

## The Influence of Party: Evidence from the State Legislatures

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**A**merican legislative studies in recent years have been occupied to a large degree with the question of the effects of political parties on the policy behavior of elected legislators, with most of the research focusing on the U.S. Congress. We undertake a comparative analysis of state legislatures for a window into the character and extent of party's effects. Specifically, we compare the impact of party on the partisan polarization and dimensionality of campaign issue stances and roll call voting in the Kansas Senate and the largely comparable, though nonpartisan, Nebraska Unicameral. This comparison offers us a nice quasi-experiment to assess the impact of party by establishing a baseline condition in Nebraska for what happens when party is absent. We argue that party lends order to conflict, producing the ideological low-dimensional space that is a trademark of American politics. Where parties are not active in the legislature—Nebraska is our test case—the clear structure found in partisan politics disappears. This works to sever the connection between voters and their elected representatives and, with it, the likelihood of electoral accountability that is essential for the health of liberal democracy.

**P**olitical parties are widely considered to be necessary for modern democracies. No theorist we know of has, for example, explicitly challenged Schattschneider's (1942, 1) half-century-old proposition that "democracy is impossible save in terms of parties." There is, however, an ongoing controversy among students of legislative policymaking in the United States that implicitly challenges the widespread assumption about the centrality and influence of parties. In his influential book *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, David Mayhew (1974, 27) offered a theory of congressional behavior based on members pursuing the goal of reelection and he explicitly dismissed the centrality of party. He presents a world of individual political entrepreneurs adapting the rules of the institution to facilitate their primary goal of reelection. At best, parties just assist in this goal. More recently, Keith Krehbiel (1993, 1998) has also challenged the widespread belief that party is central, but from a different angle. His theory is based on the simple assumption that members pursue their personal policy preferences. He concludes that his model—which provides for no role for party at all—accounts for the important observed outcomes and patterns of roll call voting. Indeed, Krehbiel (2000) contends that the findings of most studies that purport to show the strength of partisanship can as easily be interpreted to show that members vote their own preferences. To answer Krehbiel's (1993) question "Where's the Party?" a number of scholars have deployed a variety of data sets and techniques to establish empirically the effects of party (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001a; Cox and Poole 2001; Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith 1999; Snyder and Groseclose 2000), and while

some contend that their analyses demonstrate that party matters, for a variety of methodological reasons, none of these is conclusive.<sup>1</sup>

The remarkable thing about this controversy, given our prior and long-standing beliefs about the importance of parties in legislative policymaking, is how difficult it has been to establish the impact of parties in Congress. Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith (1999, 1), for example, characterize the debate as an effort "to measure and describe the modest and contingent effects of party on the behavior of members of Congress." This controversy focuses only on the effects of parties in Congress, but the debate implicitly calls into question the centrality of parties more generally. It is hard to imagine that parties are somehow central for the functioning of democracy as Schattschneider and many others argue while, at the same time, the effects of party in the chief policymaking institution in the United States are marginal and episodic.

We see three limitations in how the problem has been framed, each of which decreases the chances of identifying the effects of party. First, party is examined only within the legislature, most often in terms of unmeasured effects of party leadership on legislative outcomes and roll call voting. This is not necessarily a problem for studying the dynamics within Congress, but it is a sharply delimited view of how party can affect legislative processes. The importance of parties more generally lies in linking voters and their concerns with patterns of policymaking within legislature. A focus only on the effects of party within the chamber misses the impact of parties in connecting voters and the policymaking process.

Second, the tendency to take for granted the simple unidimensional structure of conflict in Congress limits the current debate. Krehbiel's (1993) central argument about the importance of preferences assumes that preferences can be aligned along a single dimension and subsequent efforts to estimate party

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Smith (2000) provides an excellent overview of the efforts to demonstrate that party matters in the House along with a thorough discussion of the possible weaknesses of each effort.

effects similarly rely on a single-dimensional characterization of preferences or roll call conflict (Aldrich and Battista 2002; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Steward 2001a; Cox and Poole 2001). This assumption seems reasonable in light of Poole and Rosenthal's (1997) demonstration that historically, with just a couple of exceptions, conflict in Congress has unfolded along a single (evolving) dimension. Nevertheless, this simple structure itself needs to be explained. It defies the theoretical predictions of rational choice theorists, whose models predict much more chaos and less stability than we find (Arrow 1963; Riker 1980). Shepsle (1979) has provided a name for this unexpected condition of regularized conflict, "structurally induced equilibrium," but why this equilibrium is achieved in Congress has yet to be fully established. We argue that the parties play a central role.

Third, the debate has been largely confined to one institution, the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>2</sup> The difficulty with this is that a one-chamber design holds constant many of the aspects of "party" that may affect the process. Factors such as partisan elections and organization of the legislature or even leadership powers do not vary for one chamber (or vary only modestly over time and then with numerous other factors), thus making it much harder to gauge adequately the effects of party on the legislative process.

In this paper, we seek to join and expand the debate on the importance of party in American legislative politics by adopting a theoretical approach and a research design that gets around these limitations. First, on the theoretical side, we explicitly look at party in both the electoral and the legislative arenas, which leads to incorporating the parties' efforts to win at the ballot box and the consequences of those efforts for the legislative policy process. Second, our consideration of parties in the electoral arena leads us to theorize about and examine the dimensionality of legislative conflict rather than assuming a commonly observed unidimensional structure. Third, we adopt a research design that takes us beyond the Congress to look at the effects of party comparatively in the American states. Our design incorporates an important variation in party by comparing the partisan Kansas Senate with the largely comparable, but nonpartisan Nebraska Unicameral. This comparison yields a nice quasi-experimental design for assessing the role of party in campaigns and within the legislatures.

## A WIDER VIEW OF PARTY EFFECTS

Our central premise is that much of the impact of party follows from the central activities of parties in competitive democracies. Of particular concern for an examination of the impact of party on policy behavior is the association between party labels and candidates'

<sup>2</sup> Some studies have examined voting in the U.S. Senate, while Jenkins (1999, 2000) compares the House with the Confederate legislature and Aldrich and Battista (2002) examine "conditional party government" in the states. We draw on the lesson of these studies below.

issue stances. Many party scholars note that parties are coalitions of more or less like-minded persons pursuing elective office; most studies take this association as a given. But this like-mindedness is not coincidental; the linkage between parties and bundles of issues (which determine who works with which party) is a result of purposive action for political gain (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Karol 2001; Riker 1986). Parties, particularly losing parties, systematically seek out issues that will help them win support from nonparticipants or supporters of the winning party while being constrained by the need to maintain the support of their core constituencies.<sup>3</sup> Thus, over fairly short periods of time, the sides on most any salient controversies become associated with the major parties.

We have seen examples of this through the transformations of the New Deal coalition. Initially defined largely in terms of economics, the Democratic coalition of white Southerners and Northern workers included newly mobilized ethnics. Republicans responded to this majority coalition with their "Southern strategy," which captured many estranged Southern whites who were unhappy with changes in the Democratic party's position on civil rights (Aistrup 1989; Phillips 1969). With Republican appeals to threatened Southern whites, Democrats sought to add newly enfranchised blacks in the South and to mobilize blacks in the North (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Slowly the party coalitions changed to reflect elite issue strategies (Carmines and Layman 1997; Hetherington 2001). And, as part of this change, the issues of civil rights and racial policy came to be tied ideologically, if not logically, with the existing economic concerns and stance of the Democrats, while resistance to increased civil rights legislation became associated with the existing conservatism on economic and welfare policy with which Republicans had long been associated. Subsequently, the parties split on the issues of abortion and the rights of gays and lesbians so that the positions on those issues came to be politically bundled with the parties' existing concerns about economics and race. The association of the various issues the parties have been and are identified with is not perfect and it changes (slowly) over time. We recognize that many citizens are cross-pressured, preferring one of the party's stands on some issues and the other party's stands on others. However, these variations from a total alignment of party and issues only underline our major point: Parties link diverse issues, sometimes logically, but also politically as a result of their dynamic searches for electoral advantage.

We now apply this perspective to the role of party in shaping issue stances in campaigns and within the legislatures in the form of roll call voting.

## Party and Candidates

Candidates make lots of issue pronouncements in the process of seeking office. Indeed, the essence of

<sup>3</sup> Robert Rohrschneider (2001) provides an insightful discussion in a comparative perspective of the parties' needs to maintain their base supporters ("mobilization") while appealing to new voters ("chasing").

electoral campaigns in democratic systems is that candidates and parties will present themselves and the policies they will pursue for the voters to choose between. What should we expect of the ideologies of candidates as they are expressed in campaigns? The assumption of our widely embraced Downsian spatial models is that parties, motivated only for election, will take whatever policy positions maximize their chances of getting elected. The effect of the general electorate in this model is to pull the candidate and parties toward the median voter, resulting in a convergence of candidates or parties (Calvert 1985; Downs 1957). There is strong empirical evidence that candidates gain votes when they take more moderate stands in their districts (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001b; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Erikson and Wright 1980, 1993, 1997, 2001; Wright and Berkman 1986).

The difficulty with the Downsian accounting is that its predictions for convergence are largely wrong. In most contests there is a considerable ideological distance between Democratic and Republican candidates, both overall and within individual contests. This is obvious to most observers at the presidential level and has been confirmed empirically in elections for both houses of Congress (Erikson and Wright 2001; Fiorina 1974; Sullivan and O'Connor 1972; Wright and Berkman 1986).

Some researchers have suggested that this polarization is due to the influence of policy-motivated party activists and core partisans. They are the loudest and most attentive voices within the parties and provide at least three avenues by which their more ideological policy preferences will create a pull toward the parties' centers of gravity. One is through the selection process of the primaries when candidates are first nominated. Activists' and core partisans' issue preferences, which are key components in defining what the parties stand for, are likely to play an important role in who receives the nominations. All other things being equal, we expect voters, including primary voters, to cast their support for candidates who best mirror their issue preferences. Second, candidates are much more likely to obtain support from the politically active and ideological segment of the citizenry than from the larger, but more quiescent group of moderates, weak identifiers, and independents. Third, the candidates themselves are more likely to emerge from this activist stratum within the parties than from the general citizenry. As such, we fully expect that candidates' personal issue preferences genuinely reflect, for the most part, those associated with their parties. Thus, through the formal mechanism of the primary election and through the informal mechanisms of ideologically contingent support and socialization, we expect that party activists and core partisans exert a pull on candidate issue positions away from the more moderate preferences of the median voters in their districts.

This argument has been laid out formally by Aronson and Ordeshook (1972) and Aldrich (1983; Aldrich and McGinnis 1989) and empirical work has demonstrated that state party elite ideology together with measures of

the ideological preferences of the general public nicely accounts for party differences between candidates for both the House and the Senate (Wright 1989, 1994). Parties pull candidates toward ideological extremes, while the electoral preferences of the median voter pull candidates toward greater moderation. The key in this process is the strategic point at which party activists and core partisans exert their influence—in the socialization that precedes candidate emergence and in the nomination stage, both of which occur before the general election.<sup>4</sup>

We also expect that parties have an effect on the dimensionality of the issue stances candidates take. This influence might occur through two processes—by influencing candidates' issue stances and by affecting which candidates run. In the first process, if a candidate embraces his/her party's positions on issues A, B, and C, but has little strong feeling on issue D, the fact that the party has an expected position on D would make it more likely that the candidate would take his/her party's position on D than that of the opposition. This may be because the party acts as a positive reference group for the candidate, and it could also be that strategically taking the correct and expected position on D increases one's acceptability to party regulars, ideological contributors, and primary voters. The process of being associated with a party—which is publicly defined in terms of explicit policy stances—has the effect of bringing about ideological constraint as one learns to “be a part of the team.”

The second process that could affect the dimensionality of candidates' issue preferences is simple selection, including self-selection. Nominations are affected by policy-motivated activists, and thus to the extent that candidate ideology is important, those who have more consistently liberal issue stances stand a better chance of getting the Democratic nomination and more consistent conservatives fare better in getting the Republican nomination. Those with a mixed ideological position who do not reflect a recognizable set of party stances will have a hard time getting nominated. Thus, the selection process yields an “electoral class” that presents issues in a low-dimension issue space—simplified along the traditional partisan/ideological spectrum.

## Party and Legislators

We next come to the arena that has been more the focus of the “Where's the party?” controversy, the party in the legislature. The contention is over the extent to which the party, as a caucus or through party leaders, can induce would-be moderates or defectors to support the party's position on issues when, left to their own, they would vote their own preferences or those of their constituencies. What has not been widely considered is

<sup>4</sup> There are many examples of the impact of party activists. For example, the conservative right within the Republican party saved the nomination for George W. Bush in the later primaries over Senator John McCain even though national polls suggested that McCain, who was seen as more moderate and independent, would do better against the eventual Democratic nominee, Al Gore.

the impact of party on defining the structure of conflict across issues. While there is some attention to agenda control, most observers seem to accept as given the low dimensionality of the issue space documented by Poole and Rosenthal (1997, 2001). Aldrich (1995, 2007) identified the problem: "Floor majorities could be fashioned on any number of bases. The trick is to ensure that it is done according to a primarily partisan definition of the alternatives." We believe that the mere existence of competitive parties—in the electorate and in the organization of the legislature—operates to increase the salience of party so that it becomes an effective "default cleavage" for the legislature. Because the parties have prior positions on most important issues, there is likely to be a strong tendency—as members of competing teams—to view policy first, and perhaps foremost, in partisan/ideological terms. This process does not eliminate other considerations—there can always be some issues that cut across party lines—but party as a default cleavage may go a long way in framing the policy choices that legislators make. The result of such a process is a greatly attenuated issue space, with majorities forming most often along one liberal-conservative dimension. The important point here is that by effectively casting policy controversies in "we-they" terms, and where the "we" has a prior association with distinct issue stances, there can be a great deal of cohesion within the parties on substantive issues even without explicit efforts by the party or its leaders to steer members' voting decisions on bills.

Our view of the effects of party encompasses two arenas and two aspects of policy behavior. In the next section we undertake a comparative analysis to assess empirically the operation of party in the contexts of elections and legislative voting, paying attention in each to both levels of polarization and to the dimensionality of the issue space.

## DESIGN

Although most of the work on the impact of party has looked at the House of Representatives, a comparative approach offers distinct advantages. To specify effectively the conditions under which party has certain kinds of effects, we need to look at its operation in contexts in which the character, powers, and perhaps tradition of partisanship vary. Cox (2000) takes such a perspective in addressing the question of when legislative rules make a difference, contrasting the very strong party systems in much of Europe with the weaker but still substantial parties in the U.S. Congress and the much weaker parties in Latin American democracies. We stay closer to home by taking the question to the state legislatures. Specifically, we use a paired comparison in which the chief difference between the legislatures we examine is the presence or absence of parties altogether.

Nebraska, with its nonpartisan legislature, provides us with a wonderful test case. Our comparison legislature is the Kansas Senate. The Nebraska Unicameral and the Kansas Senate are about the same size (49 and 40 members) and the states they serve are similar in

demography and overall partisanship and ideological leanings (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). Three studies suggest that nonpartisanship will make a difference. Jenkins (1999, 2000) finds less structure and less ideological polarization in roll call voting in the Confederate House, which did not have political parties, than in the U.S. House during the Civil War. Welch and Carlson (1973) examine five sessions of the Nebraska legislature distributed across a 50-year period. Using Guttman Scales to establish roll call dimensions, they find a lot of small dimensions, none very strong, that do not correlate with much of anything. They conclude that nonpartisanship in Nebraska leads to numerous majorities. Aldrich and Battista (2002) look at roll call voting in eight state legislatures, including Nebraska. They find that there is little form or definition to the NOMINATE scores of Nebraska's state senators' roll call voting, but party does a good, but variable, job of structuring the main dimension of roll call voting in other chambers.

## ANALYSIS

### Partisanship and Ideology in the Campaigns

We first consider the relationship of party to how candidates reveal their issue stances in their electoral campaigns. For the Kansas Senate, we expect the impact of partisanship to reflect the impact we find in elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. We hypothesize that the partisan character of the elections will work to produce an issue space that is dominated by the familiar liberal-conservative continuum and that the pressures of party activists, primaries, and contributors will reinforce socialization patterns to yield polarized candidates. In contrast, in Nebraska, where parties are taken out of the picture, we expect a less structured issue space since the parties are not actively bundling the issues in state legislative elections, and further, we expect that Democratic and Republican candidates will be less polarized than in Kansas.

To assess electorally expressed ideologies we make use of the data collected by Project Vote Smart (PVS).<sup>5</sup> We use the 1996 survey for the Kansas Senate, when all seats were up for reelection, and the 1996 and 1998 surveys for Nebraska because only half of the Unicameral's 49 seats are up in any given election year. There is sufficient continuity in the questionnaires that using respondents from different years for Nebraska does not present any comparability problems.<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>5</sup> Project Vote Smart is a not-for-profit organization devoted to providing objective, unbiased information about candidates to voters and the media. Their main vehicle for this is the information obtained from their candidate questionnaires, which they call a National Political Awareness Test (NPAT). These are administered shortly after each state's primary elections. The NPAT data for candidates during an election campaign or for the winners of the most recent election are available at the PVS web site: <http://vote-smart.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> The PVS National Political Awareness Test (NPAT) is composed of two parts for each state. The larger part is a "core NPAT," which asks a large battery of questions common to all the states, and the second is made up of sets of questions that tap controversies particular to

response rates for the PVS “National Political Awareness Tests” (NPATs) are not great. Even with PVS’s considerable efforts to follow up with pleas—and sometimes threats—to get candidates to fill out the questionnaires, the response rates for the states nationally are only about 35%, although the rates for Kansas and Nebraska were a better.<sup>7</sup> We have 34 respondents from Kansas and 49 for Nebraska. Here we use a subset of items of the PVS NPAT that were selected for a comparison between Kansas and Nebraska. All items in this subset are constant across the years (1996 and 1998) and the two states. We include 23 items spread across the areas of crime, the economy, education, the environment, gun control, health care, social issues, budget priorities, and abortion (see the Appendix for a listing).

The items for each state were scaled using Poole and Rosenthal’s (1997) W-NOMINATE program. NOMINATE is similar in some ways to factor analysis, though its foundation is based explicitly on the spatial model. The first step in using the NOMINATE procedure is to determine the number of relevant dimensions of the issue space sampled by the PVS questionnaires. Poole and Rosenthal typically find one, sometimes two, dimension in congressional voting, and in comparative analysis two dimensions are almost always adequate to describe the structure of the space. Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2001a) apply the Heckman–Snyder factor analysis procedure to a set of congressional PVS NPATs. The Heckman–Snyder procedure yields similar fits with roll call data as does Poole and Rosenthal’s NOMINATE procedure. Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart find that one dimension also dominates the PVS congressional NPAT and that this dimension correlates very highly with the major roll call dimension they extract. At least for Congress, incumbents’ ideologies as expressed in the campaigns and in roll voting are very similar in value and structure (see also Erikson and Wright 1997, 2001).

Our immediate purpose here is to assess the relative structures of these sets of issues and then to determine the levels of partisan polarization in the two states. Table 1 shows the outcome of applying the W-NOMINATE procedure to the PVS data for candidates in Kansas and Nebraska. First, the percentage correctly classified is just that—the percentage of candidates’ NPAT responses that the dimension predicted correctly. The percentage of correctly classified responses in each state gives us our first comparison between ideology in Nebraska and that in Kansas as measured in the campaigns. The first dimension in both states correctly classified just over 80% of the responses.

While somewhat informative, the percentage correctly classified can be misleading. If 25% of Nebraska candidates chose the minority position in these questionnaires, then correctly classifying 75% would not be an improvement over simply guessing that everybody

each state. We construct our scales using the core NPAT items, which stayed virtually the same for 1996 and 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Kansas had a return rate of 39% in 1996, while Nebraska’s rates were 67 and 48% for 1996 and 1998, respectively.

**TABLE 1. Dimensions of Candidate Issue Positions in Kansas and Nebraska**

Dimension	Correctly classified	APRE	Improvement in APRE
Kansas			
Dimension 1	0.815	0.413	
Dimension 2	0.847	0.516	0.103
Dimension 3	0.892	0.658	0.142
Dimension 4	0.931	0.782	0.124
Nebraska			
Dimension 1	0.805	0.331	
Dimension 2	0.857	0.511	0.180
Dimension 3	0.876	0.576	0.065
Dimension 4	0.912	0.700	0.124

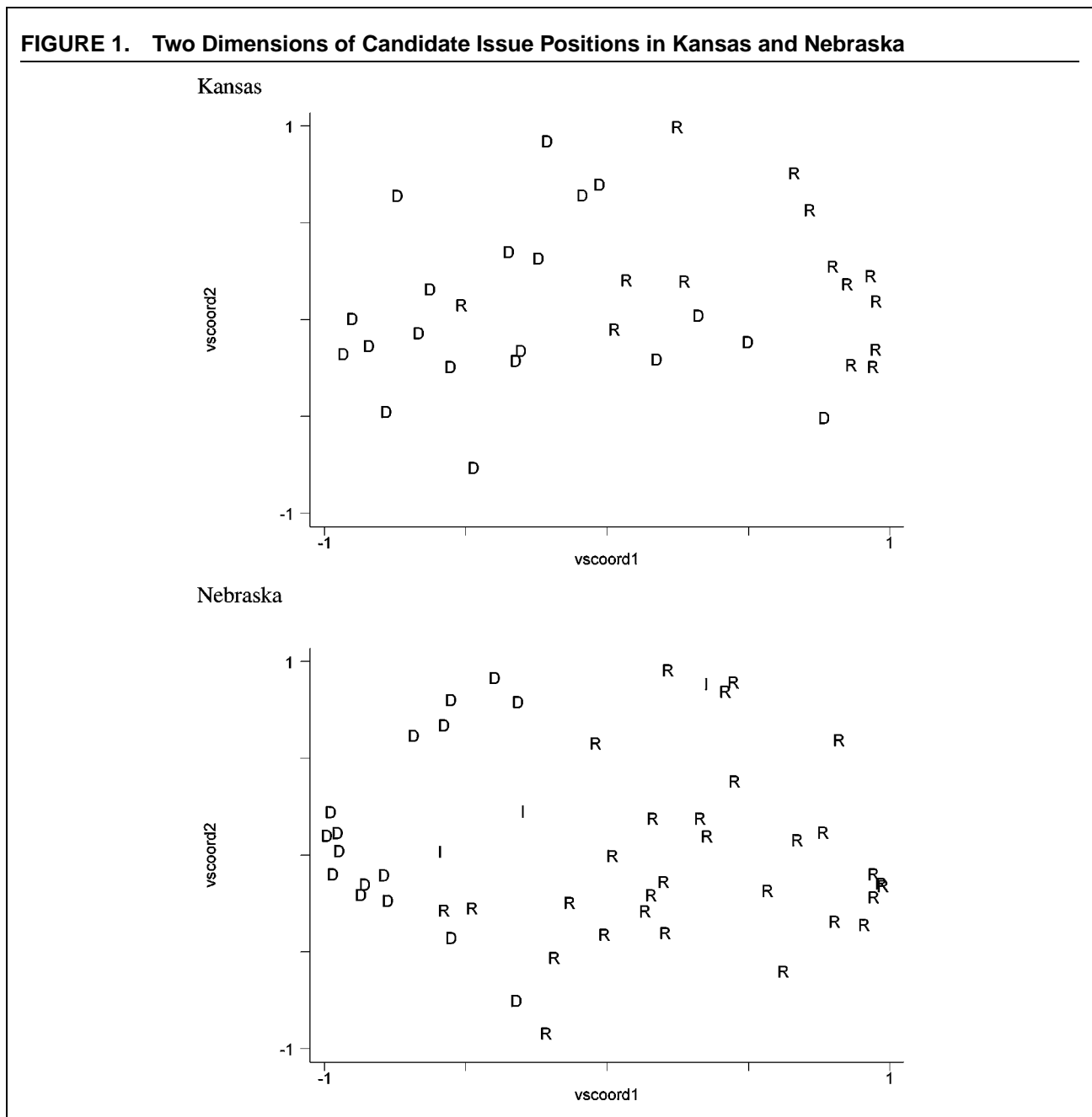
chose the majority position. The second statistic, the aggregate proportional reduction in errors (APRE) takes this into account (Heckman and Snyder 1997; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). This number is equal to one minus the number of errors divided by the number of candidates choosing the minority position. Returning to Table 1, the APRE for the first dimension in Kansas is 0.413, while the APRE for Nebraska is lower, at 0.331. In both states we find one substantial dimension that accounts for 80% of the item responses, followed by smaller dimensions. The second dimension in Nebraska is a bit clearer, adding 5% to the correct classifications, compared to the second dimension, which adds just 3% in Kansas.<sup>8</sup> The pattern of candidate positions on the first two dimensions is shown in the plots of Figure 1. We have added letter symbols to the candidates to show the pattern of partisan affiliations in the space (D, Democrat; R, Republican; and I, independents and third-party candidates).<sup>9</sup> The first dimension, which we believe reflects the clear liberal–conservative content of the items in the NPAT arrays Republicans against Democrats, with Republicans showing a strong tendency to score higher than Democrats. There is some variation on the dimension among both Democrats and Republicans in the two states. However, the striking feature of the pattern in these findings is the lack of support for our hypothesis of less structured responses as a result of the nonpartisanship of Nebraska elections. On the NPAT responses, the two states are more alike than they are different.

The second hypothesis about partisanship and ideology in the campaign was that the existence of partisan primaries and the overall involvement of the parties in Kansas’ elections should have yielded a pull toward the ideological poles of the parties compared to Nebraska, where the parties are barely active in

<sup>8</sup> In this analysis we instructed the program to extract four dimensions rather than the two that Poole and Rosenthal typically extract for their analyses of Congress. Limiting the analysis to just two dimensions would not affect our conclusions in any substantively meaningful way, while extracting more dimensions allows the possibility of finding the higher-dimensional space we expected in Nebraska.

<sup>9</sup> We coded candidate partisanship from the *Omaha World-Herald*, which reports the party with which each candidate and legislator has registered.

**FIGURE 1. Two Dimensions of Candidate Issue Positions in Kansas and Nebraska**



the state legislative elections. Table 2 shows the simple regressions of the first two dimensions on party affiliation (Democrat = 1, Republican = 0) for each state. The results are as striking as they are surprising. Partisan Kansas actually shows a lower party difference on the main dimension ( $-0.87$ ) than we find in Nebraska ( $-1.07$ ). Reflecting this, we also see that party affiliation explains much more of the variance on the first dimension in Nebraska (adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.64, vs. 0.45 for Kansas). On both counts, then, dimensionality and polarization, our hypothesizing was considerably off. In nonpartisan Nebraska, differences between Democrats and Republicans are similar to those in partisan Kansas, and the issue response sets are similarly structured in

the two states. If anything, Nebraska actually shows more partisan polarization on the main NPAT dimension than Kansas does.

As shown in Table 2, party affiliation has virtually no association with the second dimension, which is true for the subsequent dimensions, all of which appear to be more noise collectors than substantively meaningful measures. Below we speculate on what might be going on here, but what is clear is that the nonpartisanship of Nebraska state legislative elections did not affect the dimensionality of candidates' electorally expressed ideology, nor did nonpartisanship in Nebraska yield less ideological polarization between Democratic and Republican candidates.

**TABLE 2. Effect of Party on Issue Positions in Kansas and Nebraska**

Variable	Dimension 1	Dimension 2
Kansas (N = 34)		
Party	-0.87*** (0.16)	-0.17 (0.14)
Constant	0.55*** (0.13)	0.17 (0.11)
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.45	0.01
Nebraska (N = 46)		
Party	-1.07*** (0.12)	0.17 (.14)
Constant	0.35*** (0.07)	-0.06 (.08)
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.64	0.01

Note: \*\*\*p < 0.001.

**Partisanship and Ideology in Roll Call Voting**

The high level of polarization among Nebraska candidates for the state legislature was not expected since theory suggested, and the earlier research by Welch and Carlson (1973) demonstrated, quite modest correlations of partisanship with roll call voting in the Nebraska legislature. When we found the high campaign issue polarization between partisans in Nebraska, we began to suspect that partisanship had finally found its way into Nebraska legislative politics. Was it possible that Nebraska’s legislators, after years of wandering in the confusing maze of unstructured and unstable coalitions documented by Welch and Carlson (1973), had responded to the need for organization and continuity that party provides, even while remaining constitutionally nonpartisan? We can see if that was the case as we test our hypotheses about the relationship of party and roll call voting in the Kansas Senate and the Nebraska Unicameral.

Our analysis includes all even mildly contentious roll calls in the two chambers for the 1999–2000 session, defined here as any roll call in which the losing side constituted as least 5% of those voting. This resulted in 223 votes in the Nebraska legislature and 254 in the Kansas Senate. As with the PVS NPAT data, we calculate W-NOMINATE scores to assess the dimensionality of conflict in the two chambers. Table 3 shows our results from extracting four dimensions. The overall results show that, unlike the NPAT data, patterns of roll call voting are not the same in the two bodies. The percentage of correctly classified votes in each state gives us our first indication of the differences between Nebraska and Kansas. While the first dimension in Kansas correctly classifies over 88% of the votes, the first dimension in Nebraska succeeds less than 76% of the time.

The big difference, however, is found in the APRE scores. The APRE for the first dimension for Kansas is 0.463 and this increases to 0.559 in two dimensions. These are very close to the average values that Poole and Rosenthal (1997) find for the U.S House

**TABLE 3. Dimensions of Roll Call Voting in Kansas and Nebraska**

Dimension	Correctly classified	APRE	Improvement in APRE
Kansas			
Dimension 1	0.888	0.463	
Dimension 2	0.908	0.559	0.096
Dimension 3	0.919	0.614	0.055
Dimension 4	0.930	0.666	0.053
Nebraska			
Dimension 1	0.756	0.196	
Dimension 2	0.785	0.294	0.098
Dimension 3	0.800	0.343	0.049
Dimension 4	0.821	0.410	0.067

and Senate.<sup>10</sup> The first dimension in Kansas explains a great deal and the second dimension improves on that slightly. There is clearly one dominant dimension to roll call voting in the Kansas Senate.

In contrast, patterns in Nebraska’s roll call voting are difficult to find. The APRE for Nebraska’s first dimension, 0.196, is much lower than that of Kansas. Indeed, such a low APRE indicates just a nominal improvement over a naive prediction of guessing that everyone voted with the winning side. While the second dimension improves upon that APRE score by 0.098, the APRE after two dimensions (0.294) is still far less than that of just one dimension in Kansas. The unusual character of the Nebraska legislature can be seen against the backdrop of Poole and Rosenthal’s (2001) comparative statistics on 12 legislatures including the U.S. Congress, the UN, the European Parliament, and the legislatures of several European countries. The APRE for all four dimensions for Nebraska’s legislature is lower than the lowest APRE Poole and Rosenthal find for the first dimension of any of the 12 voting bodies in their study.

Table 4 presents results from OLS regressions of the first two dimensions for Kansas and Nebraska. The independent variables in this analysis are the party of the legislator (1 = Democrat, 0 = Republican) and whether the legislator’s district is rural or urban (1 = Urban, 0 = Rural). The inclusion of party is obvious, but many state legislatures, including Kansas and Nebraska are noted for significant urban-rural urban cleavages (Loomis 1994; Welch and Carlson 1973). Therefore, we include this measure to test whether this factor shapes voting in Nebraska and Kansas.<sup>11</sup>

The results in Table 4 confirm our hypotheses. The first dimension of voting in Kansas is clearly a partisan cleavage. The coefficient for party in this model is strong and significant. On a scale ranging from -1 to 1,

<sup>10</sup> The APRE values for the one-, two-, and three-dimension solutions for the U.S. House are 0.479, 0.531, and 0.546, and for the Senate they are 0.435, 0.519, and 0.530 (from Poole and Rosenthal 1997, Table 3, 28).

<sup>11</sup> We created our dummy variable of urban versus rural legislative districts by examining the population density of the counties these districts intersected. There were 25 urban and 24 rural districts in Nebraska and 26 urban and 14 rural districts in Kansas.

**TABLE 4. Effect of Party and Urbanism on Roll Call Voting in Kansas and Nebraska**

Variable	Dimension 1	Dimension 2
Kansas (N = 40)		
Party	-1.27*** (0.08)	0.40*** (0.10)
Urban district	-0.12 (0.08)	-0.24* (0.10)
Constant	0.53*** (0.07)	-0.05 (.08)
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.87	0.32
Nebraska (N = 50)		
Party	0.21 (0.17)	-0.45*** (0.11)
Urban district	-0.02 (0.17)	-0.35** (0.10)
Constant	-0.12 (0.12)	0.34*** (0.08)
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	-0.01	0.44

Note: \*\*\**p* < 0.001; \*\**p* < 0.01; \**p* < 0.05.

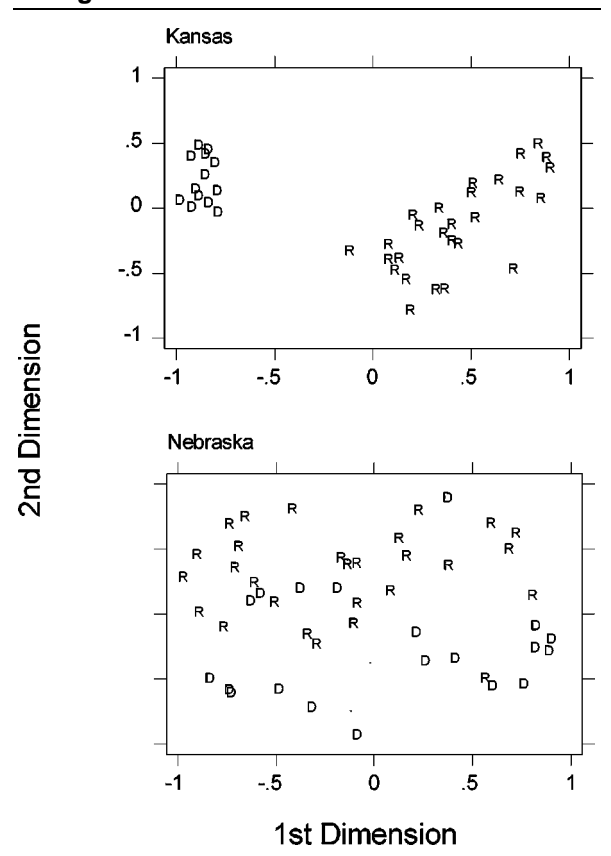
the coefficient of -1.27 for party (and the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.87 for the model) represents a substantial difference between Democrats and Republicans. In addition to its impact on the first dimension in Kansas, party also has a significant influence on the second dimension. While this coefficient is not as strong as in the first dimension, it does reinforce the impact of party in the Kansas Senate. In addition to party, the coefficient for urbanism is also significant for this second dimension. Thus, both dimensions of voting in Kansas are highly structured by partisanship, with the second also being influenced by district urbanism.

While the first dimension in Kansas is a clear partisan cleavage, there appears to be no clear pattern to the first dimension in Nebraska. Neither party nor urbanism is a significant predictor of a legislator's position on this spectrum and Figure 2 indicates the lack of any obvious cleavage as well—legislators are evenly spread across the dimension. On the other hand, dimension 2 does appear to be structured to some extent by both party and urbanism. While the coefficient for party in this case is only a third that for party on Kansas's first dimension, there does appear to be some relationship of party with this dimension; a dimension that captures only a small portion of the voting decisions of the Nebraska legislature in any case.

We find, then, convincing evidence of quite different structures of roll call voting in the Kansas Senate and the Nebraska legislature. The two dimensions explaining roll call voting in Nebraska have an APRE of just 0.294, compared to the APRE of 0.559 for Kansas's two dimensions. This difference indicates far less structure in the Nebraska legislature. Furthermore, while the first dimension was clearly partisanship in Kansas, we could find no pattern—partisan or otherwise—that could explain the first dimension in Nebraska.<sup>12</sup> Thus, our find-

<sup>12</sup> When we showed a list of names and scores on the first dimension to a colleague familiar with the legislature in Nebraska, he did not see any logic to the dimension. We believe that there is probably some-

**FIGURE 2. Two Dimensions of Roll Call Voting in Kansas and Nebraska**



ings are clear—cohesive partisan cleavages form in the partisan Kansas Senate, while such partisan divisions are minor and inconsistent in the nonpartisan setting. Our empirical conclusions echo those of Welch and Carlson (1973, 865) “that there is relatively little structure in voting in Nebraska.”

**DISCUSSION**

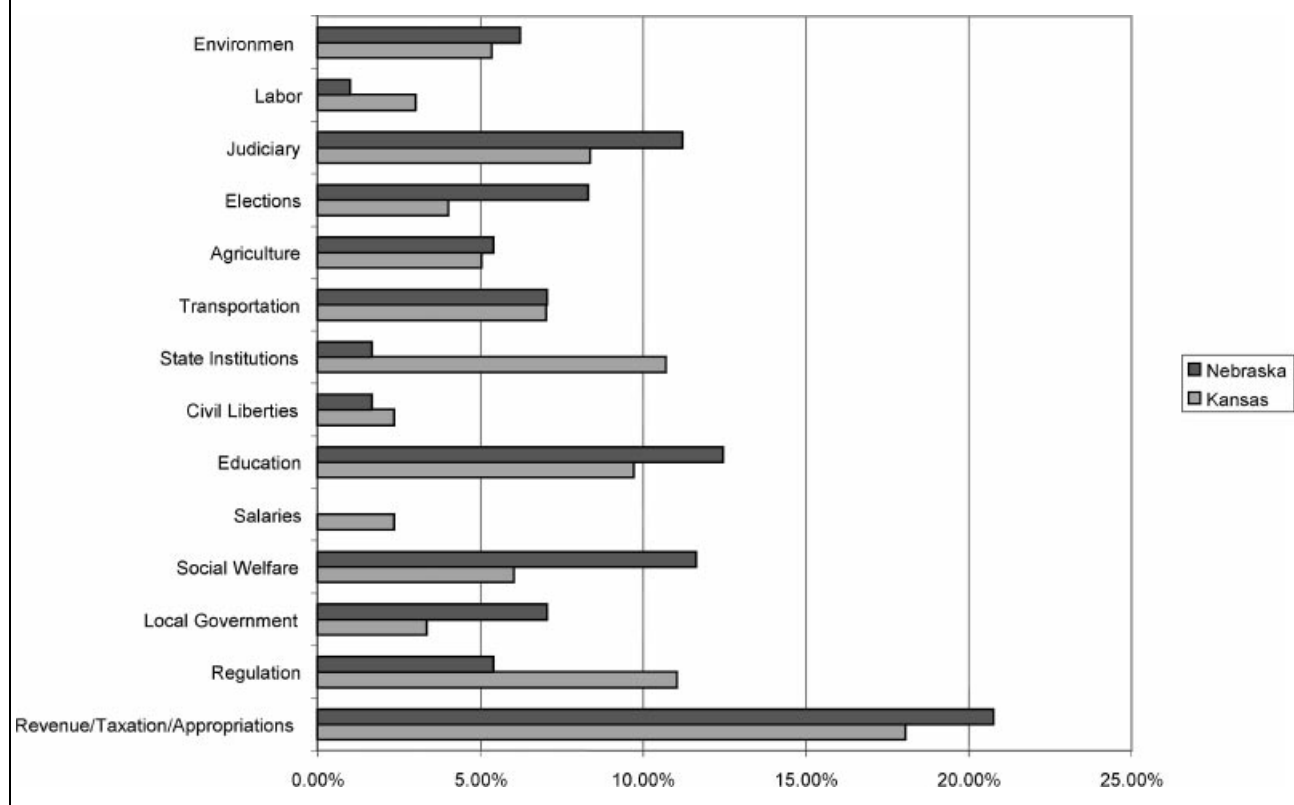
From these empirical results, we are faced with an apparent puzzle. In Kansas we find reasonable structure and polarization in the PVS NPAT data and this is reflected even more clearly in the roll call patterns of the Kansas Senate. But in Nebraska, we find the same familiar structure and even greater partisan polarization in the NPAT data, only to see the Nebraska legislators vote with each other across issues almost at random. Many of the votes on bills in the Nebraska Unicameral seem unrelated to any enduring cleavages.

One possible explanation for the findings is that our samples of individuals in the NPAT and roll call analyses are different. This could happen because only a subset of incumbents answers the NPATs. However, when we compare the subsamples of those for whom we have both NPAT and roll call data to those for whom

thing there, but it is not partisanship or the urban/rural split—and it does not account for much of the voting patterns in the legislature.



**FIGURE 3. Roll Call Issue Areas for Kansas and Nebraska**



we have only NPAT scores and only roll call scores, we find no evidence of any comparability problems.<sup>13</sup> A second comparability problem that could explain our findings is if Kansas and Nebraska simply considered different kinds of issues, with Kansas' being more susceptible to party-line voting. To check this possibility we classified all the roll calls in our analysis by issue area using the categories developed by Welch and Carlson (1979). Figure 3 shows that the distributions across areas are quite similar, and we find nothing in the

few differences in the distributions that could explain the huge differences in patterns of roll call coalitions. If anything, Nebraska should have a higher level of partisan/ideological voting, with its slightly higher proportions of bills in the education, social welfare, and revenue/taxation categories. Based on these analyses, we are confident that the differences in roll call voting are not an artifact, especially in light of the parallel findings from other studies, with Kansas' patterns looking pretty much like Congress and Nebraska's pattern being entirely consistent with Welch and Carlson's and Aldrich and Battista's analyses.

<sup>13</sup> To check for the possibility that those in the legislature for whom we have roll call data might somehow be systematically different from those who took the NPAT, we first established three groups determined by the type of data we have for them: group 1, only NPAT scores (17 in Kansas, 20 in Nebraska); group 2, both NPAT and roll call NOMINATE scores (17 in Kansas, 26 in Nebraska); and group 3, only roll call scores (23 in Kansas, 22 in Nebraska). We then estimated

$$N = a + b_1 \text{Party} + b_2 \text{G2} + b_3 (\text{Party} * \text{G2}) + e,$$

where  $N$  is the NOMINATE scores for the NPATs or roll calls and  $G2$  is a dummy variable for group 2. When  $N$  is the NPAT scores the comparison is between group 1 and group 2 (group 3 is missing data), and when  $N$  is the roll call scores the comparison is between group 2 and group 3. This analysis was run for all four of the NPAT and roll call NOMINATE dimensions for both states. Of 32 chances for  $b_2$  or  $b_3$  to be significant, only one coefficient achieved the 0.05 level, and that was on the fourth roll call dimension for Nebraska—easily attributable to chance. Thus, we are quite confident that the explanation for the differences in structure between the NPATs and the roll calls for Nebraska are institutional rather than differences between who answered the NPATs and who cast roll call votes.

Here we offer an explanation for our findings. It derives from our view of party as a device for creating order among the myriad of conflicts and issues that citizens and politicians face. As we stated earlier, we believe that party, under the right conditions, operates as a default cleavage, and when issues are interpreted in terms of this underlying cleavage the dimensionality of the issue space is reduced. The key, we believe, is in understanding the differential salience of the party/ideology linkage in different contexts. Differences in the context of the gathering of the NPAT data and roll call voting in the Kansas Senate and the Nebraska Unicameral provide a plausible explanation for our seemingly anomalous findings.

Our big inconsistent finding is the high level of structure and polarization among candidates for the Nebraska legislature. These actually make sense upon some reflection as we consider both the character of

the PVS effort and the backgrounds of the candidates themselves. Project Vote Smart constructs the questionnaires based on extensive research on the political controversies their researchers locate across the states. Legislators face the issues, from abortion and affirmative action to crime and welfare, over and over again in the states. As such, the parties have already staked out their general positions on the vast majority of these. The items are presented as clear policy choices about which courses of action the candidates endorse. The principle behind the entire effort is to highlight the essential stances of the candidates and what they stand for. Although not intended to do so, by reflecting existing political conflicts in the states, the NPATs probably promote answering items in terms of the underlying and recurring political choices as framed in current American politics. Not answering questions in a way that roughly aligns in a general liberal-conservative dimension would probably mean that the respondent does not accept the common terms of discourse in contemporary American politics.<sup>14</sup>

This is reinforced by the candidates themselves. The nonpartisan Nebraska legislature exists within a highly partisan context. Almost all of the candidates for the legislature have a recognized affiliation with one of the two major parties. Most are registered as partisans, and the newspapers frequently refer to their party affiliation along with their town or county when identifying members. When one legislator died, the Omaha paper listed 25 people who wanted to be considered as his replacement; 23 were identified by party (Hicks 1999). Hence, the candidates are partisans when they run, but they do not appear to run *as* partisans (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). Given the context in which the NPATs are constructed and the emersion of the candidates in the same larger culture, it is no wonder that they respond to PVS questions in the same way that the partisan candidates in other states do.

The patterns we found for roll call voting are sharply at odds with the patterns of the NPAT. Differences in context here also account for the use of party as a default cleavage in the Kansas Senate but not in the Nebraska Unicameral. In Kansas, candidates run *as* Democrats and Republicans, and once elected, they organize the legislature as partisans. The election and the distribution of power in the legislature are a zero-sum game between the two parties. This fact of an institutional life of recurring partisan conflict and competition makes party a natural and salient default cleavage. Then, as the parties, at least nationally, are already clearly associated with positions and groups on a wide range of issues, it becomes much more likely that the ideological/partisan component of any bill will draw attention rather than other facets of the issue around which alternative majorities might form.

<sup>14</sup> Consistent with this is the finding that third-party candidates, especially those identified with different ways of organizing political choices, do not reflect this alignment. Libertarians, for example, make choices that are systematically conservative on some issues and equally liberal on other (abortion and legalization of drugs, for example [Hetland and Wright 2000]).

In Nebraska party does not play this role. Members enter the legislature having been Democrats or Republican in the past, but we know that partisan identity plays little part in election to the legislature (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). By all accounts, the parties play only a modest, if any, role in state legislative elections. Organization of the chamber is accomplished through an anonymous vote by all members, not by party caucuses.<sup>15</sup> Thus, members' identities as partisans are not salient to their lives in the legislature, so when bills come up, there is no ongoing default cleavage. It seems almost as though each bill is considered anew rather than in the context of established sides and coalitions. Rather than having a partisan/ideological cleavage to block out other possible bases for division, members can, and apparently do, focus on any aspect that strikes them. As we have seen in the regression analysis, sometimes this pits Democrats against Republicans, sometimes urban against rural representatives. But a lot of the time, it is not at all clear what the lines of division are, and whatever they are, they do not have much continuity from one issue to the next. We believe that the important factor here is that the lack of party organization and agendas means that no one has an incentive to promote a package of legislation on which they as a group will run. Issues do not get tied together around which coalitions form as in partisan legislatures.

Before accepting these results, however, it is reasonable to ask why party coalitions do not form in Nebraska. The answer, we believe, is twofold. First, party labels are constitutionally prohibited, and in sub-presidential elections voters do not connect their partisan preferences with candidates unless party labels are actually listed on the ballot (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). Additionally, candidates seldom emphasize their party affiliations. We know that even candidates running in partisan elections generally avoid mention of their party except when appealing to partisan supporters. It is certainly rare for party to be a central element in this era of candidate-centered elections. This should apply even more where there is a tradition of nonpartisanship. Second, coalitions do not form in the Nebraska legislature because incumbent legislators have nothing to gain electorally from partisanship; incumbency is worth more at the ballot box when it is unaccompanied by party labels (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). Nebraska legislators apparently are aware of this, as they have resisted efforts by the state party organizations to return the legislature to partisan elections (Sittig 1997, 196).

## CONCLUSIONS

Our findings highlight two points about parties in legislatures. First, we believe that party plays a role that

<sup>15</sup> The 1997 state legislature reelected a Democrat as its speaker by a vote of 38–10 despite the fact that the state Republican Chairman actively lobbied Republican members (who held a 26–22 advantage in the legislature) to vote for the Republican candidate (Hord 1997). According to the “A Victory for Independence.” 1997. *Omaha World-Herald*. 10 Jan: A-10. “While party-line votes occasionally occur, they are not the rule.”

has largely been missed in the literature. Poole and Rosenthal (1997) convincingly demonstrate a very low dimensionality in roll call voting in the U.S. Congress through most of our history. But what brings about this low dimensionality? Most studies have taken this crucial factor as given. Some, however, suggest that this low dimensionality is imposed by party leaders within the legislature (Jenkins 1999, 2000; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). We believe that this explanation is incomplete. The stability and structure of coalitions in the U.S. Senate are every bit what they are in the House of Representatives, despite much weaker party leadership. The explanation, therefore, probably lies elsewhere. Our analysis provides strong evidence that the parties, in vying for electoral advantage, adopt positions on new issues to bring in new voters and, thus, package these with their existing issue stands. This provides a political connection among issues, which works its way into our general ideological way of looking at politics. Without parties, there would be no need to bundle these diverse issues, and legislators, activists, and the media would be much less likely to see any obvious connections among them. Our argument, in short, is that parties produce the ideological low-dimensional space as a by-product of their efforts to win office. Where the parties are not active in the legislature—Nebraska is our test case—the clear structure found in partisan legislatures disappears.

Second, we wish to make the point in our conclusion that nonpartisanship undermines the possibilities for popular control of government. This occurs in several ways. Elsewhere, research has indicted that nonpartisan elections cause lower turnouts, make it easier for incumbents to win elections, and effectively disenfranchise the poorest and least educated citizens (Schaffner and Streb 2000; Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001).<sup>16</sup> Our analysis here adds to that indictment.

The disjuncture between the PVS NPAT responses and the Nebraska legislative voting patterns shows that legislators there are not connecting their clear ideological preferences on the issues to the bills that they vote on in the legislature. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how voters could achieve even general policy direction when conflict patterns in the legislature are unstable and unstructured. Together these findings suggest that nonpartisan elections effectively break the policy linkage between citizens and their representatives in the statehouse. Our findings echo and lend solid empirical support to the Schattschneider observation we quoted at the outset about the importance of party for coherence and accountability in democratic politics. Both are lacking in Nebraska's nonpartisan legislature but are evident in Kansas' Senate. The difference is the existence of party.

## APPENDIX: PVS NPAT ITEMS ANALYZED

We used the following 23 items in analyzing NPAT responses among candidates in Kansas and Nebraska. The

first section of NPAT questions asks the respondent to indicate the statements with which he or she agrees. Because NOMINATE requires dichotomous choices (such as votes), we coded agreeing with the statement as an affirmative response and not agreeing with the statement as a negative response.

### Crime

- Oppose the death penalty
- Increase state funds for programs that rehabilitate and educate inmates during and after prison sentences

### Economy

- Provide low-interest loans and tax credits for expanding, starting up, or relocating businesses
- Reduce state government regulations on the private sector
- Support limits on cash damages in lawsuits against businesses and professionals for product liability or malpractice
- Increase state funding for programs to retrain unemployed workers

### Education

- Provide parents with state-funded vouchers to send their children to any participating school (public, private, religious, technical)
- Support sex education programs that stress safe sexual practices

### Environment

- Require the state to reimburse citizens when state-sponsored environmental regulations limit the use of privately owned land
- [Continue to] Provide funding for recycling programs in [state]
- Suspend [state]'s participation in unfunded, federally mandated environmental protection legislation

### Gun Control

- Increase state restrictions on the purchase and possession of firearms
- Maintain all state registration procedures and state restrictions on possessing firearms
- Ease state procedures and restrictions on the purchase and registration of firearms

### Health Care

- Ensure that [state]'s citizens have access to basic health care, through managed care, insurance reforms, or state-funded care where necessary
- Limit the amount of damages that can be awarded in medical malpractice lawsuits

### Social Issues

- Increase state funding for programs to prevent teen pregnancy

<sup>16</sup> See Welch and Carlson 1973 and the works summarized in Cassel 1986, as well as the articles cited in Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001.

## Abortion

Because the abortion questions are interrelated, we coded five responses into a single dichotomous choice. The following two choices were coded as an affirmative response.

- Abortions should always be legally available.
- Abortions should be legally available when the procedure is completed within the first trimester of pregnancy.

The remaining three choices were coded as a negative response.

- Abortions should be legal only when the pregnancy resulted from incest or rape or when the life of the woman is endangered.
- Abortions should always be illegal.
- Abortions should be limited by waiting periods and parental notification requirements.

## Budget

Candidates were asked to support a particular level of funding for education, environment, health care, law enforcement, and welfare. The funding options were to eliminate, greatly decrease, slightly decrease, maintain status, slightly increase, and greatly increase. Because NOMINATE requires dichotomous data, we bundled responses into eliminate/decrease and maintain/increase.

## Taxes

Candidates were asked to support a particular tax level for alcohol taxes, capital gains taxes, income taxes for those earning less than \$75,000, income taxes for those earning more than \$75,000, property taxes, and sales taxes. The tax options were to eliminate, greatly decrease, slightly decrease, maintain status, slightly increase, and greatly increase. Because NOMINATE requires dichotomous data, we bundled responses into eliminate/decrease and maintain/increase.

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