

Explaining Voter Registration Levels in the American States

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Previous research on political participation typically has centered upon voter turnout, modeling it as a function of socio-demographic and structural factors separately and in conjunction. Using aggregate-level data covering the 1980s, this paper updates and extends previous political participation research in the specific regard of voter registration. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between a state's voter registration level and its degree of interparty competition. An index of interparty competition for the 1980-1989 period -- based upon the Ranney index first employed for the 1948-1960 period and later extended by Bibby et al. to 1974-1980 -- is presented here for the first time. However, interparty competition and several other demographic and structural factors that traditionally are cited as contributors to voter turnout are found here to be insignificant for predicting voter registration levels. A socio-demographic factor, racial composition, and a structural factor, the closing date for registration, emerge as the most important predictors of aggregate registration level.

Introduction

The decline of voter turnout in the United States is well-documented. A plethora of both individual- and aggregate-level studies have attempted to explain political abstention. Considerable attention has been paid to what motivates registered voters to show up at the polls on election day; this paper looks at an antecedent aspect of the problem of voting decline -- cross-state variation in voter registration.

A common assumption underlying much of the political participation/abstention literature is Downs' rational choice theory, which assumes that a cost/return model governs a citizen's decision to participate. Convenience factors -- such as the registration laws considered here -- traditionally have been included among these Downsian costs (Blank 1973). The socioeconomic status of the individual and the political context also were identified early as factors that influence political participation. In turn, many scholars have combined these structural and demographic approaches to demonstrate how a citizen's propensity to participate in politics by voting represents an interplay between their personal socio-psychological conditions and systemic and contextual factors (Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko 1985; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Kim, Petrocik, and Enokson 1975; Mitchell and Wlezien 1988, 1989; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

Despite the relatively long history of the political participation literature, scholarly assessments of voter registration and turnout have dwindled in recent years, particularly those emphasizing the impact of legal constraints or contextual

factors. Apparently, this is due to the widespread acceptance of Wolfinger and Rosenstone's (1980) landmark conclusion that registration laws (and any likely changes thereof) have only a marginal effect upon the composition of the electorate (Mitchell and Wlezien 1989). Yet, since all but two states require citizens to register prior to exercising their right to vote, serious attention to voter registration laws is a necessary component of the literature on declining political participation in the United States.

Hypotheses

Building upon the theoretical and empirical traditions of the voter turnout literature, the hypothesis studied here is that a state's voter registration level is caused by certain key aspects of its aggregate demographic profile, the degree to which structural barriers are present to depress or facilitate registration, and the state's level of interparty competition.

Specifically, it is hypothesized that states with higher *per capita* incomes or higher aggregate educational levels will have higher registration levels than other states. This set of hypotheses is an extension of the well-documented individual-level causal linkages between voter turnout and income, education, and race: wealthier, better-educated, and white individuals are more likely than others to pay the Downsian costs associated with voter registration. There is empirical evidence showing that these relationships hold at the aggregate level, as well (e.g., Kenney and Rice 1985a; Kim, Petrocik, and Enokson 1975). The hypothesized negative direction of this aggregate race variable is consistent with the earlier finding that blacks living in areas with a larger proportion of blacks in the population vote *less* often than do blacks living in areas with smaller minority populations (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960, 279).

I also hypothesize that states with a greater degree of interparty competition should experience greater political activity among their citizens, resulting in a higher registration level than in states comparatively dominated by one party. The theoretical justification for this hypothesis is quite straight-forward and emerges from the turnout literature: a competitive, balanced political climate increases the Downsian importance of citizens' political participation both to voters and politicians. Thus, parties and candidates will place a greater emphasis on enlisting political supporters, and voters will perceive their participation as having a greater impact than in a non-competitive political environment. In turn, the state's voter registration level will increase (Elazar 1972; Hanson 1980).

All of these hypotheses are consistent with prior research and theory on voter turnout, including that at the aggregate level. Kenney and Rice (1985a), for example, show that high turnouts in presidential primaries are associated with a history of competitive two-party elections, as well as high median levels of education and lenient legal restrictions. Kim, Petrocik, and Enokson (1975) estimated a linear regression model of voter turnout that contained demographic

factors, voter registration laws, and interparty competition. They concluded that while restrictive registration laws do indeed reduce turnout, demographic factors and interparty competition are more important determinants.

Comparative research into political participation has led to similar conclusions. Crewe finds that

[N]ational rates of turnout rest on a combination of individual-level factors and institutional factors. . . . In the presence of such institutional incentives to vote as a close alignment between partisan and social divisions, automatic registration. . . , a competitive party system, and the administrative facilitation of voting, individual-level factors will be over-ridden (1981, 260; see also Patterson and Caldeira 1983).

More recently, Mitchell and Wlezien (1989) presented a comprehensive model of registration and turnout for the 1972-1982 period. They first analyzed variables based upon aggregated Census data, and then compared these findings with those derived from NES individual-level data. Here, I extend the aggregate-level component of Mitchell and Wlezien's (1989) work through the 1980s with comparable non-Census indicators and an updated Ranney index of interparty competition. After a brief discussion of the variables, I will turn to the empirical test of my basic regression model, which postulates that:

$$\text{Registration} = \text{Demographic Profile} + \text{Structural Barriers} + \text{Interparty Competition}$$

Variables

All of the data used for this analysis are at the aggregate level and are taken from generally available published sources. As mentioned above, the dependent variable under consideration is the percentage of a state's adult citizens who were registered to vote. For the 48 states included in this analysis (North Dakota and Wisconsin, with universal and same-day registration, respectively, were dropped), registration rate is normally distributed, and ranges from 47 to 88 percent with a mean of about 69 percent. A total of 11 independent variables were considered as possible factors affecting a state's registration level. One of these variables is, of course, the updated Ranney interparty competition index that is reported below; three others represent various demographic conditions in the states, while the other seven are structural factors that potentially affect registration level.¹

Demographic Variables

The demographic variables used here are aggregate equivalents of those almost universally employed in individual-level studies of personal political participation and vote choice. One variable records the state's *per capita* income,

another represents the percentage of the state's population with at least some college education, and a third measures the percentage of the state's voting-age population that is white. All three of these are continuous variables measured at the interval level. *Per capita* income has a mean of approximately \$15,600 with a standard deviation of about \$2800. Almost 33 percent of a state's population, on average, has some post-secondary education, with a standard deviation of about six percent. On average, 86 percent of a state's population is white, with a standard deviation of 11.4.

Structural Variables

Turning to the independent variables operationalizing the structural factors hypothesis, one variable measures the number of days prior to an election that registration ceases, while another indicates the intervals at which that state purges its checklists of inactive voters. Also included in this model are measures of the minimum number of days that a citizen must live in a state before eligible to register, and the number of days before a primary that a voter must change his or her party registration. Days of residency has a mean of 15 days, with a standard deviation of about 14 days. This high variance is indicative of the variable's bimodal distribution at zero and 30 days, with only a handful of states in between. The average deadline for changing party identification is 28 days, with a large standard deviation of 61 due to several extreme outliers at the upper end of the scale. Three dummy variables are used to represent the existence or absence of certain structural features in a state: the existence of registration by party, mail registration (restricted to the ill, disabled, and those absent from the voting unit), and universal absentee registration.

State Interparty Competition, 1980-1989

Actually, though labeled as a measure of state interparty competition, Ranney's index was, in fact, a measure of the strength of state Democratic parties. Since both Democratic strength and interparty competition measures are part of this analysis, the labels may cause some confusion. Therefore, for conceptual clarity and semantic convenience, the variable referred to here as the interparty competition index is just that: the degree to which state politics in the 1980s was divided between the two parties. The term "Democratic strength" here refers to the updated equivalent of the measure first employed by Ranney (1965) for the 1948-1960 period, and extended to the 1974-1980 period by Bibby et al. (1983).²

Interparty competition and Democratic strength are, of course, not independent of each other. Intuitively, states with a greater degree of domination by one party necessarily are less competitive than those with more evenly-distributed control. Consequently, Democratic strength is excluded from the causal model

estimated below. Nonetheless, it is best to present both concepts as distinct in the updated Ranney index reported here (see Appendix and Table 1) in order to distinguish the effects of domination by *any* party from domination by a *particular* party.

Index Construction. Data were collected for all gubernatorial elections from 1980 through 1989, and observations of the partisan composition of state legislatures were taken at five two-year intervals in this period. The indices of interparty competition and Democratic strength are based upon a quantification of the proportion and duration of the Democratic party's governance in the state, and the proportion of time in which control of the governorship and legislature has been divided between the parties.

The proportion of partisan success was calculated as the percentage of votes won by each party for governor and the percentage of seats in the legislature held by each. The duration of partisan success was calculated as the proportion of time in the 1980s during which each party controlled either the governorship or the legislature, or both. The frequency of divided control was computed as the proportion of time in which control of the governorship and the state legislature has been divided between the parties.

Each of these scales was constructed in such a way that the score represented the proportion of Democratic success in each area, so the average of these measures constitutes the Democratic strength variable. This variable then was transformed into a measure of interparty competition by reordering the states according to their proximity to the mid-point (.5) of Democratic strength; that is, the point of complete (equal) division of power between the two parties.

Party Competition Findings. The interparty competition scale has a possible range from 0 to 1.0, with 0 representing total domination by one political party and 1.0 indicating a complete equilibrium between the two major parties. Empirically, levels of interparty competition range from a low of .14 (Louisiana and Maryland) to the maximum 1.0 in North Dakota and Colorado. The average level of interparty competition is .62, with a standard deviation of .25. Fifteen states fall below the .50 mark, meaning that their political climate is more characterized by one-party domination than by two-party competition.

As with Ranney's (1965) and Bibby et al.'s (1983) measures, the Democratic strength variable has a possible range of 0 to 1, with 0 representing total Republican control over the state's government for that decade, and 1 indicating complete Democratic control. The average Democratic strength was .60, with a standard deviation of about .21. Not surprisingly, the states which also ranked as the least competitive (Maryland and Louisiana) also scored highest on the Democratic control variable with .93, followed closely by several southern states (Georgia, Mississippi, and Kentucky) and the traditional Democratic strongholds of Massachusetts and Hawaii. The least Democratic state was South Dakota, with a score of only .11. The appendix displays the registration level, interparty competition score, and Democratic strength score for all fifty states.

Changes in Partisan Dominance. Also included in the appendix are each state's Democratic strength scores for the two earlier periods studied separately by Ranney (1965) and Bibby et al. (1983), as reported in Kenney and Rice (1985b, 350-351). Table 1 presents the distribution of states across each of the Ranney classifications at both of the earlier rankings, along with new calculations for the 1980-1989 period.

The general trend across the three intervals is the increasing development of two-party states, a category that now includes fully three-fifths of the states. Bibby et al. (1983) found that 35 states had become more Democratic in state elections between the 1950s and the 1970s, while only 15 had moved toward the Republicans; 11 of the latter states, however, were part of the old Confederacy and practically could not have become more Democratic.

Kenney and Rice (1985b) noted that the distribution of states according to degree of Democratic dominance changed dramatically over the 1948-1960 period studied by Ranney (1965) and the 1974-1980 period presented by Bibby et al. (1983). During the intervening period, the states moved more toward the Democrats, although away from complete one-party domination. Kenney and Rice (1985b) attribute these shifts to changes in each state's income level, mobility, urbanization, unionization, and racial composition.

Table 1. Comparison of Ranney, Bibby, and Fleury Democratic Strength Distributions

Classification	Number of States		
	Ranney 1948-1960	Bibby 1974-1980	Fleury 1980-1989
<i>One-party Democratic</i> (.9000 to 1.000)	8	1	5
<i>Modified one-party</i> (.7000 to .8999)	9	21	11
<i>Two-party</i> (.3000 to .6999)	25	28	30
<i>Modified one-party Rep.</i> (.1000 to .2999)	8	0	4
<i>One-party Republican</i> (.0000 to .0999)	0	0	0

Of course, any brief discussion of the distribution across the five categories overlooks the considerable fluctuation within and across the states. Nevertheless, a cursory review of the 1980-1989 figures shows that despite a fair amount of variation within many of the individual states, the trends in interparty competition evident in the 1980s for the most part corroborate the conclusions drawn by Bibby et al. (1983) and Kenney and Rice (1985b).

Findings

Prior research already has empirically supported the intuition that a state's proportion of registered voters results from the interplay of its population characteristics, political culture (represented here as interparty competition), and structural arrangements. Therefore, the real task of this paper is to find a model that takes into account each of these dimensions in tandem.³

Table 2 summarizes the key regression statistics for a model estimation that includes all of the variables under consideration. The R^2 of .42 indicates that a fairly large proportion of the variance in registration level is accounted for by these variables. However, since the effect of a number of these variables is not statistically significant, any interpretation of the overall model must be made with caution.

Table 2. Estimation of Full Registration Model

<i>Dependent Variable: PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS REGISTERED</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
<i>Interparty Comp.*</i>	-1.565606	20.717209	-.010919	-.076	.9402
<i>Race</i>	.257944	.126210	.300203	2.044	.0483
<i>Income</i>	-6.29946E-04	6.1102E-04	-.177788	-1.031	.3094
<i>Education</i>	-.020702	.259756	-.012576	-.080	.9369
<i>Closing Date</i>	-.327931	.180905	-.340269	-1.813	.0782
<i>Residence</i>	.111714	.107861	.164189	1.036	.3072
<i>Purge</i>	.674347	.494419	.196137	1.364	.1811
<i>Absentee</i>	1.514899	3.743603	.058214	.405	.6881
<i>Mail Reg.</i>	-.686866	2.926441	-.035289	-.235	.8158
<i>Party Reg.</i>	-2.164324	2.824901	-.110024	-.766	.4486
(Constant)	61.494153	16.783365		3.664	.0008
	$R^2 = .42$	SEE = 8.5	F = 2.34		N = 48

*The interparty competition variable is estimated instead of the Democratic strength variable because the latter is the equivalent of Ranney's (1965) and Bibby et al.'s (1983) so-called interparty competition measure. It would be statistically inappropriate to include both the interparty competition and Democratic strength variables in the same regression equation, given their direct empirical relationship (the former is a nonlinear transformation of the latter).

One specific conclusion that can be drawn from Table 2 is that for each three days a state moves back its registration closing date, it can expect approximately a one percent increase in its registration level. Prior research (notably Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980) has identified early closing dates as the most important barrier to voter turnout; these data corroborate that finding by looking directly at how much closing dates depress registration levels. The substantive importance of this three-to-one finding (three days = one percent change) is magnified by the

fact that states close their registration period an average of 23 days (s.d. = 10) before election dates. Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978) found that if all states adopted various provisions to liberalize their registration laws, *turnout* would increase by approximately 9.1 percentage points. These findings show that eliminating the closing date alone would boost *registration* by about 7.5 percent.

Perhaps the most interesting finding, though, is the number of variables that do *not* exhibit the expected relationship or achieve statistical significance. Importantly, this category includes the interparty competition variable, as well as education, income, and all of the other structural factors besides closing date. In other words, only race and closing date emerge as significant -- and the latter only if the traditional .05 cutoff is relaxed a bit. Interparty competition's sign is not in the expected direction, nor is the relationship significant. To home in further on a parsimonious, statistically significant prediction of registration level based upon these factors, this model was re-estimated in stepwise iterations that eliminated the insignificant variables. Still, only the race and closing date variables proved to have a strong, significant impact on voter registration levels.

Discussion

The most striking aspect of these data is the number of hypothesized relationships derived from the professional literature that fail to receive empirical support. Although the extent of interparty competition is often cited as a factor in the mobilization of participation (c.f. Crewe 1981; Kenney & Rice 1985a; Kim, Petrocik & Enokson 1975; Patterson & Caldeira 1983), the index of interparty competition proved a poor predictor of states' voter registration levels in this analysis. Indeed, even the bivariate correlation is negligible ($r = .002$) and insignificant. Moreover, of the demographic characteristics often found to be good predictors of political participation at the individual level (i.e., race, education, and income), only race emerged here as significant at the aggregate level (cf. the individual-level finding of Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978, 31).

Most strikingly, these findings on voter registration do not corroborate Kim, Petrocik, and Enokson's (1975) finding that interparty competition is a major determinant of voter turnout. Given the considerable prior literature claiming the importance of such as a determinant of the extent of public participation, how, then, do we account for the finding here that such competition does *not* covary with a state's registration level? Perhaps this discrepancy owes to the difference between the dependent variables of the respective studies: a competitive, mobilizing political environment may encourage the propensity of registered voters to turn out (Patterson and Caldeira 1983; Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko 1985); but other factors (e.g., demographics and structural barriers) more strongly and directly affect citizens' likelihood of registering in the first place.⁴

Perhaps, too, these findings fail to establish a direct linkage between interparty competition and registration level because whatever effect the political

climate has on voter registration works indirectly -- and, importantly, in nonlinear fashion -- through some of the structural factors modeled separately. That is, the degree of interparty competition in a state may exercise a direct influence on the systemic impediments or inducements to registration that are present in a state, and these structural factors in turn affect registration levels. However plausible this hypothesis might seem, it is not reflected by the variables' partial correlation coefficients. When interparty competition is correlated with registration level, controlling for the effect of the most powerful structural variable (closing date), the partial Pearson's r , like the zero-order coefficient, is negligible and insignificant (partial $r = .04$).

However, regression and correlation coefficients detect only *linear* effects between variables, and thus may be unequipped to capture the dynamics at work in this case. The present data provide some support for the hypothesis that interparty competition has a curvilinear effect on closing date, which in turn has a linear effect on registration level. When the interparty competition variable is trichotomized, the states with moderate levels of interparty competition emerge as the least restrictive in terms of registration access, with a mean closing date of about 20 days, compared to more than 25 days for the states with low and high levels of interparty competition, respectively. The relatively restrictive registration deadlines in the states with lower levels of interparty competition suggests the logic that states dominated by one political party, whose nominating primaries are thus critical contests, might prefer more restrictive electoral access. Similarly, in the highly-competitive two-party states, where registration deadlines are equally as restrictive, neither party may perceive that its competitive interests are served by expanding the electorate through liberalized voter registration laws that increase the unpredictability of turnouts and, thus, outcomes. Apparently, lawmakers in both kinds of states are more convinced than political scientists (see Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980; Martinez & Gant 1991; Mitchell & Wlezien 1989; c.f. Piven & Fox 1988) that liberalization of registration laws might drastically change the partisan or ideological composition of the electorate.

Conclusion

This analysis has shown that many demographic and structural variables previously presumed to facilitate electoral participation do *not* contribute to an explanation of state voter registration levels during the 1980s. The inclusion of only a small sampling of variables operationalizing the demographic and structural hypotheses undoubtedly provides an attenuated prediction of the true impact of these factors upon registration. Yet, the strong explanatory power of race, a demographic indicator, and closing date, a structural one, offers at least some support for the basic structure of the general model, which hypothesizes a causal link between these categories of variables and registration level. Although the most powerful indicators of these concepts presumably have been included here,

subsequent research could benefit from including a wider battery of demographic and systemic indicators.

The same goes for political indicators. It certainly is counterintuitive (and contradictory to some prior research) to conclude that voter registration levels are unaffected by a state's political environment. However, according to these data, this conclusion is inescapable when the level of interparty competition is employed as the political vector. Perhaps other, more specific indicators of a state's political environment could be shown to affect registration levels, but few such measures are likely to be as comprehensive in scope as the Ranney index of interparty competition.

Mitchell and Wlezien (1989) observed that early studies on the impact of voter registration laws relied exclusively on aggregate-level data and -- worse -- tended to make the fallacious assumption that correlations at the aggregate level reflect correlations at the individual level. Cross-level inference error also was cited by Kim, et al. (1975) as one of the major failings of earlier voting studies. The potential for this type of error does not pose a problem in this analysis, the focus of which exclusively is on aggregate registration levels, but it does caution against generalizing to the individual level these findings on demographic and structural effects. Perhaps more importantly, however, these results also caution against generalizing theory and findings from the voter turnout literature to the explanation of voter registration levels.

APPENDIX

Registration Level, Democratic Strength, and Interparty Competition, by State

State	Democratic Strength				
	Reg. Level	Ranney '48-'60	Bibby '74-'80	Fleury '80-'89	Party Comp. '80-'89
<i>North Dakota</i>	100.00	.19	.34	.50	1.00
<i>Wisconsin</i>	100.00	.30	.66	.65	.70
<i>Mississippi</i>	88.48	.98	.88	.92	.16
<i>Maine</i>	88.47	.24	.52	.64	.72
<i>Michigan</i>	85.27	.38	.61	.59	.82
<i>South Dakota</i>	84.09	.23	.35	.11	.22
<i>Oklahoma</i>	83.94	.82	.78	.74	.52
<i>Minnesota</i>	82.73	.46	.67	.73	.54
<i>Vermont</i>	79.61	.18	.36	.36	.72
<i>Alabama</i>	78.47	.96	.94	.76	.48
<i>Idaho</i>	78.46	.38	.39	.47	.94
<i>Iowa</i>	78.43	.25	.45	.40	.80
<i>Alaska</i>	75.84	.68	.58	.46	.92
<i>Montana</i>	75.77	.47	.63	.58	.84

(Appendix continued)

<u>State</u>	Democratic Strength				
	<u>Reg. Level</u>	<u>Ranney '48-'60</u>	<u>Bibby '74-'80</u>	<u>Fleury '80-'89</u>	<u>Party Comp. '80-'89</u>
<i>Ohio</i>	75.12	.35	.59	.62	.76
<i>Oregon</i>	73.23	.35	.70	.64	.72
<i>Colorado</i>	73.20	.48	.44	.50	1.00
<i>Nebraska</i>	72.84	.39	.52	.30	.60
<i>Kentucky</i>	72.80	.76	.79	.89	.22
<i>Missouri</i>	72.47	.66	.69	.51	.98
<i>Utah</i>	70.78	.46	.47	.25	.50
<i>Indiana</i>	70.75	.35	.41	.21	.42
<i>Illinois</i>	70.22	.38	.54	.51	.98
<i>Rhode Island</i>	68.72	.63	.85	.69	.82
<i>Louisiana</i>	68.63	.99	.88	.93	.14
<i>West Virginia</i>	67.67	.72	.80	.76	.48
<i>Arkansas</i>	67.52	.94	.86	.78	.44
<i>Connecticut</i>	67.13	.44	.73	.71	.58
<i>Wyoming</i>	66.95	.35	.39	.49	.98
<i>New Hampshire</i>	66.95	.27	.39	.20	.40
<i>Tennessee</i>	66.81	.87	.66	.65	.70
<i>Massachusetts</i>	66.28	.52	.79	.91	.18
<i>Washington</i>	65.26	.56	.58	.64	.72
<i>Pennsylvania</i>	64.54	.41	.56	.36	.72
<i>Kansas</i>	64.13	.24	.47	.35	.70
<i>New Jersey</i>	63.55	.36	.73	.48	.96
<i>North Carolina</i>	62.71	.88	.86	.68	.64
<i>California</i>	61.47	.39	.71	.57	.86
<i>Arizona</i>	61.34	.75	.45	.41	.82
<i>Maryland</i>	61.30	.71	.85	.93	.14
<i>Delaware</i>	60.41	.54	.55	.35	.70
<i>New York</i>	59.87	.32	.54	.59	.82
<i>Texas</i>	59.39	.96	.80	.67	.66
<i>Florida</i>	58.57	.92	.75	.74	.52
<i>New Mexico</i>	57.49	.70	.71	.68	.64
<i>Virginia</i>	57.44	.88	.72	.81	.38
<i>Georgia</i>	55.22	.99	.88	.92	.16
<i>South Carolina</i>	51.26	1.00	.80	.77	.46
<i>Hawaii</i>	50.97	.49	.75	.88	.24
<i>Nevada</i>	47.18	.53	.76	.60	.80

NOTES

* I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Andrew Dowdle in collecting data for the interparty competition/Democratic strength measures.

¹Although there is considerable regional variation in registration levels, regional dummy variables were not included here because the cross-region registration variation is presumably the result of structural and demographic factors already included separately in the model. For similar reasons, no separate categorical indicator of state “political culture” is included even though many scholars have discussed its relationship with interparty competition and electoral participation (see Elazar 1972; Sharkansky 1969; Key 1949; Hanson 1980; Kincaid 1980; Patterson 1968; Kousser 1974). Conceptually, my focus is on the general causal relationship between demographic, structural, and political (i.e., interparty competition) variables and state registration levels, not state-specific cultural variations. Including dummy cultural variables such as Elazar’s cultural streams (1972) in my registration model may very well improve its fit, but not its substantive explanatory power. Additional reasons for not including a political culture variable include the dated nature of Elazar’s (1972) typology for my purposes of studying the 1980s, and the questionable theoretical appropriateness of measuring political culture at the state level. Measuring political culture at such a highly-aggregated level would greatly over-simplify the considerable cultural variations across substate regions (Kincaid 1980). Moreover, Sharkansky (1969, 83) suggests that “Elazar’s designations for the political cultures of each state -- and sub-areas within the states -- are of questionable reliability. They are also limited in the number of traits of each political culture that they assess.”

²For a discussion of the limitations of Ranney’s index, see Kenney and Rice (1985b).

³Much effort went into ensuring that these data meet the assumptions associated with multiple regression. Because the models were not found to be affected by serious violations of the regression assumptions, there is no need to elaborate in great detail. Perhaps the most serious cause for concern over possible systematic measurement error in this analysis is that states’ reported registration levels may exaggerate the actual figures because they still include some portion of those voters who have deceased or moved from the state. This over-reporting could be expected to be especially acute in states that purge their poll lists less often. If this possible problem were serious, however, the effect of the purge variable in the model would be inflated in the hypothesized direction. Since its regression coefficient is neither strong nor significant, we can conclude that non-systematic measurement error is not seriously affecting the model.

⁴Another likely reason for the discrepancy between these findings and those of Kenney and Rice (1985b), for example, is that they used percentage *changes* as their variables, while this study employs static cross-sections.

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