CHAPTER 3

The Setting: Political "Districts"
in the U.S. House and Senate

The conventional wisdom is that Senate and House represent a host of differences in settings, institutional arrangements, candidates, campaigns, and voters. But is the conventional wisdom regarding Senate and House elections an accurate description of reality? One might suspect that it is not: Westlye (1983) points out that some differences between Senate and House challengers (e.g., Abramowitz 1980; Hinckley 1980a; Mann and Wolfinger 1980) are an artifact of sample design. In fact, many Senate challengers look just like House challengers. I show in this chapter that differences in political settings also have to be reexamined. When arrayed on a series of demographic, media market, and partisan measures, many congressional districts look like states while many states look like congressional districts. This means that neither senators nor House members automatically confront particularly more "complex" arrays of political interests when they run for office. States and congressional districts *are* different but not in the ways that might have been expected.

This chapter is primarily descriptive, but the results form the foundation for all subsequent analyses. My working hypothesis, outlined in chapter 2, is that Senate and House districts are *not* electoral settings. State/congressional district is not a dichotomy but a way of identifying two *distributions.* Each has a midpoint and a spread, as any distribution does. A complete comparison of the political settings in the House and Senate must take into account both aspects of the distributions. These comparisons will reveal whether or not institution and setting are collinear. If they are, then no statistical analysis, no matter how creative, can hope to disentangle their relative effects. Overlaps, on the other hand, provide an opportunity to test the political-setting explanation of elections. Under the strongest version of the political-setting argument, when I select out similar political districts, regardless of the institution, candidate quality, campaign spending, voter information, and voter decision rules ought to look quite similar.

I compare states and congressional districts on those politically charged demographic characteristics (race, income, education, occupation, and ethnicity) that form long standing cleavages in national and local American politics. I improve on previous comparisons by keeping these demographic categories separate rather than lumping them into a summary measure.[1] To these I add a set of indicators that are surrogates for ease of information dissemination in the district: population density and television market efficiency.

With these measures in hand, I ask how different, and how similar, states and congressional districts really are. States and congressional districts turn out to be very similar on measures of demographic diversity. States are not more heterogeneous than congressional districts. Instead, the most homogeneous *and* heterogeneous election settings are congressional districts. Where states and congressional districts do differ is in the information environment and partisan balance. Congressional districts are on average much smaller and denser, with less efficient media markets and skewed numbers of Republicans or Democrats.

In the next section, I describe the measures that I use to characterize congressional districts and states. The reasons *why* we would care about diversity were explicated in chapter 2, especially in the section entitled "Politics and the Locality."

Diversity, Partisan Balance, and Media Market Efficiency

Any explanation of the political process must begin with a description of the terrain. Individual actions—running for office, selecting a campaign strategy, spending campaign funds, learning about politics, and choosing among competing candidates—take place within an electoral setting. For candidates, this terrain is what Hershey (1984) calls "the environment of political campaigns." One aspect of the political setting is the number of distinct political interests in a electoral district, what I operationalize as political diversity. A second feature of the setting that constrains campaigners is the ease or difficulty of communicating political information. I measure this by the efficiency of media markets. Finally, I add the balance of partisans in the district—how skewed the district is toward Democrats or Republicans. While not a comprehensive summary of the ways that one might think about the political setting, no major categories are excluded from this survey.

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1. Grofman, Koetzle, and Brunell (1997) and Lee and Oppenheimer (1999) independently reached this same conclusion. They allow different kinds of demographic cleavages to have differential impacts of competitiveness.

Diversity of Interests in States and Congressional Districts

There is a multitude of demographic divisions that might matter to Senate and House candidates. I reduce this to a manageable set by means of two decisions. The first is guided by methodological considerations. Reliable opinion measures for congressional districts are unavailable. Ideally, I would have survey data on ideological, partisan, and policy opinions in states and congressional districts, but these are only available for states (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). Good measures of public opinion within congressional districts either do not exist or are difficult to obtain.

I substitute *demographic diversity* as a surrogate for diversity of interests. Demographic categories tap into at least some part of the way that members of Congress, and the Senate, view their constituencies. Fenno claims that some part of "home-style" activity is oriented toward the "geographic constituency, [a] district's internal makeup using political science's most familiar demographic and political variables: socioeconomic structure, ideology, ethnicity, residential patterns, religion, partisanship, stability, diversity, etc." (1978, 2). Bond et al. (1985), Bond (1983), and Bullock and Brady (1983) have all used a summary measure of heterogeneity based on a set of demographic measures under the assumption that demographic characteristics "provide the basis for political cleavages" (Bond et al. 1985, 516). Others use a weighted set of demographic categories in order to simulate or otherwise characterize public interests in congressional districts. A combination of race, income, some measure of social class, education, urban/rural, and sectionalism are most often used. For all their hoary quality, race, income, class, and education perform admirably in summarizing the political cleavages politicians face.[2] I select a small set of demographic categories in order to characterize states and congressional districts as more or less diverse.

The second decision is what categories to include. I choose a small set of characteristics that reflect long-standing political divisions in American society: social class, race, ethnicity, and urban/rural. This has the advantage of both reducing the number of categories and making it less likely that I will be distracted by the idiosyncracies of any one election.[3]

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2. Jackson and King (1989) use income levels as a surrogate for opinions on tax policy and education as a surrogate for political informedness. In a different vein, Page et al. (1984) use regression to determine a set of weights to apply to demographic measures in order to simulate district opinion. Kingdon (1968), Froman (1963), and Turner and Schneier (1970) all characterize districts using a small set of demographic and party indicators such as metro/rural, ethnicity, race, sectionalism, and competitiveness.

3. The list of characteristics selected by Grofman, Koetzle, and Brunell (1997) matches the list I chose.

The first cluster of variables comprise the components of socioeconomic status or social class: income, education, and occupation. Class divisions have not been as great in the United States as in other advanced industrial democracies (Beck 1997, chap. 6), but they still help us to differentiate Democratic and Republican convention delegates (Stone et al. 1990) and voters (Beck 1997). In general, higher SES is associated with higher levels of voter turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993) and political activism (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Finally, SES bears some relationship, tenuous perhaps, to New Deal economic and social policies, a set of issues that has dominated American elections in the postwar era (Rosenstone 1983).

Race has played a central role in American politics for the half century since the New Deal (Rosenstone 1983) and beyond (Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Racial divisions of all kinds (white vs. black, black vs. Hispanic, white vs. Hispanic) have been regularly prominent in national and local elections. Controversy surrounding the 1982 Civil Rights Act and 1992 redistricting have focused specifically on the legitimacy of racial gerrymandering and racial voting (Grofman and Davidson 1992). Relatedly, white ethnicity has remained an important consideration for congressional candidates. In many urban centers, Polish, German, Irish, and other ethnic groups retain distinctive patterns of voting (Pinderhughes 1987, chap. 4; Gove and Masotti 1982). I tap into the racial and ethnic dimension in two ways, first by measuring racial diversity (the categories are white, black, Hispanic, and Asian American) and second by measuring the percentage of foreign stock, in an attempt to reflect white ethnic diversity.

Measuring Diversity

For theoretical reasons, means and medians are not the best way to compare states and congressional districts. Means do not tell us whether there are states that look like congressional districts or vice versa. Second, my conceptual construct is diversity of interest. I want to measure diversity of a setting in a way that reflects both the midpoint and the spread of the demographic distribution.[4] Thus, I need some estimate of the level of variation *within* an electoral district. Two estimators are employed here. Variance is an appropriate measure of dispersion for continuous variables (such as income and education). A derived measure of variation is applicable to nominal variables. I refer to this derived measure as a diversity score.

The derived measure comes from the work of Sullivan (1973) and has been employed by Bond (1983), Bond, et al. (1985), Bullock and Brady (1983),

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4. A more technical treatment of this topic is contained in appendix A.

Grofman, Koetzle, and Brunnell (1997), and Koetzle (1998). All of these authors (save Koetzle) calculate a summary measure of heterogeneity, lumping race, income, occupation, and education together. I take a different tack. There is no good reason to pool ethnic, economic, and residential diversity. It is quite possible that the political import of racial diversity, for example, is different from that of economic diversity (in fact, partisan differences on class are far smaller than partisan divisions on race). Therefore, I present both the summary measure for comparison with Bond's calculations and separate diversity scores for racial, occupational, foreign stock, and urban/rural diversity. Since these are measures of variation *within* settings, I am also able to calculate variation in the diversity scores across the population of settings. With a mean diversity score and a variance in diversity scores across all states and congressional districts, I can test for the likelihood that the state and congressional district distributions have different means.

Does diversity mask more than it reveals? In a recent study of Senate elections, Lee and Oppenheimer (1999) claim that it does. First, they believe that diversity measures contradict our common sense because states such as Mississippi rank as more diverse than Pennsylvania (chap. 4). They also criticize the limited variation in the diversity scores, ranging from only .40 to .55 in a recent updating (Morgan and Wilson 1990, see also appendix A, table A.3). Finally, the repeated failure of diversity scores to explain electoral dynamics calls their utility into question. I disagree with Lee and Oppenheimer on each count. First, remember that the researcher chooses what to include in the diversity score and how to calculate it. In this book, I have chosen to keep the scores "unpacked." Treating all political divisions equally is misleading. This does not mean, however, that I need to abandon a focus on diversity.

Second, and related, the range and standard deviation of the summary score depend on what the researcher chooses to include. As I demonstrate in appendix A, both mathematically and empirically, if you keep a large number of demographic categories, you increase the range of diversity scores. Since the diversity score represents the probability that a random pair of individuals will differ on any combination of characteristics, then the linkage between the number of potential categories and the range of the scale is obvious. The more possible variations that are possible, the probability that a randomly selected pair will match is lower and the variance between relatively homogeneous settings and relatively heterogeneous settings is larger. Besides, a limited range does not in and of itself indict the diversity scores. It may be that small movements on the scale have large political consequences.

Since scholars have typically chosen a limited set of variables (race, occupation, urban residence, and foreign stock) and have collapsed across categories, it is not surprising that states such as Mississippi and Hawaii rank high

on a diversity measure. This is almost completely a product of equal racial and urban/rural divisions in these two states. Mississippi is more diverse than Pennsylvania if by diverse you mean the likelihood that a pair of individuals will differ in terms of race or type of residence. Arguably, this kind of variation is quite important to campaigners. Thus, the drawbacks quite rightly pointed out by Lee and Oppenheimer are not a drawback of the theory but rather of the way scholars have constructed and used the diversity measure.

Partisan Balance

The number of Democrats, Republicans, and independents in a district is, prima facie, central to the level of political competition. Partisan balance requires no special metric. A measure should indicate the level of competitiveness between the major political parties and be purged of incumbency advantage and national forces. Survey measures of partisanship and vote choice would be ideal but are unavailable for congressional districts and states. Election results must be used. That raises a second question: which results? A running average of the last four results is a good alternative for congressional districts.[5] This is a long enough period to smooth out spikes due to particularly odd years. It includes two off-year and two on-year elections. For the Senate, I cannot average the past four elections, since that would necessitate averaging 24 years of data, far too long a time during which to claim some average level of partisan support. Instead, I take the mean normal vote score across all the congressional districts in the state and use this as statewide partisan balance.[6]

Measuring the Information Environment: Media Market Efficiency

In chapter 2, I argued that the ease with which political information can be disseminated in an area is a second important feature of political settings. In locations where media markets and electoral districts are highly contiguous,

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5. A problem with these variables is that they are based on congressional elections and therefore combine partisan with incumbency advantage. One way to overcome this problem for states would be to code and average election results from a wider variety of elections (e.g., Bond et al. 1985). Palfrey and Erikson (1993) suggest a measure that is purged of incumbency advantage. This measure is only defined for districts where incumbents faced challengers, thus significantly reducing the House sample by 100 cases, nor have they developed a state equivalent of the measure.

6. A partisan vote measure is first calculated, running from 0.0 (pure Democratic district or state) to 1.0 (pure Republican). My partisan balance measure runs from 0.0 to 1.0, where 0.0 represents a completely non-competitive district (either 100 percent Republican or Democratic normal vote) and 1.0 represents a perfectly divided district (essentially the vote measure folded about its midpoint, then multiplied by two.)

or where advertising (or other distribution) costs are lower, we would expect elections, ceteris paribus, to be more competitive.[7]

Potential routes for information dissemination include television, radio, newspaper, and interpersonal communication. Data are readily available for only one: television markets. Therefore, I rely on information about television markets in order to describe media structure in political settings. My measures of the information environment reflect two broad features of the television market that affect the strategic thinking of political campaigners: cost and efficiency.[8] As an additional, indirect measure of the communication environment, I compare population density in states and congressional districts.

The drawbacks to this decision are obvious. Although television market structure may be a valid standard of comparison for states, it is a much less obvious one for congressional districts. Senate candidates rely on television for many reasons. It is an efficient means of communicating with large, widely scattered populations (Jacobson 1997; Fenno 1982). Senate candidates have more money to spend and thus a greater ability to spend on television advertising. Senators receive more free television coverage than representatives do (Fenno 1982; Hess 1986; Foote and Weber 1984). Previous research has shown that the efficiency of television markets affects how much Senate candidates spend and how much voters learn (Stewart 1989a; Stewart and Reynolds 1990).

More surprising, perhaps, is a parallel finding for congressional districts (Campbell, Alford, and Henry 1984; Niemi, Powell, and Bicknell 1986; Fowler and McClure 1989, chap. 2). One explanation is provided by Niemi and his colleagues: television market efficiency predicts information levels because television markets serve as surrogates for other media markets (radio and newspaper): "the correlation between newspaper-district congruence and television-district congruence is probably very high" (1986, 195). Other researchers respond that newspapers are the main source of information in House campaigns. Goldenberg and Traugott stress the relative infrequency of television advertising in House campaigns (1984, 117). Westlye suggests that even in Senate races information dissemination occurs mostly through newspapers (1986, chap. 3). It would be reassuring if television markets are surrogates for newspaper markets. My suspicion is that they are not. This does not explain how the findings of Goldenberg and Traugott and Niemi can be reconciled. Nor does it answer the question of whether using television market data is a

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7. I am grateful to Charles Stewart for substantial help with this section.

8. The formulas used to calculate the cost, contiguity, and dominance measures are contained in appendix A.

meaningful way to characterize congressional districts. Practical considerations dominate this decision. A measure based on television markets is the only alternative available for all congressional districts and states. I use cost and efficiency measures of the television markets for states and congressional districts.[9]

Television markets are not the only way to represent the information environment. A different angle on information dissemination is this: the more dense a district is, the more likely it is that a variety of communications channels will emerge, including traditional mass media, local media sources, and interpersonal communication. I also compare states and congressional districts on population density. My assumption is that the more dense a district is, the easier it will be for candidates to reach a large number of voters. They can afford to be relatively less active in dense districts.

Similar or Different? Comparing States and Congressional Districts

How similar or how different are states and congressional districts on measures of demographic diversity, media market efficiency, population density, and partisan division? It comes as no surprise that states, on average, are larger and more populous than congressional districts. Still, greater size does not necessarily translate into greater diversity. As I will demonstrate, unlike the archetypal description, on most demographic measures there are substantial overlaps, with *both* the most homogeneous and most heterogeneous districts being congressional districts. At the same time, states have substantially more efficient media markets. Finally, Senate candidates face a more balanced partisan environment. The consequence of this latter difference could be substantial. Even if states and congressional districts are not distinctive demographically, they may be politically. In a final section, I attempt to sort out this finding and discuss its potential consequences for campaigns and elections.

A Most Similar Comparison: Demographic Diversity

The geography of congressional districts is designed to encourage more personalized and localized politics. Congressional districts are much smaller and

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9. *Contiguity* represents the relative degree of overlap between the electoral district and the Arbitron area of dominant influence (ADI), a categorization of counties as television markets. Contiguity runs from zero, or one ADI for every county, to one, or a perfect overlap between district and ADI. *Dominance* represents the degree to which a district is served by a few (a single ADI results in a value or 1.0) or many (closer to zero) ADIs. Finally, *per capita cost* and *average cost* are measures that represent the relative costs of advertising on the six o'clock news across a district. See appendix A for more complete information.

less populous than the average state. The smallest state comprises more than a thousand square miles, while the smallest congressional district is only seven. State populations are a magnitude larger. The size difference, in particular, looms large. Nonetheless, as shown in the last two columns of table 3.1, differences in size do not necessarily translate directly into more diverse constituencies.

On all measures, a congressional district is both maximally and minimally diverse (at least as reflected in the minimum, maximum, means, and standard deviations). The variation among congressional districts is larger than the variation among states (see col. 3). States are not substantially more heterogeneous than congressional districts when the measure of heterogeneity relies on racial, occupational, percentage urban, income, or educational variability. On all measures, states are slightly more diverse than congressional districts, but the differences are neither statistically nor substantively significant. When appeals to heterogeneity are made in order to account for Senate/House differences, political scientists should be aware that *demographic diversity* cannot be what is meant.

As I have argued at multiple points, descriptive statistics, particularly the mean, can be deceptive. Do these results hold up when I use a more nuanced measure of diversity? I answer this question in some detail by looking at racial diversity. I deal much more quickly with the other characteristics since the conclusions are exactly the same: there is little or no basis upon which to argue that states are uniquely diverse political settings. In this case, at least, the simple descriptive statistics were not deceptive at all.

Figure 3.1 is a histogram of racial diversity for states and congressional districts (CDs). The horizontal axis of this figure represents the diversity score calculated for either a state or a congressional district. On the vertical axis, I have plotted the percentage of total election districts (435 congressional districts or 50 states) at that level of diversity.[10] Below this, I report the mean variance and standard deviation (of the diversity measure) for states and congressional districts, and a test statistic that tells whether the two distributions are statistically distinguishable.[11] Empirically, the most diverse districts tend to be congregated in urban areas with high concentrations of both blacks and Latinos (Los Angeles, New York, Dallas, and Houston) as well as cities with

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10. The diversity measure can be interpreted as the probability that a randomly selected pair of individuals would differ on the characteristic in question.

11. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test compares means and variances of two samples. The associated probability level tests whether the Senate and House variances are *the same.* Thus, a high *p*-value implies a high probability that the cases (states and congressional districts) are drawn from identical (or at least similar) distributions (Blalock 1979, 266–69).

TABLE 3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Election Districts

Characteristic		Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
		As of 1970			
Population	States	3,702,914	3,915,537	302,173	19,953,134
	CDs	464,769	27,296	302,173	617,761
Black	States	0.082	0.094	0	0.37
	CDs	0.105	0.144	0	0.889
Blue collar	States	0.353	0.06	0.21	0.468
	CDs	0.361	0.079	0.073	0.592
Urban	States	0.529	0.263	0	0.927
	CDs	0.681	0.343	0	0.1
Income	States	9,166.28	1,473.21	6,068	12,441
	CDs	9,630.04	2,121.00	826	17,102
High school	States	0.531	0.081	0.378	0.673
	CDs	0.522	0.106	0.246	0.803
		As of 1980			
Population	States	4,518,143	4,715,042	401,851	23,667,902
	CDs	519,327	25,040	316,619	690,768
Black	States	0.091	0.092	0.002	0.352
	CDs	0.114	0.149	0.001	0.921
Blue collar	States	0.319	0.051	0.227	0.416
	CDs	0.322	0.072	0.112	0.524
Urban	States	0.506	0.204	0.15	0.847
	CDs	0.613	0.328	0	1
Income	States	16,778.00	2,415.00	12,271	24,967
	CDs	17,105.00	3,672.00	7,461	29,806
High school	States	0.693	0.067	0.562	0.818
	CDs	0.682	0.09	0.41	0.874

relatively high proportions of Asians (Honolulu, San Francisco, and Los Angeles). An expert observer's impressions of at least one district corroborates the diversity measure. For example, in the 1980s California's Thirty-First District ranked as the most racially diverse in the country. There was a 67 percent chance that a randomly drawn pair of individuals would be of different races. *Politics in America* agreed, describing the Thirty-First District as "a working-class suburban district with more ethnic and racial diversity than is found in almost any district in the state" (Duncan 1989, 188).

TABLE 3.1. (continued)

Characteristic		Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
			As of 1990		
Population	States	4,960,979	5,454,770	453,588	29,706,021
	CDs	568,886	47,326	57,184	970,902
Black	States	8.646	8.384	0.3	31.6
	CDs	11.055	15.295	0.1	72.4
Blue collar	States	26.608	4.14	20.5	1,330.4
	CDs	26.663	6.989	8.5	51.6
Urban	States	67.404	15.698	28.7	92.6
	CDs	75.012	22.073	13.1	100
Income	States	34,332.24	6,054.34	24,448	49,199
	CDs	35,983.52	9,397.56	16,683	64,199
High school	States	31.992	10.435	15	98.5
	CDs	30.099	6.263	15.4	60.8

Source: 1970, 1980, and 1990 Censuses.
Note: The congressional district data are post-redistricting (1972, 1982, and 1992). The figures do not take into account lines that may have been redrawn later in the decade. Income figures represent median income.

It is apparent from the two distributions shown in figure 3.1 that states are not more racially diverse than congressional districts are. The most noticeable characteristics are the large overlap and the fat right tail of the congressional district distribution. The tail indicates that, among states and congressional districts, congressional districts are the most racially diverse. Of the 50 most diverse political settings, only two (Mississippi and Hawaii) are states. The mean values of racial diversity bear out the same point. The average congressional district is marginally more diverse on race than the average state. Overall, the two distributions are statistically indistinguishable.[12]

A series of additional comparisons reinforce this conclusion: states are just marginally more heterogeneous than congressional districts. As shown in figures 3.2 through 3.5, states contain a wider variety of occupational groups, show more variability in urban/rural residents, and vary more in income and

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12. The means reported in each figure are not weighted by population size. I treat 50 states and 435 congressional districts as two independent samples of political settings. Although the assumption of independence is obviously incorrect, it is reasonable here. The whole point is to determine whether states, as a sample of political settings, differ from congressional districts as a sample of political settings. If I weigh the state values for diversity by their relative population sizes, the means for the 50 states and the 435 congressional districts would be identical.
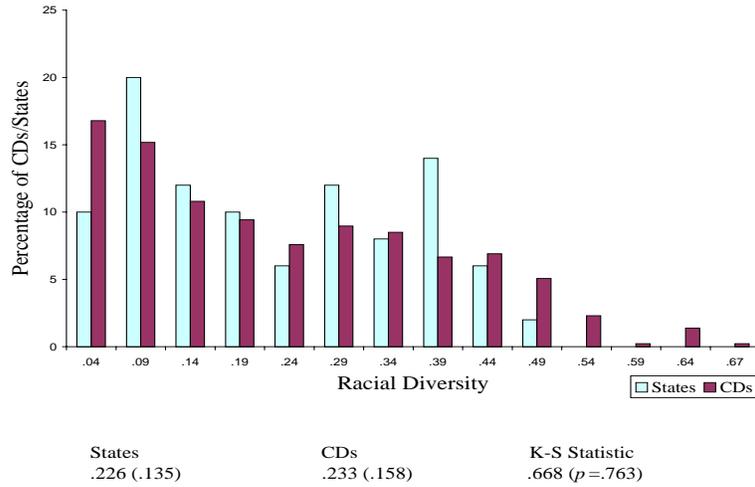
States	CDs	K-S Statistic
.226 (.135)	.233 (.158)	.668 (p =.763)

Fig. 3.1. Diversity in racial makeup, states and congressional districts

education levels. Congressional district populations, on average, vary more only on measures of racial diversity and foreign stock. On two summary measures, state populations are more diverse.[13] The tails of all the histograms are dominated by congressional districts, while states cluster in the center. The most heterogeneous and homogeneous political settings are congressional districts, not states.

It is misleading to claim that Senate candidates as a group face more heterogeneous electorates than House candidates do. This assertion overlooks an important conceptual feature of heterogeneity: it has a variance as well as a mean. These measures (race, income, education, etc.) are distributions with significant overlaps across these institutions. Put another way, heterogeneous/homogeneous and state/congressional district are not collinear. Some Senate states look more like congressional districts, and some congressional districts look like states. This means that it is possible to disentangle the political impact of district diversity from the impact of institutional makeup. What remains to be seen, though, is whether this conclusion—some differences with substantial overlaps—holds for other aspects of the political setting.

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13. These results, which update the figures reported in Bond 1983, are reported in table A.3 in appendix A.
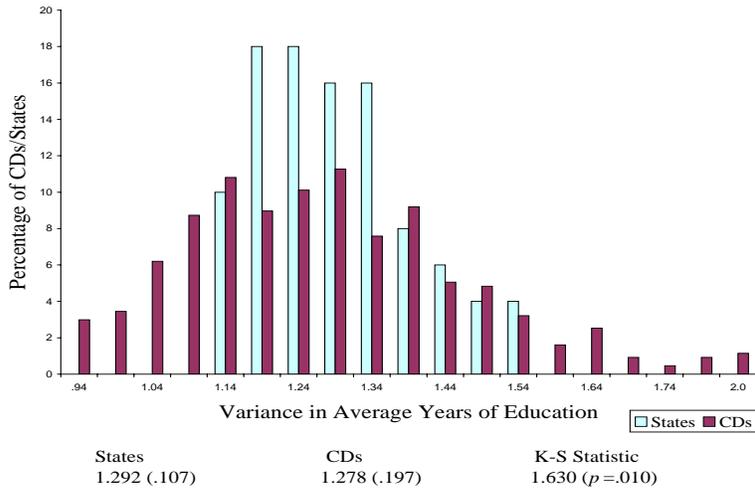
States
1.292 (.107)

CDs
1.278 (.197)

K-S Statistic
1.630 (*p* =.010)

Fig. 3.2. Variance in education levels, states and congressional districts

States
18.571 (1.699)

CDs
18.327 (1.840)

K-S Statistic
.567 (*p* =.905)
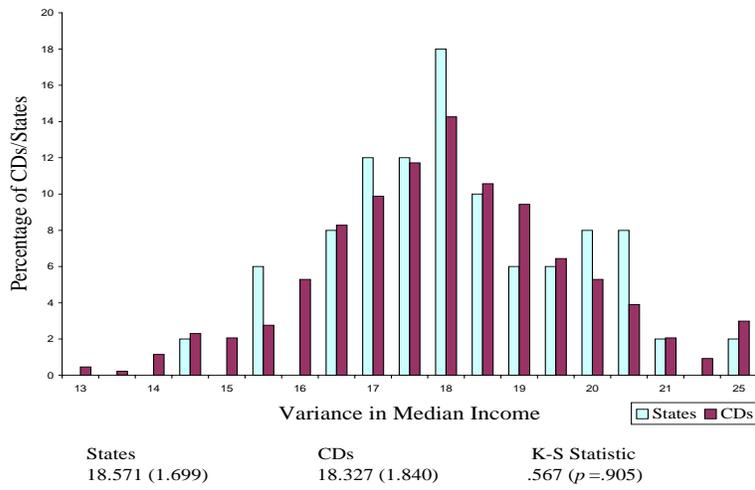
Fig. 3.3. Variance in income levels, states and congressional districts

States   CDs   K-S Statistic
.485 (.039)   .469 (.063)   1.221 ($p = .102$)
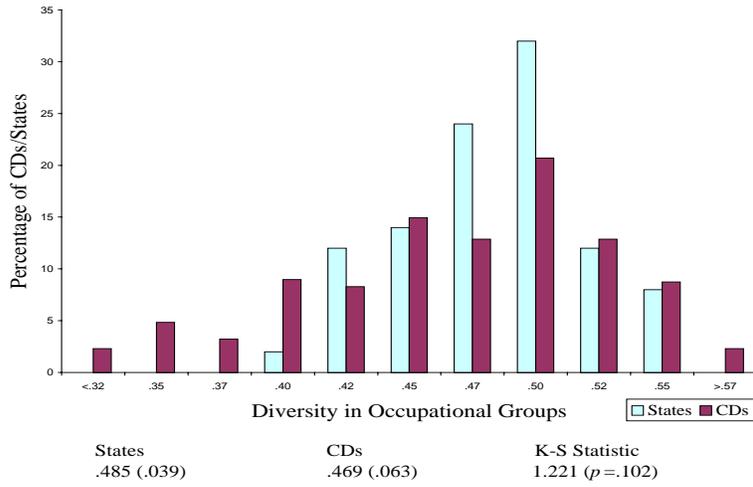
Fig. 3.4. Diversity in occupation, states and congressional districts

States   CDs   K-S Statistic
.080 (.062)   .107 (.005)   1.107 ($p = .172$)
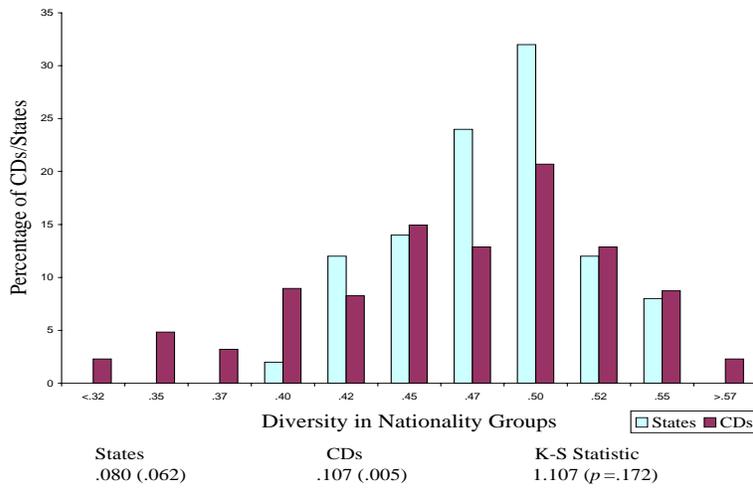
Fig. 3.5. Diversity in nationalities, states and congressional districts

A Most Different Comparison: Media Markets and Partisan Balance

In contrast to demographic diversity, the media markets of states and congressional districts differ dramatically. In a congressional district, it is relatively easy to decide in which market to advertise—most are enveloped in a single media market (ADI).[14] However, free media time is difficult to obtain for members of the House, since high dominance is paired with low contiguity: the congressional district population makes up a small proportion of the total ADI population. For states, the situation is reversed: states are seldom dominated by a single ADI, but the contiguity of ADI and state borders is generally quite high. However, there are some notable exceptions. A few states have dominance scores that place them squarely among congressional districts and a very few district boundaries are highly contiguous with ADI boundaries. Advertising costs follow the same pattern. It is much more expensive per capita to advertise in congressional districts than it is in states. Yet the advertising costs in a few states (e.g., Delaware and Wyoming) are quite high. The only measure of the information market that shows substantial overlap between the House and the Senate is population density.

If you are campaigning for a seat in the House, it is often quite easy to decide in which television market to advertise. Forty-eight percent of the congressional districts (206 out of 432, excluding Hawaii and Alaska) have dominance scores of 1.0 (the congressional district is enveloped within a single ADI). Another third have scores ranging from .50 to .98 (see fig. 3.6). States are rarely dominated by a single ADI. Fifty percent of states have dominance scores ranging from .14 to .32, with an overall mean almost one-half the congressional district mean. States show a wider range of variation than congressional districts do. Six states have dominance scores greater than .70. All this might lead me to conclude that House candidates rely on television advertising more the Senate candidates, since the House markets are usually dominated by a single or small number of media markets.

This conclusion is obviously wrong because it fails to take into account other aspects of television markets: contiguity and cost. The population of a typical congressional district makes up a small proportion of the typical ADI. If I were to fold the dominance scale at its midpoint, I would obtain a rough approximation of contiguity (fig. 3.7). Congressional districts are not very contiguous with ADI boundaries (mean contiguity score = .264); states, in contrast, are highly contiguous with ADI's (mean score = .767). If a news

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14. If a county is in an ADI, it means that over 50 percent of the television households receive signals from that market and so that the market is the "dominant" (most commonly received) television signal in the county.
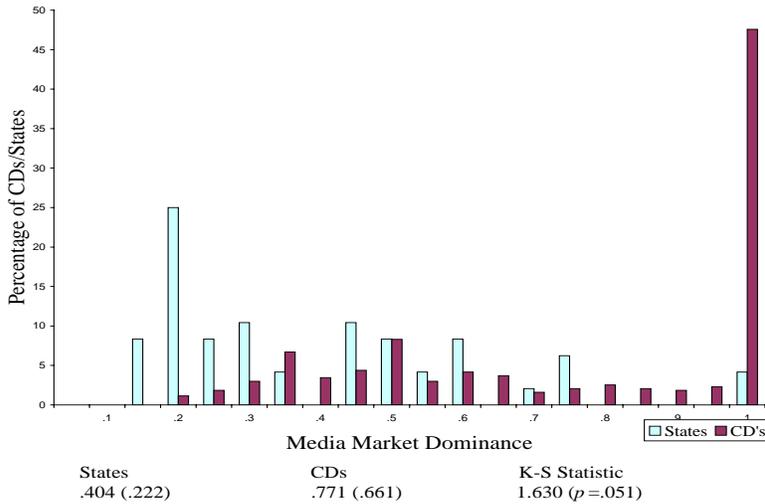
States	CDs	K-S Statistic
.404 (.222)	.771 (.661)	1.630 ($p = .051$)

Fig. 3.6. Media market dominance of electoral districts

editor were to take nothing into account to measure newsworthiness other than the contiguity of his ADI and a political district, the vast majority of Senate races would be "newsworthy." Challenger recognition and voter information are conditioned in large part by the amount of information provided by the mass media; therefore, Senate candidates have a distinct advantage over their House counterparts.

Advertising costs also differ in dramatic fashion between states and congressional districts. Mainly because of the efficiency of state media markets, the per capita cost of advertising is lower. Employing a television strategy, it has been suggested, is a necessity in today's competitive Senate campaigns. It is also much cheaper for a Senate candidate to employ this strategy. As is shown in figure 3.8, the per voter cost in the average congressional district is four times as great as in the average state.[15] Only 12 percent of congressional districts have a per capita advertising cost below one dollar, whereas 79 percent of states do. At the other end of the scale, it costs more than two dollars per capita to advertise in 58 percent of the congressional districts, whereas these

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15. Notice that this is still true even though I set a threshold beyond which per capita costs cannot rise. Some of the congressional district/ADI overlaps are so small, approaching 100 households, that this threshold is a necessity in calculating reasonable cost figures.
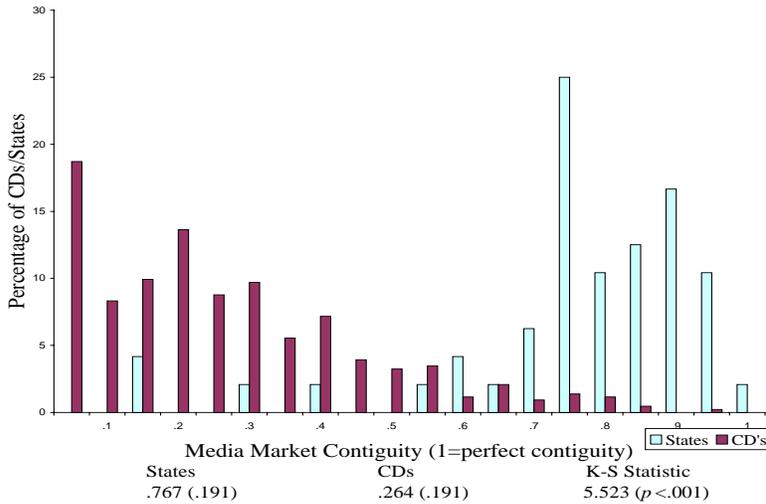
Fig. 3.7. Contiguity of media markets and electoral districts

advertising rates are broached in only three of 48 states. Within the Senate, there is a wide variety of advertising costs; within the House, almost all candidates face daunting advertising prices. The large populations that a Senate candidate is trying to reach combined with relatively inexpensive advertising makes it unsurprising that Senate campaigns have relied more and more on mass media appeals. On the basis of cost measures alone, one would expect that Senate candidates would have an easier time getting their names before the voters by employing television advertising.[16]

Population density further complicates the picture. In figure 3.9, I array states and congressional districts on a horizontal scale of population density (population per square mile). The data show that House members on average represent districts without the widely scattered populations that many states exhibit. If population density is a reasonable approximation for difficulty of information transmission, this indicates that, ceteris paribus, House candidates will have an *easier* time communicating with their constituents than Senate candidates do. Based on well-known findings about the recognition levels of Senate and House candidates, I know that this is not true. At least I know

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16. A crucial test would be whether House districts where markets are efficient also rely more on television advertising relative to other sorts of campaign appeals. Since the Federal Election Commission does not require campaigns to report a breakdown of how money was spent, this cannot be explored without more detailed information about specific campaigns.

	States	CDs	K-S Statistic
	.286 (.041)	1.144 (.055)	4.595 (*p* <.001)
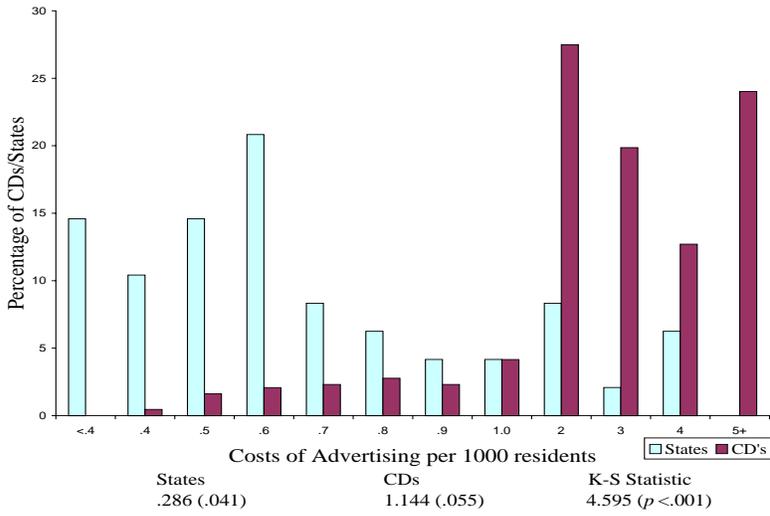
Fig. 3.8. Per capita advertising costs in electoral districts

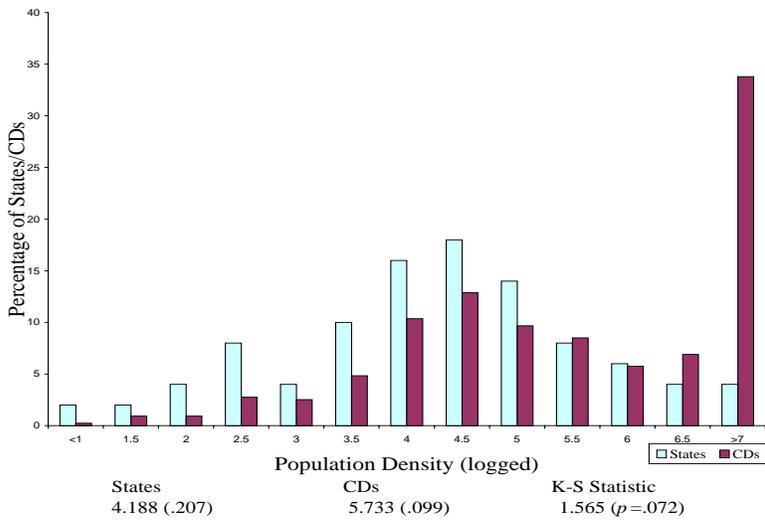|	States	CDs	K-S Statistic
	4.188 (.207)	5.733 (.099)	1.565 (*p* =.072)

Fig. 3.9. Population density in states and congressional districts

that low recognition rates for House candidates are not a result of sparsely populated House districts. What these data do not tell me is whether low information levels are due to a lack of funds, bad candidates, or uninterested voters. Once again, this points to the necessity of considering these competing explanations simultaneously.

On average, senators will have an easier time gaining free media coverage independent of greater attention due to any increased importance of the Senate (Hess 1986). Television advertising will probably be an inefficient proposition for most members of the House, since the TV audience is not predominantly made up of their constituents, while most senators can rest assured that their campaign advertisements are viewed by eligible voters. Senators are disadvantaged by larger and less dense electorates. On the other hand, states are much more efficient media markets—they are served by fewer television stations, the boundary lines between states and ADIs are more contiguous, and it is far cheaper to advertise (on a per capita basis) in most states. Nonetheless, on all of these distributions there are interesting cases that allow me to test the theoretical assertions laid out in chapter 1. There are House districts that look like states on measures of media market efficiency and vice versa. If media market structure has the effects that I suspect it does, these cases in particular ought to reveal these effects.

There are at least two caveats to these results. First, a recent dissertation (Lipinski 1998) shows that members of the House engage in a wide variety of communications strategies. Even something as seemingly disposable as "franked" mass mailings significantly improve incumbents' images among their constituencies. Obviously, I have no leverage on these sorts of communications in this study. Second, recent changes in the information environment, specifically the emergence of cable television and the Internet, may eventually fundamentally change how voters learn about political candidates. Research results at this point, however, are preliminary (e.g., Baum and Kernell 1999; Adler et al. 1998).

The final measure of the political setting that I consider is the most explicitly political of them all: partisan balance. As with media markets, states and congressional districts are quite distinct on measures of partisan balance. Unlike media markets, however, the advantaged chamber is the House. Representatives are able to take advantage of skewed partisan distributions in their districts. Sitting senators are much more likely to represent an evenly split state.

I contrast states and congressional districts on two measures of partisan balance: average vote and partisan split. The partisan split measure is simply the average vote measure folded about its midpoint. As shown in figures
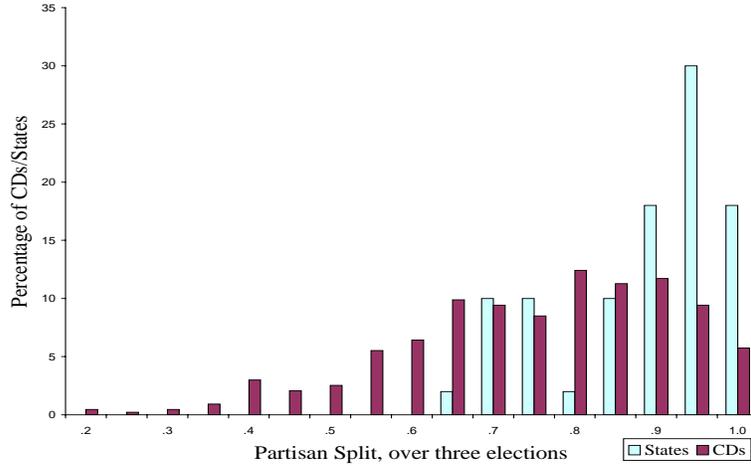
Fig. 3.10. Partisan competitiveness in electoral districts 1982–88

3.10 and 3.11, many more states are evenly split than are congressional districts. This is a direct indication that states, and Senate races, will be more competitive on average.[17]

These figures reproduce a familiar finding: elections in the Senate were more competitive in the 1980s and had been for a number of decades. The incumbency advantage has had a much smaller impact in Senate than in House elections (Kostroski 1973; Abramowitz 1980; Hibbing and Brandes 1983; Gross and Breaux 1989; for a dissenting voice, see Collier and Munger 1994). Partially confirmed, then, are the assertions of those who appeal to setting differences between the House and Senate. There is greater competitiveness in states, but it does not seem to be due to demographic diversity. Instead, vigorous party systems and balanced numbers of party loyalists are far more likely to be found in states than they are in congressional districts. Competitiveness may also be a function of more efficient media markets.

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17. I reproduced the House distribution using a partisanship measure purged of incumbency advantage (Palfrey and Erikson, 1993). There were no obvious differences in the distribution. There are no state equivalents for the Palfrey and Erikson measure.
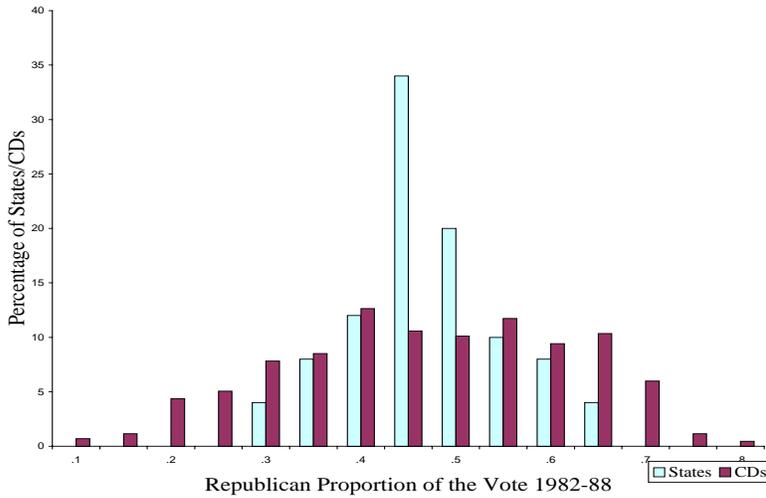
Fig. 3.11. Normal Republican vote in electoral districts 1982–88

A Sidenote on Racial Redistricting and District Diversity

It is important to consider the impact of the 1992 redistricting on district heterogeneity. Constitutional provisions, as well as a series of Supreme Court decisions, mandate that congressional district lines be redrawn following each decennial census. Not surprisingly, the results of redistricting are far from politically neutral. A craftily carved plan can cement one party's control of the legislative delegation and may even provide party control where it is undeserved. The results of redistricting can help or hinder current officeholders and future aspirants to federal office (Gronke and Wilson 1999).

The situation after the 1990 census was further complicated by the requirement for minority-majority districts, which was laid out most explicitly in the 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act and the 1986 *Thornburg v. Gingles* decision. Clearly, the 1992 reapportionment gave rise to powerful political struggles throughout the nation, particularly in the South. Many southern states witnessed an uneasy alliance of Republicans and black activists, each with a shared interest in creating minority-majority seats but each realizing their differences on many other political matters. These differences, and the impact of

racial redistricting on the representation of black interests, are laid out most carefully by David Lublin (1997).

Nonetheless, did these significant changes in redistricting modify the relative levels of heterogeneity in the House and Senate? In fact, they did not. As shown in table 3.1, there was no substantial jump in racial homogeneity in the 1990s. The requirement for equal population districts (required since the 1960s) led to more heterogeneous congressional districts (making them more comparable to states) (Baker 1995, chap. 4). Ironically, creating minority-majority seats had the same impact. Remember that *balanced* demographic divisions lead to higher scores on the diversity measure—and balanced divisions are precisely what the Justice Department and the Court require (Gronke and Wilson 1999; Lublin 1997). Racial redistricting created some less heterogeneous districts, as blacks were removed from districts that were controlled by Democratic incumbents. It also created some that were more heterogeneous, primarily minority-majority districts with just over 50 percent black populations. The 1990 redistricting had a substantial impact on the political dynamics of particular districts and on the membership of state and the national legislatures. Racial redistricting did not have a significant impact on the relative levels of heterogeneity and diversity of congressional districts and states.

Conclusion

Political setting includes both the constituency features (who lives in a district, what they want from government) and the structural features (size, shape, lines of communication) of an electoral district that influence campaigners and election outcomes. A politician or candidate seldom views his or her constituency as composed of individuals. They rely on simplifying cues, just as voters do. Group memberships—racial, ethnic, and economic categories—are the dominant way that a politician identifies interests in his or her constituency (Kingdon 1968, 1988). Furthermore, politicians recognize that constituencies display variances—it is not just the "average" voter but the variety or heterogeneity of a district that has to be represented (see Fiorina 1974 for the most completely developed theoretical description of this relationship). Finally, the electoral district has certain structural features that constrain candidate actions. These features include the ease of reaching individual voters.

What I have done here is reorganize the contents of these categories. To political setting, I have explicitly added structural features of the district such as media market efficiency and population density. Partisan diversity is important enough to deserve separate treatment. I have shown that states and congressional districts differ but not in ways that would be expected. There

is a large amount of overlap on demographic measures of diversity, with averages that are statistically indistinct. On media market measures, states and congressional districts are clearly different, with media markets in states being much more efficient and the costs lower. Partisan balance is another way that congressional districts and states differ. There are very few states that are skewed to one end or another on partisanship.

Ross Baker, in his important study *House and Senate* (1995), suggests that the most notable difference between congressional districts and states is the loss of "intimacy" among states. The kinds of personal relations that are possible in relatively small, geographically contiguous, congressional districts are inconceivable in the typical state. Baker also points to a number of other ways that states differ from congressional districts—states are more heterogeneous, media markets are less efficient—but in the end he returns to a theme of "loss of control." Senators simply cannot comprehend all the diverse interests and groups in a typical state.

This chapter takes Baker's observations on district geography and subjects them to a careful test. In some ways, they remain unchallenged. Size and scope are two undeniable differences between Senate and House electoral environments. From the perspective of an electoral analyst, in contrast to Baker's more institutional viewpoint, similarities emerge as frequently as differences do.

States and congressional districts are not as different as a superficial view would have us believe. States are not exceptionally heterogeneous, nor are congressional district unusually homogeneous. Rather than asserting that states are simply more complex, I need to attend to the shared features of states and congressional districts and to other ways in which they might diverge. The overlap of media markets and election districts is more efficient in most states. It is no great insight to realize that in some ways congressional districts and states look similar and in other ways they differ. If, however, characteristics of a political district operate to constrain the actions of campaigners, these effects ought to be observed across institutional settings. If they are not, then the political context cannot be cited as a cause free of institution. With a set of measures of the political setting that are truly comparable in states and congressional districts, I can test several hypotheses about the relationship between political settings, institutional arrangements, and campaign dynamics.