Memorandum to Editor

***We were very pleased with the positive response to our paper, and with the helpful suggestions of the reviewers and the editors.  We have been able to respond to all of them, and in doing so we feel as if the paper is greatly improved.  We first note the overall changes we have made in our manuscript and then we discuss we discuss our response to each specific suggestion.***

***We agree that the essay was quite dry and devoid of commentary as mentioned in the comments, and have added some anecdotes from the 2016 election to help make the transcript more colorful and give some context to why a reader might be interested in how non-competitive states influence electoral outcomes. Along with adding these tidbits, we have expanded the literature review so the essay builds more generally off the electoral college literature, and more specifically the Public Choice variant of said literature. Not only does this give credit to concepts widely excepted to their authors, it too helps to put our new work into context.***

***The most important improvements we have made mostly reside in the Appendix. We have added several additional robustness checks, including re-defining competitive as +/- 1.5%, and using Shaw and Althaus’s data on ex ante battleground status in four different ways. These additional robustness checks, we feel, help valid our non-competitive advantage measure as being more general and predictive regardless to how one defines competitiveness or battleground.***

***Below we will respond to each of the reviewers concerns one by one.***

p. 2, line 16: there ARE m states.

***Done***

p. 3, line 29: 53% is misleading; the author should say 6% greater than the other major-party candidate, because other candidates may prevent the winner from getting 53%.

***We added in text to make clear that this is the two-party vote share, and added a footnote that the margin can be no larger than 6%.***

p. 3, line 39: The correlation analysis (and later the regression analysis) does not seem to add much, because virtually all the correlations are high (and the regression coefficients are in the expected direction).

***BG, WE DIDN’T DO ANYTHING ABOUT THIS… SHOULD WE?***

p. 9, line 9: better THAN the Brams-Kilgour variables.

***Done***

p. 9, line 43: What the author's measure of "non-competitive advantage," while simple, hides is whether mostly large, medium, or small states--or some combination--are the source of a candidate's strength or weakness.  This might be useful information to unpack when the index fails to make a correct prediction.

***This is a very nice suggestion, but given the short “note” length of the paper, this type of analysis might be better expanded in a paper on campaign strategies related to disjoint quotas and competitiveness.***

p. 11, line 7: Some speculation on the failure of the index in these two elections would be useful here.    
***We have added two brief but important reasons why failure to predict could happen. Close elections are like a flip of the coin, and over-performance relative a rival in battlegrounds and overcome the Advantage from non-competitive states.***

The on-line appendix tests robustness by changing +/-3% to +/-5%; why not go in the other direction to +/-1 1/2%, as did Brams and Kilgour.

***We have added to the appendix a section explains the results of a robustness check by changing the competitiveness measure downward to +/- 1.5%. In doing so, we now have results for +/- 1.5%, 3%, 5%, and using Shaw and Althaus’s battlegrounds in four separate ways. All the models lead to the same conclusions about Non-Competitive Advantage.***

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Now, I do wish that the authors were a little more skeptical (or discerning) with respect to the Brams and Kilgour theory. Most notably, their acceptance of a post-hoc definition of competitiveness is not compelling. For example, in 2008 the state of Florida was considered a pre-eminent battleground state. McCain and Obama spent millions of dollars there, and all four presidential and vice-presidential candidates made multiple stops in the Sunshine state. In the end, Obama won by over 5 points. So it wasn't competitive?

***The weakness of our first submission was in the post-hoc nature of our definition of competitiveness. In fact, this is a weakness of Brams and Kilgour’s piece as well. We hope that we have satisfactorily addressed this concern with our robustness models, especially those that use Shaw and Althaus’s ex ante campaign strategy data.***  
  
The authors may want to see if they can get a recent paper from Scott Althaus and Daron Shaw on the candidates' actual Electoral College strategies from 1952 through 2016. This would be a nice check on what they use here.

***We thank the reviewer very much for this suggestion. We did in fact contact Prof. Althaus and Shaw, who were kind enough to share their paper and their data with us. In Appendix C, we have reproduced the results from the main text using their ex ante measure of battleground. The results are similar, as Non-Competitive Advantage only fails to predict two elections, regardless of which definition of battleground we choose from. We include results for four separate runs, defining battlegrounds as those that either party targets, only those in which they agree, and separately for each campaigns’ strategy.***  
  
The authors might also consider that underdog candidates do not simply compete in competitive states. Because they have to win 270 electoral votes, they have to compete in states where they are decidedly behind. (A and S also have an interesting take on this.)

***We have made appropriate citations to this extent (see esp. Stromberg 2008), and hope that the robustness check described above help to alleviate any concerns with regard to which states are battlegrounds.***  
  
I would also like to see the authors leverage their time series a little more effectively. Do relationships between winningness, vulnerability, and EC results fluctuate at all as we move across different party systems (1828-1856, 1860-1892, 18986-1928, 1932-1964, 1968-2016)? Since different party systems reflect coalitional changes in the parties' constituencies, they might influence the relative import of these different factors, or at least their distribution across states.

***We have added a plot, now labeled “Figure II”, which shows a time series between percentages of competitive and uncompetitive EC votes. We tie this to some literature that says that the number of battlegrounds have decreased over time, but we concur with Shaw and Althaus’s findings that any decline is slight.***

**BG, I SENT YOU SOME STUFF ON THIS BUT NONE MADE THE FINAL PAPER.. SHOULD WE JUST DESCRIBE THOSE RESULTS HERE?**

The authors' distinction between close and uncompetitive elections is interesting, and ought to be extended. Perhaps in conjunction with a by-era analysis, as described above.

***We have spent a little more time examining the claim that competitive post-hoc measures are appropriate proxies for battleground states, and have addressed the claims found in Shaw and Althaus’s forthcoming piece about the imperfect nature of this measure.***   
  
There is, as mentioned earlier, an extensive literature beyond B and K. I don't know that the paper needs to slog through the dozen or so studies that might be relevant, but it is a rather skimpy set-up that could benefit from a broader review of the extant literature. (I can't believe I'm asking for more gratuitous literature review...I feel hell freezing over...)

***We appreciate the need for a slightly longer literature review, which we were happy to oblige. In particular, we wanted to make sure we were well situation in the Public Choice literature that this journal specializes in.***  
  
The paper is generally well-written, but the current manuscript feels a little dry. The authors might want to consider connecting it up more directly to the 2016 and (speculatively) the 2020 elections. Bring some politics into it!

***We have added some anecdotes from the 2016 election, along with discussion RED/BLUE America and how it has entered the vernacular.***