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≡≡≡ A New Measure of Party Strength

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In order to measure the strength of the parties in each state, the Major Party Index (MPI) was built by averaging the results of the six major elections that take place in the fifty states. This index allows us to describe the absolute and comparative partisan leaning of each state in each election and identify trends of party strength over time within individual states, among regions, and within the nation as a whole. The MPI sheds considerable light on three general developments: (1) a national change from Democratic dominance in the 1980s to a Republican edge by 2002, (2) significant regional realignments in the South and New England, and (3) a strong trend toward greater consistency between partisan voting at the federal and state levels.

Party strength in the United States is generally measured by public opinion polls in which respondents report their own partisan identification. There are well-known advantages to this approach. It permits analyses that relate an individual's party preference to attitudinal and demographic factors, thereby allowing for the generation and testing of hypotheses about the causes of party attachment. Self-identification can also be correlated with reported votes, which allows for inquiries into the relative importance of party preference for electoral behavior. For these reasons, poll surveys have become the preferred standard in academic research. But this method has admitted weaknesses. Polls are expensive and they often have a significant margin of error, which in the case of general national polls increases greatly as one begins to investigate particular sub-groups or geographical regions. Partisan self-identification by itself, moreover, does not tell us how people actually vote. For example, many white Southerners after 1950 identified themselves as Democrats or independents even as they had become reliable Republican voters at the presidential level. Finally, partisan self-identification itself says nothing about the habitual behavior—if it exists—of independents. Many analysts today suspect that most voters who call themselves independents in fact have a fairly distinct partisan leaning when it comes to casting their ballots.¹

Another approach to assessing party strength is to look at election results and measure party standing by the votes each party's candidates received. This method also has its strong points. It is inexpensive (at least for scholars), as the government picks up all of the costs of the research project by holding elections. The margin of error is fairly low, with the inaccuracies being limited to fraud and the now well-documented difficulties encountered in counting and recording votes (hanging chads, undervotes, voting machine failure, and the like).² Election results also have

the advantage of directly measuring the phenomenon: if one is interested in party strength, it makes great sense to look at how citizens actually vote. Still, there are weaknesses in using electoral results. The statistics are tied to aggregates (collective units), not to individuals, which makes it impossible to connect the vote to attitudinal variables and difficult to relate it to many demographic factors (other, of course, than geography itself).³ Another problem is that a vote for a particular candidate is by no means the same thing as an expression of support for a party; it may only reflect a preference for a particular individual, as when millions of Democrats pulled the lever for the war hero Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956. Election results from any single election may therefore reveal little about "real" or "normal" party strength.

All approaches are bound to have strengths and weaknesses, and the question of a measurement's worth should be judged on the practical grounds of its helpfulness as an investigative tool. Despite the drawbacks just noted, the idea of measuring party strength on the basis of election results seems attractive enough to hold considerable interest for political scientists—not as a substitute for, but as a supplement to, polling methods. Yet this approach is virtually absent from contemporary political science. Frequently, of course, one comes across rule-of-thumb descriptions that refer to election outcomes. Pick up any book on elections and you will likely read statements such as "Massachusetts voted Democratic in the last four presidential elections," thus qualifying it as a solidly Democratic state. General historical studies also frequently rely on such characterizations as in Black and Black's (1992) characterization of the South: "For more than six decades, from 1880-1944, the eleven states of the old Confederacy . . . regularly voted as a solid block in favor of the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party."⁴ Such references, however, are completely ad hoc; they have no common standard and offer no basis for systematic

¹ Bruce E. Keith, et al., *The Myth of the Independent Voter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

² For a discussion of some of these problems, see Brady, Henry E., Justin Buchler, Matt Jarvis, and John McNulty. 2001. "Counting All the Votes: The Performance of Voting Technology in the United States." Available at: <http://ucdata.berkeley.edu/>.

³ For a recent method that can account for ways of using aggregate data for some of these purposes, see Gary King. 1997. *A Solution to the Ecological Inference Problem: Reconstructing Individual Behavior from Aggregate Data*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁴ Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Vital South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 4.

communication among those studying party strength. What is needed, clearly, is a general index to which all can refer. The idea behind an index—think for example of the Dow Jones index—is to capture in one number a measure that supplies a broad picture and that can provide a baseline for charting trends and movements in party strength.

A few political scientists in the period between 1960 and 1989 sought to devise such an index. These efforts did not gain wide currency at the time, and none of them has been updated or remains in use today. Part of the reason is no doubt the aforementioned appeal of survey data. But another reason, we would argue, is to be found in the flaws in these indexes. With improvements, we believe it is possible to construct a measure that overcomes some of the past difficulties and that can serve today as a helpful tool for political analysis. The objective is to construct a measure that captures the underlying strength of the parties while managing to absorb and smooth out distortions of particular elections.

Any measurement using electoral results must, as noted, proceed on the basis of geographical units. This unit could be as small as the precinct. But for the purposes of a general index for the whole of American politics, the state is the proper starting point. States serve as the unit for selecting presidential electors, senators, and governors. Additionally, state majorities generally determine the majority party in state legislatures. In order to measure the underlying strength of the parties in each state, we have built an index that averages the results of the elections for the six major offices that take place in each of the fifty states: president, U.S. senator, U.S. representative, governor, state senator, and state representative.

Our Major Party Index (MPI) allows one to describe the absolute and comparative partisan leaning of each state in each election year and to identify trends of party strength over time within individual states, among regions, and (by weighting populations) within the nation as a whole. It is also possible, by breaking the index into subindexes, to measure the consistency of partisan voting between state and federal offices and to observe whether partisan voting patterns at these two levels are moving further apart or closer together. The MPI can be used, as will be demonstrated, to shed considerable light on some of the major developments in modern electoral politics.

PREVIOUS MEASURES OF INTERPARTY COMPETITION

Past indexes of party strength employed different methods to determine which elections to observe and how to weight the different components in relation to one another. The diversity in approaches resulted in part from the researchers' different interests and purposes, but it also highlights some of the difficulties in using electoral results to come to grips with measuring the abstraction of party strength. Previous indexes were generally based on averaging aggregate party vote totals for particular offices over a particular period of time. Cox's (1960) index used vote

totals for federal elections only.⁵ By contrast, Ranney (1965) and King (1989) measured the level of party competition only in state-level contests.⁶ A few efforts combined results from both levels, as we shall do here (Hofferbert 1964; David 1972; Bullock 1988).⁷

Another point of difference revolved around the type of data employed and the frequency of observation. Some indexes employed the raw vote totals or percentages of the vote each party won (Hofferbert 1964; Ranney 1965; David 1972; King 1989). Others relied solely on the number of seats each party held (Bullock 1988). The frequency of observation also varied. Some indexes were based on long periods of aggregate analysis (Hofferbert, Ranney, King), while others took new measurements every two years (David, Bullock). The Cox Index used a combination of these approaches. These indexes were also used for different purposes. Hofferbert and King sought to determine the level of competition in each state and ascertain which party was in control, while others were more concerned with observing partisanship over time and in analyzing the reasons for change (Cox, Ranney, David, Bullock).

These previous attempts to examine party competition demonstrate the diversity of opinion over what should be measured and how such measurements should be carried out. They also reveal, however, some methodological drawbacks, even when taking account of the purposes for which they were intended. Three of these indexes deserve further attention because their successes and failures informed the development of our new measure.

The Cox Index was an early effort to measure party competition in and between the states. Relying solely on vote totals for federal offices, Cox labeled each state as either Democratic or Republican and classified it as either "safe" for a party, "generally" for a party, or "marginal" when neither party was dominant.⁸ As a result of only looking at national elections, Cox concluded that most states were "marginal," or not aligned with a party. While this conclusion may have had validity at the federal level in the post-World War II years, it certainly did not describe the situation within the states. Some of the states, particularly in the South, were competitive in presidential elections, but were strongly supportive of one party at the state level.

Cox's index was also methodologically flawed in that each biennial observation included only the elections that

⁵ Edward F. Cox, "The Measurement of Party Strength," *Western Political Quarterly* 13 (1960).

⁶ Austin Ranney, "Parties in State Politics," in Herbert Jacob and Kenneth N. Vines, *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis* (First Edition) (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965). James D. King in "Interparty Competition in the American States: An Examination of Index Components," *Western Political Quarterly* 42:1 (1989).

⁷ Richard I. Hofferbert, "Classification of American State Party Systems," *Journal of Politics* 26:3 (Aug. 1964), 550-567. Paul T. David, *Party Strength in the United States: 1872-1970* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1972). Charles S. Bullock III, "Regional Realignment from an Officeholding Perspective," *Journal of Politics* 50:3 (Aug. 1988) 553-574.

⁸ Cox.

occurred in that particular year. Thus, congressional races were included in every measure, while presidential voting was only part of the measure in every other biennial observation. As a result, the measurement varied enormously based on whether a presidential election was held, making it difficult to draw conclusions or demonstrate trends over time. The index failed to supply a comparable measure for each observation.

Ranney's index is perhaps the most well known. In contrast to Cox, Ranney only measured intra-state contests and excluded federal offices. His index also differed from Cox's in that it considered the longevity of party control of the governorships and the legislatures in addition to partisan vote totals for governor, state senate, and state house. Ranney used his measure to assign each state to one of five categories: "One Party Republican," "Modified One-Party Republican," "One Party Democratic," "Modified One-Party Democratic," and "Two-Party."⁹ The Ranney Index has a number of limitations. One problem is that it measures only state-level elections and gives an insufficient measure of party competition writ large.¹⁰ Another drawback is that the Ranney Index cannot be used to examine individual years because of its consideration of a party's longevity of control.

Finally, Paul T. David's (1972, updated 1974, 1976, 1978) index averaged the vote for governor, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House elections and classified states as "predominantly Democratic," "predominantly Republican," or "competitive."¹¹ His index is more comprehensive than Cox's or Ranney's because it considered both state and federal elections. In addition, David's index took these three factors into consideration at each biennial observation, thus avoiding the inconsistency of Cox's measurement. (The results of the last governor's race were included in the index, even if a gubernatorial race did not take place in that year.) Nonetheless, David's index also has problematic features. Although it includes both federal and state electoral competition, it omits the most important of all elections in America: the contest for the presidency. In addition, given the three races David uses, his index assigns two-thirds of the weight to national voting and one-third to state voting. No compelling reason is given for this weighting. David's index, finally, seems skewed because, within the intra-state component, he includes elections for the governorship but omits those for the state legislatures, which seem just as important. For example, in 1972 Southern Republicans intermittently controlled governorships, but won only a handful of seats for state legislatures and did not control a single state legislative body. At the time these states were clearly more Democratic than states that had intermittent Republican governors with occasional or frequent Republican

state legislatures. The David Index missed this important element in state partisanship.¹²

THE MAJOR PARTY INDEX

The Major Party Index (MPI) is intended to measure the level and extent of interparty competition in and between the states. It builds on previous findings by providing a means to identify states dominated by one party (as Cox and Ranney Indexes did) as well as to observe important characteristics of the national electorate in specific years and over time. It also improves on most past indexes by including both federal and state elections. Each component within these two arenas is weighed evenly—indeed, there is no compelling reason to assign them different values. Of course, the construction of any index has an arbitrary element to it but the MPI has the most logical makeup possible. Although the index cannot be said to offer a perfect representation of American party strength—no measurement can—the hope is that it will offer a more comprehensive and more reliable picture than any index thus far proposed.

Design

The Major Party Index is comprised of six weighted components calculated on even numbered years for each state, from 1990 to 2002. Three of these components are based on elections for national offices and three for state-level offices. Within the federal portion, half of the weight is assigned to presidential elections and half to Congressional elections. Similarly, the state component is evenly divided between the governorship and the state legislature. This is an appropriate weighting scheme because it attaches equal importance to the two arenas of government in our federal system and, within each arena, to the executive branch and the legislative branch. The MPI takes all of the major elective offices into account, thereby fulfilling the aim of being a comprehensive measure.

The index is based on a two-party evaluation. Third-party candidates have been eliminated in all six components. A value for all components is entered for each biennial observation, which is accomplished by using the most recent presidential and gubernatorial election results if none was held in a given year. The components and their weights are listed in Table 1.

The first component of the MPI and the first nationally based measure is the two-party vote for president in each state's most recent presidential election. Thus in 2000, the

⁹ Ranney.

¹⁰ King, 84.

¹¹ David.

¹² In addition, calculating the index for three parties rather than two lessens comparative opportunities. By including third parties in his formulation, David decreases the marginal difference between the two major parties, making them more difficult to compare. By using two-party vote totals the major parties become mirror images of each other, increasing and decreasing in proportion to one another. The changes in partisan support are thus amplified and a more realistic and meaningful analysis of the major parties is possible.

≡ TABLE 1
COMPONENTS OF THE MAJOR PARTY INDEX (MPI)

President	25%
Congress	25% (Senate: 12.5%; House: 12.5%)
Governor	25%
State Legislature . . .	25% (Senate: 12.5%; House: 12.5%)

value is based on the election result of that year. For 2002 the same value is entered because there was no presidential election in 2002. This factor accounts for 25 percent of the total index value for each state.

The second MPI component, also at the national level, is the two-party vote in each state's two most recent United States Senate elections and accounts for 12.5 percent of the total index value.¹³ To take an example, Idaho's U.S. Senate value is calculated by averaging the results from the 1998 and 2002 Senate elections. By taking both of the Senate elections into account, despite the time lag on the former, the MPI attempts to reflect partisan voting from year to year without overemphasizing current partisan swings. By including a Senate result every year, it evens out results among different states.

The third component, and the final national measure, is the total two-party average of all votes in each state's biennial U.S. House elections. Virginia's value, for example, is obtained by adding Republican and Democratic votes in all congressional districts and calculating each party's percentage of this total. This method provides a more accurate measure of the overall state partisan choice than would be obtained by averaging the two-party percentages of each district because districts differ in population and turnout. In addition, it reduces the impact of uncontested seats. This component of the MPI accounts for 12.5 percent of each state's total score.¹⁴

The fourth component of the MPI, and the first state-level measure, is the two-party vote percentage in each state's most recent gubernatorial election. This component accounts for 25 percent of each state's total.¹⁵

The fifth measure, also at the state level, is the two-party percentage of all seats in each state's Senate. The Major Party Index value is determined in this case by dividing the number of Republican seats by the sum of Democratic and Republican seats. There were two reasons in this case for using *seats* (as opposed to *votes*) as the basis of calculation: vote totals for state legislative elections are difficult to find, and many of these races are uncontested (a large number of uncontested seats skews the two-party vote totals).¹⁶ This component is weighted as 12.5 percent of the total index.

The final component of the MPI, and the third state-level measure, is the two-party percentage of seats in state houses. This score is calculated in the same way as that for the state senate and is worth 12.5 percent of the total index value.¹⁷

The sum of these components is then calculated to determine the biennial Major Party Index value in each state. The MPI is based on Republican scores in a two-party evaluation. The Democratic value is the inverse of the Republican score. Thus, as the numerical value increases, a state becomes more Republican and, conversely, as the value decreases, a state becomes more Democratic. The formula for each state in each even numbered year, then, is:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{MAJOR PARTY INDEX} = & ((\text{Most recent 2-Party Republican} \\ & \text{Presidential Vote}) * 0.25) + ((\text{Average of the Two Most} \\ & \text{Recent Republican 2-Party Votes for the U.S.} \\ & \text{Senate}) * 0.125) + ((\text{Republican 2-Party Percent of all} \\ & \text{U.S. House Votes}) * 0.125) + ((\text{Most Recent 2-Party} \\ & \text{Republican Vote for Governor}) * 0.25) + ((\text{2-Party} \\ & \text{Republican Percentage of Seats in the State} \\ & \text{Senate}) * 0.125) + ((\text{2-Party Republican Percentage of} \\ & \text{Seats in the State House}) * 0.125). \end{aligned}$$

Table 2 lists the four most Republican and Democratic states over the past three biennial observations (note that the values listed in the table are the difference of the MPI score of each state from 50, expressed as positive numbers for ease of comparison). On the Republican side, Idaho has had the highest MPI rating since 1998, with a 68.5 score in 2002. Indeed, Idaho is a haven for the Grand Old Party, and if all

¹³ Values for Louisiana are not always present because of the state's unusual voting laws. For much of the 1990s, the state held a "blanket primary" the summer before the usual November elections. If a candidate received a majority of the vote, he or she was elected and the seat was not on the November ballot. In these instances, Louisiana's Senate value was omitted and the 12.5 percent was divided equally among the other components. Jim Jeffords, Vermont's independent senator, is counted as a Republican because he was elected under that party's banner. Should he seek reelection as an independent, he will be counted as a Democrat because he caucuses with that party.

¹⁴ Vermont's Independent representative, Bernie Sanders, is counted as a Democrat while Virginia's Virgil Goode is counted as a Republican even in those years before he officially joined the party. This allows for a more accurate vote count because the parties that benefit from these members never mounted a legitimate challenge.

¹⁵ There is one exception to using the most recent election. Two states—Vermont and New Hampshire—elect governors every two years rather than every four years. For consistency and comparability, a four-year

value is obtained by averaging the two-party vote total from the two most recent gubernatorial elections. Vermont's 2002 gubernatorial value, for instance, is obtained by averaging the 2002 and 2000 two-party vote totals.

¹⁶ The data of popular votes for state legislative elections is unavailable in any one central location for elections before 1996. It would have been possible, with some difficulty, to have collected this data, but we were mindful also of the possibility that at some point certain researchers may wish to extend the index back in time before 1990. Requiring the popular vote totals would have made such an extension difficult if not impossible. One of the advantages of this index, as we see it, is its relative ease in preparation. The asymmetries introduced by using different bases (popular vote shares and seat shares) is not, in our view, very serious given the broad descriptive purposes for which the index is intended.

¹⁷ In the case of Nebraska, which has a unicameral, nonpartisan legislature, the state House and Senate values are omitted and the other variables are proportionally re-weighted.

≡ TABLE 2
 MOST REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC STATES AS MEASURED BY MPI (1998-2002)*

	1998	2000	2002
Most Republican	Idaho, 69.1 (19.1)	Idaho, 69.4 (19.4)	Idaho, 68.5 (18.5)
	Utah, 68.7 (18.7)	Kansas, 68.2 (18.2)	Alaska, 67.7 (17.7)
	Kansas, 66.3 (16.3)	Wyoming, 67.2 (17.2)	Utah 67.6 (17.6)
	Montana, 61.8 (11.8)	Utah, 64.9 (14.9)	Wyoming, 64.8 (14.8)
Most Democratic	Hawaii, 31.9 (18.1)	Mass, 31.4 (18.6)	Mass, 31.5 (18.5)
	Rhode Is., 32.8 (17.2)	Hawaii, 34.9 (15.1)	Rhode Island, 34.8 (15.2)
	West Virg, 33.2 (16.8)	Rhode Island, 34.9 (15.1)	Hawaii, 36.2 (13.8)
	Mass., 34.0 (16.0)	Maryland, 35.4 (14.6)	Maryland, 39.3 (10.7)

*The values in parentheses indicate the difference of each state's MPI score from 50, expressed as a positive numbers for ease of comparison. Thus, in 1998 Idaho had an MPI of 69.1 (19.1 points above 50) and Hawaii had an MPI of 31.9 (18.1 points below 50). This means that Idaho was slightly more Republican than Hawaii was Democratic.

the nation were like Idaho, George W. Bush would have no need for Karl Rove. No Democratic presidential nominee has carried the state since Lyndon Johnson edged Barry Goldwater by 5,000 votes in 1964. Similarly, no Democrat has been elected to the U.S. Senate since Frank Church in 1974. On average Republican presidential and senate candidates garner over 60 percent of the vote. Occasionally Idaho Democrats have been elected to the U.S. House, though none have in the last twelve years. The current state legislature has a Republican majority of 28 seats to 7 in the Senate and 54 to 16 in the House. Most statewide offices have also been held by Republicans, although the Democrats controlled the governor's mansion from 1970 to 1994—due in large part to the popularity of Cecil Andrus, a conservative Democrat, who served as the chief executive for sixteen of those years. In the 42 statewide elections since 1984, Democrats have only won thirteen—and six of these were for the minor office of Controller. In only four of these elections was the vote margin less than five percent between the two major party candidates.¹⁸ In short, no one can be surprised that Idaho has become the poster case for Republican strength.

Massachusetts has had the lowest MPI rating since 2000, making it the most Democratic state, for the two most recent biennial observations. Massachusetts, as noted, has gone Democratic in all presidential races since 1988. It gave the widest margin of any state to Bill Clinton in 1996 and the second largest to Al Gore in 2000. Its two Senators are Democrats (Ted Kennedy and John Kerry), and all ten House members are Democrats, with none receiving less than 60 percent of the vote in the 2002 election (six were unopposed). On Beacon Hill, in the state legislature, Republicans comprise less than 15 percent of the membership in both houses. Notwithstanding this fact, Massachusetts now has a Republican governor (as do a few other strongly Democratic

states); and, in a great anomaly, it has had a Republican governor since 1990, giving it one of the nation's longest consecutive periods under Republican governors.

THE MAJOR PARTY INDEX APPLIED

The Major Party Index not only allows us to describe the partisan leaning of each state every biennial year, but also to identify trends in partisan strength over time within individual states, among regions, and within the nation as a whole. The MPI sheds light on three developments in recent American history: (a) a national change from Democratic dominance in the 1980s to a Republican edge by 2002, (b) significant regional realignments in the South (in favor of the Republicans) and in New England (in favor of the Democrats), and (c) a trend toward greater consistency between partisan votes at federal and state levels.

The MPI displays the rise of the Republican Party at the national level. Appendix 1 gives the MPI value for each state at each biennial observation from 1990 to 2002. Appendix 2 displays the figures for 2002 broken down by each of the six components.¹⁹ Republican states, defined as those with a final value above 50, are shaded. A decade ago, Democrats were clearly the dominant party with an advantage in 33 states compared to only 17 for the Republicans. But over the last ten years Republicans gained states in every election except 1998. The 2002 MPI indicates that the Republican resurgence has not yet ended. When the 2002 MPI is contrasted with the results from the early 1990s, it is clear that a major partisan reversal has taken place. Now 34 states fall on the Republican side of the ledger, while only 16 remain Democratic (see Table 3).

The most significant change in the state breakdown by partisan leaning occurred in 1994. That year's elections, of

¹⁸ Todd Lochner and Gary Moncrief, "Idaho: Electoral Reform at the Margins," Election Reform: Politics and Policy Conference, 29 May 2003.

¹⁹ A data file for all the components for all states in each year is available on request.

≡ TABLE 3
STATE ADVANTAGE BY PARTY (1990-2002)

	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Republican States	20	17	27	28	27	32	34
Democratic States	30	33	23	22	23	18	16

course, were dominated by the Republicans, who won control of both chambers of Congress for the first time since 1954. Republicans also made notable gains at the state level, both in gubernatorial and state legislative elections. The change in the partisan breakdown, with Republicans gaining the MPI advantage in ten states, reinforces our confidence in the measure. While the index smoothes out the value by spreading it over a number of election contests (including some in previous years), it is sufficiently sensitive to quickly register large and broad changes.

Computing partisan advantage by the number of states, however, tells only part of the story. Any kind of national measure must also take into account the states' respective populations. While the Republicans currently enjoy an advantage in 34 states, this does not necessarily indicate that they are now the dominant party nationally. Several of the largest states remain in the Democrats' column, including three of the five most populous states: California (1), New York (3), and Illinois (5). On the other side of the ledger, seven of the Republican states are among the ten smallest states in the country, including Wyoming (50), Alaska (48), North Dakota (47), South Dakota (46), Montana (44), and New Hampshire (41).

Weighting the data to take electoral strength into account allows for a proportional examination. Going back to 2000, the year of the last presidential election, the data indicated almost perfect electoral parity between the parties. Republican states accounted for 277 of the 535 state electoral votes (51.8 percent), while the Democratic states had a total of 258 (48.2 percent). (The District of Columbia, with its three electoral votes for the presidency, is not included; the Democrats have a complete lock on the District's votes,

having won them in every election since they have been counted.) Further evidence of the parity between the parties was of course evident in George W. Bush's narrow victory, in which he won 271 electoral votes to Al Gore's 266 and in which the candidates were separated by only 540,000 popular votes in Gore's favor (the MPI is not yet sufficiently refined to take Supreme Court votes into account).

But using the 2002 Major Party Index and the new (2004) electoral college figures, the shift toward the Republicans now becomes more evident. Republicans have an advantage in states accounting for 307 electoral votes, or 57.4 percent, while Democrats control states that cumulatively carry 228 of the 535 electoral votes or 42.6 percent.²⁰

This analysis, however, is based on dichotomizing states into the simple categories of Republican and Democratic. It does not take into account the closeness of the division between the parties. Further inspection indicates that although Republicans are dominant in a majority of states, their hold on these states is not necessarily stable. Table 4 displays each state's 2002 MPI score from highest (most Republican) to lowest (most Democratic) and groups states together based on their distance from equal party control (50). Nine Republican states have a score of less than 52 (two points or less from even party control), while the same is true for only five Democratic states. Within a four-point range are twelve Republican states but only six Democratic states. Thus, despite the 34 to 16 state advantage the Republicans currently enjoy, their control of many states is far more tenuous than is the case with the Democrats.

There is a more comprehensive way to indicate national party strength by one simple measure. It is to take the MPI of each state, weight it according to its electoral strength, and then calculate a national average. This measure is the Dow Jones of political fortunes, representing in our view the single best general measure of party strength. Even if the meaning of the absolute levels may be questioned, the measurements of relative change are instructive. The index is shown in Chart 1.²¹

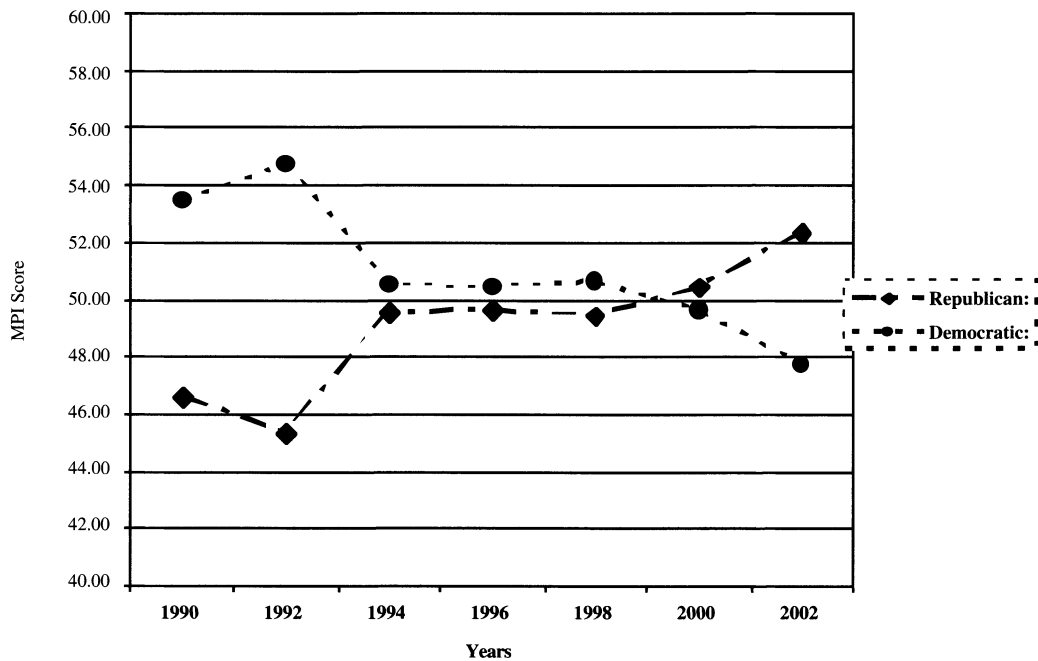
≡ TABLE 4
DEGREE OF PARTY STRENGTH BY STATE 2002

Even (50)	AL	
	Democrat	Republican
0-2	DE, KY, ME, MI, OR	GA, IA, LA, MN, MS, PA, NC, TN, WI
2-4	NY	IN, NE, MO
4-6	WA, IL, VT, CT, NJ, AR	FL, OK, SC
6-10	CA, NM, WV	SD, TX, NV, OH, AZ, VA, ND, CO MT
+10	MD, HI, RI, MA	D, AK, UT, WY, KS, NH

²⁰ This comparison is still slightly biased toward the Republicans. Electoral votes are determined by the number of Congressional districts in a state and the number of United States Senators. Congressional districts are apportioned based on population but every state has two Senators. Thus, smaller states will have more electoral votes under this system than if apportionment was determined strictly by population. Weighting the population based on electoral votes, though, is arguably more insightful because the presidency is the only office voted upon by the entire country, and the winner is determined based on the electoral college.

²¹ Despite showing two lines, there is really only one number to this index. The Democratic score is calculated as 100 minus the Republican

≡ CHART 1
NATIONAL WEIGHTED AVERAGE



The Major Party Index also highlights one of the most striking developments of American politics in recent times: strong (and partly offsetting) regional realignments. The South's realignment is the greatest.²² Table 5 displays Republican gains in the region. In 1990, the first year covered by the MPI, every Southern state except South Carolina was in the Democratic column. Since then there has been a huge shift toward the Republican Party. Every Southern state increased its MPI value, with the result that all of the states with the exception of Arkansas now show a Republican advantage (Alabama is almost dead even). A few states experienced truly dramatic shifts during these twelve years. For instance, Georgia and Texas increased their MPI values by 12.2 and 12.0, respectively.

Accounts of Southern politics have traced the outlines of this transformation. The Southern realignment towards Republicans began in the 1950s, at the presidential level, in the two Eisenhower elections. The strength of the party in presidential elections began to spread thereafter, and by the time of the three "Reagan elections" (1980, 1984, and 1988), Republicans won the electoral vote of every Southern state except Georgia in 1980 (Jimmy Carter's home state). No non-Southern Democrat has captured a Southern

State since 1968, and Al Gore, a Southern candidate, lost all of the Southern states in 2000. The realigning process worked its way gradually to representation in the Senate, the House and the governors' mansions. A threshold was crossed in the 1994 election. In 1992 a majority of both the senators and House members from the South were Democrats, as had been the case for more than a century; but after the 1994 elections, the majority in both cases were Republicans. A similar, if slower, trend has followed at the state level. In 1990 the Republicans did not control a single legislature of a single state in the South, whereas by 2002 they had a majority in 10 of the region's 22 legislative bodies. The good news for Republicans in the South is that they have gained tremendously over the past half-century and even the past decade. The bad news may be that, for national-level offices, they are nearing their peak (though substantial gains remain in the offing for some of the state legislatures).²³ The only state in the South to avoid a full tip to the GOP has been Arkansas, although it too has been moving slowly in that direction. Part—but only part—of its resistance was due to the fact that it was the home state to President Clinton in 1992 and 1996.

New England also experienced a realignment but—in contrast to the South—in favor of the Democrats. Table 6 displays the New England data. In 1990 two of the six New England States were Republican: Connecticut and New Hampshire. By 2002, only New Hampshire—the Arkansas

score. Data points are as follows: 1990: 46.55R 53.45D; 1992 45.33R, 54.67D; 1994 49.50R, 50.50D; 1996 49.58R, 50.42D; 1998 49.42R, 50.58D; 2000 50.41R, 49.59D; 2002 52.32R, 47.68 D.

²² For the purposes of this paper, the South is defined in accordance with the longstanding political science consensus grounded in V.O. Key's (1949) work: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

²³ Republicans still have gains to be realized in a few states, and a proposed redistricting plan in Texas could net a substantial number of additional House seats.

≡ TABLE 5
CHANGE OF PARTY STRENGTH IN THE SOUTH 1990-2002

South	1990	1996	2002
Alabama	42.7	47.0	50.0*
Arkansas	35.3	39.6	44.1*
Florida	48.4	51.4	55.5*
Georgia	39.3	48.1	51.5*
Louisiana	29.7	45.5	51.8*
Mississippi	42.7	50.8	51.7*
North Carolina	48.1	48.7	51.1*
South Carolina	52.3	53.8	56.0*
Tennessee	44.1	50.2	50.7*
Texas	47.6	53.2	59.6*
Virginia	47.2	52.5	58.2*

*More Republican in 2002 than 1990.

≡ TABLE 6
CHANGE OF PARTY STRENGTH IN NEW ENGLAND 1990-2002

New England	1990	1996	2002
Connecticut	51.8	44.9	44.4*
Maine	46.6	42.2	48.5
Massachusetts	40.9	40.1	31.5*
New Hampshire	61.2	53.1	61.1*
Rhode Island	32.0	33.1	34.8
Vermont	49.1	39.5	44.1*

*More Democratic in 2002 than 1990.

of New England—remained in the Republican column. More telling, however, is the degree to which the Democrats solidified their hold on the region. Four of the six states registered as more Democratic in 2002 than in 1990, with an average change of 2.7 points. Some of these shifts were significant. Massachusetts, for instance, decreased its MPI score by 9.4 points while Connecticut became more Democratic by 7.4 points. This realignment matches the ideological tilt to the left in New England. Many prominent Republicans in the region—such as Senators Lincoln Chafee, Susan Collins, and Olympia Snowe—are much more moderate than their partisan colleagues from other parts of the country.

Given the national trend towards the Republicans, Democratic gains in New England are impressive—even if they are more modest than Republican gains in the South. American politics scholars for years have considered the South to be a “special case,” but it may now be time to consider New England in that light. In their voting for Democrats, some of the New England states strongly resemble the states of the South during the heyday of one-party dominance. In fact, New England qualified in 2000 as the region that is furthest from the national average or midpoint.

A third and final trend that can be studied by our data relates to the complex relationship between national and state-level voting. This analysis proceeds by breaking the MPI down into two sub-indexes, one for federal offices and one for state offices. In compiling these sub-indexes the executive and legislative branches are weighted equally. These two indexes replicate, in effect, the intentions of the Cox Index (federal) and the Ranney Index (state). Our concern here was to study the states having a “schizophrenic” profile, which we defined as having: (a) an MPI that was of a different valence for each subindex, i.e., Republican at one level and Democratic at another, and (b) a difference between these scores of more than six points (the latter provision is introduced to eliminate states that were in a condition of essential competitiveness at both levels). A schizophrenic profile indicates what amounts to a different partisan pattern on the two levels of government. In 1990, 17 states that fell into this category, whereas by 2002 the number had decreased to only ten.²⁴ This suggests growing congruence in the partisan voting patterns between state and federal voting, and it would be interesting to see if the trend noticed here is an important movement that took place chiefly within the last decade. It remains, of course, to be seen, if a less schizophrenic electorate is also a happier and healthier one.

²⁴ The seventeen states that fell in this category in 1990 were Alabama, Alaska, California, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, and Virginia. The ten states that met this standard in 2002 were Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee.

APPENDIX I
 MAJOR PARTY INDEX BY RANK ORDER
 "ORDER = REPUBLICAN STATES (SHADED), DEMOCRATIC STATES (UNSHADED)"

1990		1992		1994		1996		1998		2000		Average 1990-2000		2002	
N. Hampshire	61.2	Utah	59.4	Utah	64.2	Utah	67.7	Idaho	69.1	Idaho	69.4	Utah	64.08	Idaho	68.5
Utah	59.6	Kansas	55.7	Idaho	63.8	Idaho	64.7	Utah	68.7	Kansas	68.2	Idaho	61.92	Alaska	67.7
Arizona	54.8	N. Hampshire	55.5	Kansas	62.7	Montana	63	Kansas	66.3	Wyoming	67.2	Kansas	61.61	Utah	67.6
Wyoming	54.6	Arizona	54.3	N. Hampshire	62.1	Kansas	62.7	Montana	61.8	Utah	64.9	Wyoming	59.8	Wyoming	64.8
Kansas	54.1	South Carolina	54.2	Wyoming	61.2	Wyoming	61.4	South Dakota	61.2	South Dakota	63.8	Arizona	57.02	Kansas	63.1
Indiana	52.9	Idaho	53.7	Ohio	59.2	Alaska	61	Wyoming	60.9	Arizona	61.2	Alaska	56.8	N. Hampshire	61.1
Delaware	52.9	Iowa	53.7	Arizona	57.5	Ohio	58.5	Arizona	58	Alaska	61.2	South Dakota	56.11	South Dakota	59.9
South Dakota	52.9	Wyoming	53.6	Alaska	56.7	North Dakota	57.5	Nebraska	57.9	Texas	58.8	N. Hampshire	55.4	Texas	59.6
Alaska	52.4	Nebraska	53.42	Wisconsin	55.2	South Dakota	56.5	Alaska	57.6	Nebraska	58.8	Ohio	55	Nevada	59.5
South Carolina	52.3	Connecticut	52.3	Virginia	54.9	Arizona	56.3	Texas	56.8	Tennessee	57.7	Montana	54.94	Ohio	58.9
Nebraska	52	Alaska	51.8	Iowa	54.3	Indiana	53.9	North Dakota	56.2	Oklahoma	56.9	Iowa	52.98	Arizona	58.3
Connecticut	51.8	Ohio	51.2	New Jersey	53.4	South Carolina	53.8	Pennsylvania	54.9	Montana	56.7	South Carolina	52.85	Virginia	58.2
Missouri	51.6	Wisconsin	51	Michigan	52.9	Iowa	53.6	Colorado	54.6	North Dakota	56.4	Nebraska	52.51	North Dakota	58
Ohio	51.4	Virginia	50.2	South Dakota	52.7	Texas	53.2	Tennessee	54.5	Ohio	55.7	Wisconsin	52.13	Colorado	57.7
Colorado	50.9	New Jersey	49.8	Montana	52.6	N. Hampshire	53.1	Ohio	54	Pennsylvania	55.6	Indiana	52.12	Montana	56.4
Idaho	50.8	South Dakota	49.6	South Carolina	52.6	Wisconsin	52.8	Florida	53.7	Colorado	55.2	Texas	51.98	South Carolina	56
Iowa	50.7	Texas	49	Indiana	52.3	Oklahoma	52.6	Nevada	53.1	Florida	54.5	Virginia	51.89	Florida	55.5
Wisconsin	49.8	Indiana	49	Illinois	51.9	Virginia	52.5	Oklahoma	52.9	Virginia	54.4	Colorado	51.78	Oklahoma	54.3
Vermont	49.1	Michigan	48.6	Florida	51.6	Colorado	51.4	Michigan	52.5	New Mexico	53.7	Michigan	51.14	Nebraska	53.7
Michigan	48.9	Montana	47.7	Colorado	51.3	Florida	51.4	Iowa	52.4	Iowa	53.2	Florida	51.09	Indiana	52.7
Florida	48.4	Colorado	47.2	Connecticut	51.3	Michigan	50.9	Indiana	52.3	Michigan	53.0	Pennsylvania	50.92	Missouri	52.5
North Carolina	48.1	Florida	46.9	Pennsylvania	51.3	Pennsylvania	50.8	Virginia	52.1	South Carolina	52.9	North Dakota	50.34	Iowa	51.9
Montana	47.9	Oregon	46.7	North Carolina	50.5	Mississippi	50.8	Wisconsin	51.5	Nevada	52.5	New Jersey	49.82	Louisiana	51.8
Pennsylvania	47.8	Illinois	45.8	Nevada	50.2	Tennessee	50.2	South Carolina	51.4	Wisconsin	52.4	Tennessee	49.34	Mississippi	51.7
Texas	47.6	California	45.7	Minnesota	49.6	Illinois	50	New Jersey	49.6	Indiana	52.2	Nevada	48.88	Minnesota	51.6
New Mexico	47.2	Mississippi	45.5	Oklahoma	49.5	New Jersey	49.8	Kentucky	49.5	N. Hampshire	52.0	Connecticut	48.85	Pennsylvania	51.5
Virginia	47.2	Pennsylvania	45.1	Oregon	49.3	Oregon	49.5	Mississippi	49.5	Missouri	51.0	Oklahoma	48.59	Georgia	51.5
Nevada	47.1	Maine	44.6	Mississippi	49.2	New Mexico	48.7	New Mexico	49.2	Louisiana	50.7	New Mexico	48.47	North Carolina	51.1
New Jersey	47	Minnesota	44.6	Washington	49.2	North Carolina	48.7	Georgia	48.9	Maine	50.2	Illinois	48.34	Wisconsin	51
California	46.9	Missouri	44.6	California	48.8	Nevada	48.5	N. Hampshire	48.5	Georgia	49.6	Mississippi	47.84	Tennessee	50.7
Maine	46.6	North Carolina	43.6	Tennessee	48.8	Minnesota	48.4	Illinois	47.9	Mississippi	49.4	North Carolina	47.75	Alabama	50
Illinois	46.3	Delaware	43.4	New Mexico	48.6	Kentucky	48.2	Missouri	47.1	New Jersey	49.3	Missouri	47.66	Michigan	49.6
Oregon	45.7	New Mexico	43.4	Delaware	48.1	Georgia	48.1	Connecticut	47	North Carolina	49.0	Minnesota	47.3	Oregon	49.6
Minnesota	45.5	North Dakota	42.1	Maine	47.6	California	47.9	Minnesota	46.9	Minnesota	48.8	Delaware	47.17	Delaware	48.9
Washington	45	Vermont	41.9	Nebraska	46.5	Washington	47.4	Maine	46.8	Alabama	48.4	Oregon	46.63	Maine	48.5
North Dakota	44.4	Alabama	41.9	Texas	46.4	Alabama	47	Alabama	46.7	Illinois	48.0	Maine	46.33	Kentucky	48.2

continued on next page

APPENDIX 1 (continued)

	1990		1992		1994		1996		1998		2000	Average 1990-2000		2002	
Tennessee	44.1	Nevada	41.9	New York	46	Nebraska	46.5	North Carolina	46.5	Arkansas	47.6	California	45.38	New York	46.1
Alabama	42.7	Tennessee	40.8	Missouri	45.8	Delaware	46.2	New York	46.2	New York	47.5	Alabama	45.3	Washington	45.6
Mississippi	42.7	Kentucky	40.5	North Dakota	45.4	Missouri	46	Delaware	45.1	Delaware	47.3	Washington	45.17	Illinois	45.3
New York	42.4	Georgia	40.1	Alabama	45	Louisiana	45.5	Washington	44.8	Kentucky	46.2	Kentucky	45.04	Vermont	45.1
Kentucky	41.8	Oklahoma	39.7	Kentucky	43.9	Connecticut	44.9	Louisiana	44.7	Connecticut	45.7	Georgia	44.98	Connecticut	44.4
Massachusetts	40.9	Washington	39.1	Georgia	43.9	New York	43.2	Arkansas	44.6	Washington	45.5	New York	43.95	New Jersey	44.1
Oklahoma	39.9	New York	38.5	Massachusetts	42.3	Maine	42.2	Oregon	44	Oregon	44.6	Vermont	41.6	Arkansas	44.1
Georgia	39.3	Massachusetts	37.3	Maryland	41.2	Maryland	40.6	California	42.1	Vermont	43.4	Louisiana	39.67	New Mexico	43.9
Maryland	38.4	Maryland	35.1	Vermont	40.3	Massachusetts	40.1	Vermont	39.5	California	40.8	Arkansas	38.16	California	42.5
Arkansas	35.3	Louisiana	33.5	Rhode Island	36.6	Arkansas	36.9	Maryland	36.1	West Virginia	36.0	Maryland	37.79	West Virginia	40.4
West Virginia	34.1	Rhode Island	32.6	West Virginia	34.8	Vermont	35.4	Massachusetts	34	Maryland	35.4	Massachusetts	37.68	Maryland	39.3
Rhode Island	32	Arkansas	31.3	Louisiana	34.1	West Virginia	35.1	West Virginia	33.2	Rhode Island	34.9	West Virginia	33.99	Hawaii	36.2
Hawaii	31.5	West Virginia	30.7	Arkansas	33.1	Rhode Island	33.1	Rhode Island	32.8	Hawaii	34.9	Rhode Island	33.67	Rhode Island	34.8
Louisiana	29.7	Hawaii	29.4	Hawaii	32.1	Hawaii	32.7	Hawaii	31.9	Massachusetts	31.4	Hawaii	32.09	Massachusetts	31.5

APPENDIX 2
2002 MAJOR PARTY INDEX (PERCENT REPUBLICAN)

	President	Governor	U.S. House	U.S. Sen	State Sen	State House	Score
Idaho	70.9%	57.4%	65.1%	68.9%	80.0%	77.1%	68.5
Alaska	67.9%	57.8%	81.3%	83.8%	57.8%	67.5%	67.7
Utah	71.7%	59.6%	60.5%	66.8%	75.9%	74.6%	67.6
Wyoming	71.0%	49.0%	62.1%	74.9%	66.7%	75.0%	64.8
Kansas	61.1%	46.0%	68.1%	83.7%	75.0%	64.0%	63.1
New Hampshire	50.7%	60.6%	59.2%	61.4%	75.0%	70.3%	61.1
South Dakota	61.6%	57.5%	54.0%	43.4%	73.5%	70.0%	59.9
Texas	61.0%	59.1%	50.2%	61.5%	66.3%	58.6%	59.6
Nevada	51.9%	75.6%	60.1%	54.0%	61.9%	45.2%	59.5
Ohio	52.0%	60.2%	57.6%	59.6%	66.7%	62.6%	58.9
Arizona	52.9%	49.0%	55.2%	85.8%	56.7%	65.0%	58.3
Virginia	54.0%	47.4%	63.2%	76.2%	57.5%	66.3%	58.2
North Dakota	64.6%	55.0%	47.6%	37.1%	70.0%	70.2%	58.0
Colorado	54.5%	65.2%	55.3%	58.5%	51.4%	56.9%	57.7
Montana	63.6%	52.0%	66.0%	42.7%	58.0%	53.0%	56.4
South Carolina	58.2%	53.0%	61.8%	50.9%	54.3%	58.9%	56.0
Florida	50.0%	56.6%	56.0%	42.5%	65.0%	67.5%	55.5
Oklahoma	61.1%	49.6%	59.6%	64.5%	41.7%	47.5%	54.3
Nebraska	65.5%	71.5%	88.6%	67.0%			53.7
Indiana	58.0%	42.4%	56.3%	51.4%	64.0%	49.0%	52.7
Missouri	51.7%	49.5%	53.8%	49.8%	58.8%	55.2%	52.5
Iowa	49.8%	45.8%	55.0%	57.0%	58.0%	54.0%	51.9
Louisiana	53.9%	67.8%	64.7%	40.8%	33.3%	32.4%	51.8
Mississippi	57.8%	49.4%	51.6%	83.8%	34.6%	29.4%	51.7
Minnesota	48.7%	55.0%	47.8%	49.2%	46.9%	61.2%	51.6
Pennsylvania	47.9%	45.5%	55.1%	58.7%	58.0%	53.7%	51.5
Georgia	56.0%	52.7%	53.8%	46.5%	53.6%	40.8%	51.5
North Carolina	56.5%	47.2%	55.9%	51.2%	44.0%	50.0%	51.1
Wisconsin	49.9%	47.8%	56.0%	43.2%	54.5%	58.6%	51.0
Tennessee	51.9%	48.4%	53.1%	61.1%	45.5%	45.5%	50.7
Alabama	57.5%	50.1%	54.6%	61.4%	28.6%	40.0%	50.0
Michigan	47.6%	48.0%	46.6%	43.9%	57.9%	57.3%	49.6
Oregon	49.8%	48.6%	43.9%	47.5%	50.0%	58.3%	49.6
Delaware	43.1%	40.1%	73.0%	42.6%	38.1%	70.7%	48.9
Maine	47.4%	46.8%	41.7%	63.7%	48.6%	45.6%	48.5
Kentucky	57.7%	26.8%	68.9%	57.4%	55.3%	35.0%	48.2
New York	37.2%	59.7%	41.3%	42.6%	59.7%	31.3%	46.1
Washington	47.0%	40.5%	46.1%	45.8%	51.0%	46.9%	45.6
Illinois	43.8%	46.6%	46.6%	45.2%	45.8%	44.1%	45.3
Vermont*	44.6%	51.2%	33.2%	47.9%	36.7%	51.7%	45.1
Connecticut	40.7%	56.1%	47.8%	34.2%	41.7%	37.7%	44.4
New Jersey	41.8%	42.5%	42.1%	46.7%	50.0%	45.6%	44.1
Arkansas	52.9%	53.3%	42.8%	44.8%	22.9%	30.0%	44.1
New Mexico	50.0%	41.0%	37.7%	51.7%	41.5%	38.6%	43.9
California	43.7%	46.8%	41.7%	42.1%	35.0%	40.0%	42.5
West Virginia	53.1%	48.5%	29.8%	28.7%	29.4%	32.0%	40.4
Maryland	41.4%	51.7%	35.1%	33.1%	29.8%	30.5%	39.3
Hawaii	40.2%	52.3%	33.6%	21.8%	20.0%	29.4%	36.2
Rhode Island	34.2%	54.7%	30.4%	39.8%	15.8%	14.9%	34.8
Massachusetts	35.3%	52.6%	13.1%	33.7%	15.0%	14.5%	31.5

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