COMMUNICATIONS

To the Editor:

In a recent article on “Party Effort and Its Impact on the Vote” (American Political Science Review, 65 [June, 1971], 439–450), William Crotty claims to show that “party effort” has a measurable impact on election outcomes. Unfortunately, the evidence Crotty displays is insufficient either to confirm or to disconfirm his hypothesis. With North Carolina counties as observations, Crotty regresses the vote divisions for five offices on five demographic variables, “party competition,” and eighteen measures of “party effort” (nine per party). The main problem is that Crotty chose to report only that each entry of new variables into the equations generally increases the explained variance by a margin he regards as substantial, without revealing the strengths or even the signs of the relationships between the entered variables and the vote.

For example, Crotty shows that the entry of “party competition” into the equations pushes the multiple R’s 3 to 6 points beyond what they were with only the demographic measures as independent variables. If this relationship between party competition and the vote is indeed meaningful, as Crotty suggests, it would be helpful to learn whether the sign of the relationship implies that party competition causes Democratic voting or implies that it causes Republican voting. Whichever the case, the results are at variance with current notions of the range of the explanatory power of “party competition.” By extension, it is desirable to learn more about what happened when the eighteen “party effort” indicators were plugged into the equations—beyond the statement that the multiple R’s increased from 2 to 12 points. Even if some of the 18 partial correlations (per equation) between effort and the vote are nonsensical, positive relationships between Republican effort and Democratic voting or between Democratic effort and Republican voting, they would—as any independent variable would—add somewhat to the explained variance.

Finally, a particularly acute problem arises with Crotty’s interpretation of his finding that for competitive counties alone, the multiple R increases by 17 to 38 points when the “party effort” measures are cranked in. Crotty’s conclusion is that “party effort during campaigns in competitive areas has a pronounced effect on the outcomes of the races” (pp. 446/447). But no such inference can be made from the data, because with so many variables, restriction of the analysis to competitive counties allows only 0 degrees of freedom—a level at which all results are meaningless. As indication, the footnote to Crotty’s Table 5 tells that even the mammoth .98 multiple R’s so derived fail to achieve “statistical significance.” Indeed, with no degrees of freedom (a completely determined system), any deviation of the R from a perfect 1.00 must of necessity be solely due to computer rounding error.

In short, Crotty has applied some interesting data to an interesting problem. But the way he chose to present the findings prevents us from learning whether or not his hypothesis is correct.

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To the Editor:

Mr. Erikson exaggerates. The research intent of the article is clear, and the execution follows closely the lines of development indicated at the beginning of the piece.

A number of interesting and related lines of inquiry could have been followed. Several of the most relevant of these are developed in the Appendix—including a reference to the exploration of the type of problem he finds most intriguing.

My major concern in the article, as I stated, was to explain total results rather than to trace the specific linkages. The increases in the explained variance related to the measures of party effort introduced are, in most cases, so substantial that it was hardly conceivable to treat them as the results of random variables. They also are in accord with a substantially grounded literature as well as the theoretical guidelines that introduced the analysis.

Although the major research interest was the variance accountability rather than the direction of the contributions, Table A.2 was included to accommodate the differential impacts of the independent variables.

A close inspection of this table, the citations in the notes which refer to analyses of the problem, and the Appendix more generally should provide the basic answers to the questions raised.

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