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Erratum

This is a duplicate of the Gyski article in Volume 9, Number 2, except for a slight change in the algebraic formula at the end of the article.

State Party Competition Reconsidered*

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Introduction

Political scientists have devoted a considerable amount of attention to devising various measures or classificatory schemes of state interparty competition (ipc).¹ These endeavors served a useful heuristic purpose and assisted in characterizing the complexion of state ipc generally, two functions significant especially in the developmental stages of the literature on state parties.²

Too often, though, these conceptual initiatives lacked focus. Classificatory systems can be evaluated properly only by reference to the larger purposes they are to serve. That is, these constructs are not ends in themselves but rather are research tools designed to assist in the investigation of more pervasive political phenomena.³ Such a focus materialized in the state policy literature,⁴ one aspect of which sought to assess the relative effectiveness of socioeconomic and political factors (e.g., ipc) in explaining interstate policy variation. This "policy focus" now is a central consideration of research on state politics. It is possible, therefore, to specify two criteria for the evaluation of various ipc measures: 1) their ability to portray accurately the character of political competition in the states, and; 2) the ease and precision—both practical and theoretical—of their incorporation into the current structure of research on state political systems. We wish here to argue concerning the deficiencies of previous measures of ipc, and, in addition, present a new measure which overcomes most of these shortcomings.

Deficiencies of Previous Indices

With the above two criteria in mind, two classes of problems—technical and theoretical—become apparent in the various ipc indices extant in the literature.

Dawson and Robinson indicated three major technical problem areas—time periods considered, offices included, and the ways of looking at competition within the context of the first two factors.⁵ The time period selected for the competition index should roughly coincide with the time period of the policy data.⁶ Concentration upon one office is unreliable.⁷ And if the states are to be treated as policy "systems," then measures which include non-state races (e.g., U.S. Senators) are unsatisfactory,⁸ regardless of how useful they may be for indicating the general contours of state party competition. Further, while state legislators are pivotal policy actors, con-

sideration of these offices is often excluded.⁹ Finally, several measures resort to either placing the states into various competitive categories¹⁰ or rank ordering the states according to the degree of ipc.¹¹ But the categories are sometimes rather crude, often not logically distinct, and usually obscure subtle but important distinctions among the states in any given category. Rank ordering can be misleading if the states happen to fall in clusters, and it does not permit complex statistical operations as would be the case if the data were presented in interval form.

A more serious technical problem concerns the manner in which legislative competition is usually measured. Several of the measures employed in state policy research¹² have focused on three aspects of ipc: one minus the percentage of the popular vote of the victorious gubernatorial candidate, and one minus the percentage of seats won by the majority party in each house of the state legislature. Though having the advantages of data availability and ease of measurement, this approach can distort the actual situation of party conflict in the states. It is possible, for example, that a legislature having, say, 100 seats could be divided equally between the two parties. Yet it is also logically possible that each of these elections was uncontested by one of the parties. Thus this approach would classify this situation as one of "perfect" competition, clearly a distortion of actual competitive conditions. While this admittedly is a rather extreme example, it is usually the case that a substantial proportion of legislative elections are decided by lopsided margins.

The theoretical problem concerns the linkage of these previous ipc constructs. It will be recalled that the impetus for this literature was the "Key theory," which stated that ipc exerts an intervening influence between state economic conditions and state spending for "redistributive issues."¹³ Candidates in competitive districts will favor a greater level and range of public services in an attempt to secure the votes of the large middle and lower middle class voter blocs. The crucial linkage, then, is between the degree of competition and public policy. Previous ipc measures, by counting legislative seats already won by the parties, totally ignore the extent of competition in the actual legislative elections. In effect, previous indices are measures of "legislative or parliamentary" competition rather than "electoral" competition. These measures therefore suffer from a theoretical deficiency since the Key theory posits an electoral rather than a parliamentary linkage between competition and policy.

A Proposed New Measure

One method of overcoming the problems of measuring legislative competition discussed above would be to calculate the average vote of all candidates of the victorious party in the elections for both houses of the legislatures. This would in a way be similar to the previous measures but instead would focus on the extent of competition in each legislative district. While this approach is preferred over previous measures, it still would not overcome a serious problem common to both approaches. For example, ac-

According to a distribution of seats measure of ipc both New York and Illinois are highly competitive states.¹⁴ However, most races are in fact *not* highly contested, with Democrats controlling Cook County and Republicans controlling downstate in Illinois, and Democrats controlling New York City and Republicans controlling upstate in New York. These conditions could be identified by an ipc measure which focused on individual legislative races, but by averaging the vote of all the candidates of the victorious party these non-competitive conditions within the state would cancel each other out, once again producing a highly competitive score. In effect such indices are actually measures of *one-party dominance* rather than measures of *interparty competition*.

A new ipc measure is proposed here, one that is theoretically sound in that it is addressed to competition in each legislative district, and is capable of identifying the actual patterns of competition in the states. This new measure has three components, the average of which represents a composite ipc index:

1. one minus the proportion of the popular vote of the victorious gubernatorial candidate;
2. one minus the average vote of all victorious candidates in elections for the upper house of the state legislature, and;
3. one minus the average vote of all victorious candidates in elections for the lower house of the state legislature.

The major shift entailed by this new measure is that attention is focused on the extent of competition in state legislative races *regardless of party*. This approach is preferable for technical reasons because it avoids the kind of problems posed by the Illinois and New York examples. More important is the fact that this technique is superior in theoretical terms. The key linkage is addressed to the degree of party competition in a state political system rather than the extent of one-party dominance. Perhaps this point was obscured in subsequent applications of the linkage due to the fact that Key described politics in the South at a time when one-party dominance and interparty competition meant essentially the same thing. When applied outside the South in a different historical period, however, this distinction becomes crucial, both empirically and theoretically. And we argue that only by focusing on the idea of competition (regardless of party) as described above can we: a) measure the extent of actual political competition in the states, and b) construct an ipc index amenable to the framework of contemporary research on comparative state public policy.

APPENDIX

This new ipc measure can be represented algebraically as follows:

$$ipc = 1 - \frac{g + 1/n \sum_{i=1}^n s_i + 1/m \sum_{i=1}^m h_i}{3}$$

where g = proportion of the vote received by winning gubernatorial candidate
 n = number of races for the upper house of the state legislature
 s_j = proportion of the vote of the winning candidate in the "j th" race
 m = number of races for the lower house of the state legislature
 h_j = proportion of the vote of the winning candidate in the "j th" race

NOTES

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¹See, for example: Robert Golembiewski, "A Taxonomic Approach to State Political Party Strength," *Western Political Quarterly* 11 (September, 1958); Mark Stern, "Measuring Interparty Competition: A Proposal and a Test of a Method," *Journal of Politics* 34 (August, 1972); Austin Ranney, "Parties in State Politics," in Herbert Jacob and Kenneth N. Vines (eds.), *Politics in the American States* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965); Richard L. Hofferbert, "Classification of American State Party Systems," *Journal of Politics* 26 (August, 1964).

²On this point see Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, "The American Party Systems," *American Political Science Review* 48 (June, 1954): 477.

³See Hofferbert, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

⁴The relevant literature is now rather extensive. A representative sampling would include: Richard E. Dawson and James A. Robinson, "Inter-party Competition, Economic Variables, and Welfare Policies in the American States," *Journal of Politics* 23 (May, 1963); Thomas R. Dye, *Politics, Economics and the Public* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966); Ira Sharkansky, "Economic and Political Correlates of State Government Expenditures: General Tendencies and Deviant Cases," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 11 (May, 1967); Charles F. Cnudde and Donald J. McCrone, "Party Competition and Welfare Policies in the American States," *American Political Science Review* 63 (September, 1963); Brian R. Fry and Richard F. Winters, "The Politics of Redistribution," *American Political Science Review* 64 (June, 1970); Brian R. Fry, "Interparty Competition and Redistribution: Theme and Variation," *Journal of Political Science* 3 (Spring, 1976).

⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 271.

⁶This procedure was not followed, for example, by Dye in his influential work, *op. cit.* There, he used political data from the Fifties to study policy decisions of the Sixties. A different aspect of the "time factor" issue concerns the "pendulum effect," the importance of which was argued by Joseph A. Schlesinger in "A Two-Dimensional Scheme for Classifying States According to the Degree of Inter-Party Competition," *American Political Science Review* 50 (December, 1955), and "The Structure of Competition for Office in the United States," *Behavioral Science* 5 (July, 1960). A critique of the pendulum notion can be found in David Pfeiffer, "The Measurement of Inter-Party Competition and Systemic Stability," *American Political Science Review* 61 (June, 1967): 460-61.

⁷This was done by: V. O. Key, Jr., *American State Politics: An Introduction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), and Schlesinger, "A Two-Dimensional Scheme for Classifying States According to the Degree of Inter-Party Competition," *op. cit.*

⁸For example Hofferbert, *op. cit.*

⁹For example Schlesinger, "The Structure of Competition for Office in the United States," *op. cit.*, and Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*

¹⁰This procedure was followed by, among others, John H. Fenton, *People and Parties in Politics* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1966); Golembiewski, *op. cit.*; Duane Lockard, "State Party Systems and Policy Outputs," in Oliver Garceau (ed.), *Political Research and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

¹¹See Hofferbert, *op. cit.*

¹²For example, Dawson and Robinson, *op. cit.*, and Dye, *op. cit.*

¹³V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949), especially pp. 288-311.

¹⁴See, for example, Ranney, *op. cit.*