each election. This practice does not reduce the likelihood of primary competition in the absence of an incumbent in the pri-

¹⁹ Key found that in Missouri and Ohio the presence of an incumbent in a primary was likely to decrease the chances of opposition particularly in safe districts. He thought this might help to cause the drop in majority party primary competition that he found in the safest districts. Key, *op. cit. supra* note 6, at 175-177. Epstein found no consistent relationship between incumbency and primary competition. Epstein, *op. cit. supra* note 16, at 131-132, 200.

mary, however; all of these districts had majority-party primary contests at least three times and usually more frequently. The practice is limited to districts that have been consistently controlled by one party. Half of these districts are Republican, a disproportionately high number.

Another question that must be measured is the effect of urbanism on primary competition. Studies of other states have shown that primary competition is greater in the more highly-urbanized districts.²⁰ As in the survey of incumbency it is necessary to keep the factor of election prospects constant while varying the urbanization factor. Table 3 shows that among Kentucky two-party districts primary contests are much more frequent and are closer in the thirteen non-metropolitan districts than in the twelve metropolitan districts. Among the non-metropolitan districts, variations in the percentage of urban population do not seem to affect the chances for a primary contest although it is less likely to be a close one in districts that are at least 25 per cent urban. (There are not enough two-party, non-metropolitan districts to make these comparisons particularly significant, however.) Among the 75 one-party districts, the degree of urbanization appears to have remarkably little effect on primary competition in the majority party. Close primary contests are least likely in the metropolitan districts, but the contrast with non-metropolitan districts is much less than in two-party areas.

Is this situation caused by factors that are unique to Kentucky? V. O. Key thought there was less primary competition in the rural districts of the states he studied because less effort and fewer resources were necessary to monopolize party position than in large urban areas characterized by a multiplicity of power centers.²¹ The political situation is different in Kentucky, where two-party competition is concentrated to such a degree in metropolitan areas. It is primarily in the metropolitan areas that the minority party (usually Republican) has the re-

²⁰ Key divided districts into those with a population over fifty per cent urban and those under fifty per cent urban. He found primary contests twice as frequent in the former districts than in the latter in Ohio, while in Missouri the more urban districts had five times as high a proportion of primary contests as the more rural districts. He thought that if the most one-sided districts were rural ones this factor would also contribute to the slight drop in primary competition in one-sided districts that he noted. Key, *op. cit. supra* note 6, at 175-178. Epstein's findings were similar in Wisconsin. Epstein, *op. cit. supra* note 16, at 133.

²¹ Key, *op. cit. supra* note 6, at 178.

sources and the incentive to offer vigorous opposition and to present candidates regularly. Under these conditions, both parties in metropolitan areas have relatively strong organizations that seek to avoid primary contests. Moreover, the metropolitan Democratic organizations have greater patronage to utilize than those in the smaller counties. Most of the one-party districts in Kentucky are so one-sided that the majority party organization lacks the incentive to maintain unity. Just as the majority party in a one-party southern state has neither the need nor the ability to avoid statewide primary contests, so

TABLE 3
PRIMARY CONTESTS IN KENTUCKY HOUSE DISTRICTS HAVING
VARYING DEGREES OF TWO-PARTY COMPETITION AND
VARYING PERCENTAGES OF URBAN POPULATION,
1947-1957*

| % of District Population Living in Urban Areas | No. of Districts | Contests with Winner Under 60% | Contests with Winner 60% or More | Only One Candidate |
|--|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Two-Party Districts | | | | |
| 75-100 | 12 | 10% | 30% | 60% |
| 25-74 | 3 | 31 | 34½ | 34½ |
| 1-24 | 7 | 47 | 23 | 30 |
| 0 | 3 | 38 | 23 | 34 |
| One-Party Districts | | | | |
| 75-100 | 8 | 42 | 27 | 31 |
| 25-74 | 23 | 51 | 22 | 27 |
| 1-24 | 19 | 47 | 21 | 32 |
| 0 | 25 | 47 | 20 | 33 |

* Two-party districts include those with party turnover, for which the records of both parties are given, and those in which both parties always ran candidates, for which only the record of the majority party is included because the minority party in those districts had much less primary competition. (Note Table 2.) One-party districts are all those in which there was no party turnover and the minority party did not always run a candidate. Only the record of the majority party is included in these districts. The twenty districts that are at least 75 per cent urban happen to be the only ones in areas defined by the Census Bureau as metropolitan.

the majority party in Kentucky's one-party districts usually fails to prevent primary contests.

The situation will be clarified if the primaries of the two parties are compared. Among the 25 two-party districts the Republicans have even less primary competition than the Democrats in the metropolitan districts (primarily in Jefferson County). These are the areas where the Republican party, which normally has a large minority or a small majority of the vote, has a particularly strong incentive for maintaining unity and has a rela-

tively effective organization. In the non-metropolitan areas there is little difference between party practices.

Among the 75 one-party districts, there are eight in metropolitan areas, all Democratic. In all of these metropolitan districts the Republicans have run candidates on occasion, with the median being three elections out of six. Moreover, these are all in counties which gave President Eisenhower a majority or near-majority in the last two presidential elections. Consequently in the eight metropolitan districts the Democrats might be expected to have both the organization and the incentive necessary for avoiding close primary contests. Among the non-metropolitan Democratic districts there is more primary competition in completely rural districts than in those with some urban population. Among the Republican districts, however, there is a striking degree of competition (a primary contested and won by less than 60 per cent in 31 out of the 36 elections) in the six districts having some urban population. These districts are not heavily urban, however, and there are too few to permit valid generalizations.

In Kentucky, where the majority Democratic party is frequently torn by state-wide factional conflicts, it is important to inquire whether such factionalism affects Democratic legislative primaries. While statistical proof is lacking, press accounts suggest that when Democratic state-wide factional conflicts were most intense contests in the Democratic legislative primary increased and more often reflected the statewide conflict. Factional primary contests were particularly frequent in Jefferson County.²²

In 1947 Earl Clements narrowly defeated Harry Lee Waterfield in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. Both factions endorsed candidates for all or most of the contested seats in Jefferson County, and pro-Clements candidates won six of these seven contests. In 1949 press accounts identified candidates in nearly half of the contested Democratic House primaries as either administration or anti-administration men. Administration candidates won over half of these contests. In 1947 and 1949 the total numbers of contested Democratic House primaries were 53 and 56 respectively. In the next two primaries the totals

²² This is based on a survey of the Louisville *Courier-Journal* and the Lexington *Herald* during the period of primaries in the years under study.

dropped to 49 and 41. In 1951 Lawrence W. Wetherby, who defeated Howell W. Vincent by more than a three-to-one margin, had the backing of most leaders of both Democratic factions in the state. In 1951 and 1953 there was little evidence of factionalism in legislative contests. In 1955 and 1957 the total number of Democratic contests rose to 61 and 59, respectively. In 1955 A. B. Chandler narrowly defeated Bert Combs in the gubernatorial primary, but press accounts reported factional legislative contests only in Jefferson County. In 1957 there were reports of factional contests for ten legislative seats, most of them won by opponents of the Chandler administration.

An examination of factionalism also sheds light on the differences between Democratic primary competition in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. The Jefferson County Democratic primary had contests in 26 out of 44 possible cases during the four elections when the press reported competing factional legislative sales in the county; there were contests in only three out of 22 possible cases in the other two years. In no other districts were there *frequent* reports of state-wide factional contests being reflected in the legislative primary. Almost all of the other districts where there were *any* reports of this happening were in metropolitan districts or safe Democratic districts in the western part of the state.

This evidence suggests that the conclusions about the effects of metropolitanism on Democratic primary competition can be further refined. In Jefferson County the dominant faction of the Democratic party, which is pro-Clements and anti-Chandler, has both the resources and the incentive (from Republican opposition) to maintain a strong organization and often to prevent serious primary opposition. It regularly endorses a legislative slate. Primary contests usually arise only when there is a state-wide factional conflict that causes an opposing group to present a slate of candidates in the county legislative races. One reason the opponents file a slate is to give them representation in the county election machinery; this is especially important in such a large county. In other metropolitan areas there is less organizational strength and less need for unity; primary contests vary greatly in frequency but are not so dependent on an organized opposition slate. In the non-metro-

politan Democratic districts, where politics is more personal, factionalism seldom appears to be a factor in primary contests.

PRIMARIES AS SUBSTITUTES FOR ELECTIONS

To what extent can primaries in the majority party be considered an adequate substitute for elections in the one-party areas of Kentucky? In most districts there was some form of competition. The number of legislators chosen without either primary or election opposition varied from 13 to 24 and averaged 18 in the 1947-57 period. In an average year only two incumbents were defeated in elections and four others retired before the opposing party won the seat; by contrast, an average of eleven incumbents were defeated in primaries, with the exact number varying from six to thirteen.

It has been established that primary competition was more likely in the majority party in districts where victory in November was virtually certain; where there was closer party competition, there were fewer contests. This fact in itself guarantees that primaries will be a partial substitute for elections, providing more choice when the election is one-sided. In the 75 one-party districts during six elections there were primary contests in the majority party over two-thirds of the time and close contests nearly half of the time.²³ Among these districts there were none in which the majority party never had a primary contest and only one district with just a single contest. There were six districts having primary contests twice, 24 with three contests, nine with four contests, 18 with five contests, and 17 with contests every election year. Fourteen of these last 17 had at least one primary in which an incumbent was defeated, a much higher proportion than in the other districts. The 29 districts in which one party never ran a candidate are obviously the ones where a primary was most needed. In just four of these were primaries held only once or twice, while in thirteen they were held five or six times.

If the primaries are to substitute for elections, contests must not only be frequent and reasonably close but must also present the voter with some real choice of issues and records. Even though parties do not differ on every issue, there is usually

²³ See Table 2.

enough contrast between their platforms and between their records to give the voter some meaningful choice in two-party districts. In the primary of a one-party district, the high retirement rate minimizes the chances a citizen has of voting on the records of state legislators. Among the 75 one-party districts, the median district had an incumbent seeking re-election to the House in only three out of the six primaries.²⁴ Lacking an incumbent, the voters in a primary must make decisions on the basis of personalities and promises rather than legislative records.

It is for this reason that the role of factionalism in legislative primaries assumes great importance. Democratic factionalism in legislative races is most frequently reported in the two-party districts, particularly in Jefferson County. Press reports suggested factionalism in slightly less than half of the fifty-five Democratic-dominated districts. But factionalism was an intermittent factor, seldom occurring more than once in a twelve-year period in any of these legislative districts. Even though some local examples of factional conflict presumably escaped the newspapers, it seems clear that the Democratic voters outside Jefferson County seldom have a clear choice between candidates representing two different organized groups each with a well-known program. The factions seem to have lacked enough organizational strength throughout the legislative districts to provoke such contests. Moreover, in the twenty districts dominated by the Republican party, voters in the primary have had no major factions to choose between. Voters in one-party districts, it appears, frequently have a choice to make in legislative primaries, but the choice is seldom as meaningful as that in two-party districts.

CONCLUSIONS

An examination of Kentucky legislative races emphasizes that, despite occasional Republican victories in statewide contests, Kentucky is a Democratic state. The weakness of two-party competition is proved not only by the continuing Republican failure to win a legislative majority but also by the scarcity of close-contested House seats. Close contests are far more fre-

²⁴ In addition, some House members were running for the Senate and some former members of the House were seeking election; in both cases they would have records that could be issues in the campaign.

quent and incumbents are in much greater jeopardy in the primaries than in the general election. The greater the chance a party has for electoral victory in a district, the more likely there is to be primary competition for the nomination although there is less primary competition in metropolitan areas, where party organizations are strong.

Despite frequent contests in the majority primary of one-party districts, the primary does not serve as an adequate substitute for elections in making legislators responsible. It is unrealistic to expect the average voter to have adequate familiarity with the voting record and program of legislative candidates. He can make an intelligent choice related to issues and based on more than personality only if he can identify the candidate with some state-wide party or faction that has a record or a platform. Democratic legislative candidates in the one-party areas seldom appear to be closely identified with opposing state-wide factions. Even when there is such identification, it may be doubted whether the average voter is frequently aware of it and whether state-wide factional issues will be reflected in the legislative campaign. It is seldom that the Kentucky voter has no choice of legislative candidates. But it is also seldom that the average voter, in his choice of these candidates, can choose between conflicting programs for state government.