

Measuring Preferences for Divided Government in the U.S.

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Abstract

Empirical tests of theories of split-ticket voting and the electoral origins of divided government hinge on the proper measurement of voter preferences for divided government. Many tests derive voter preferences for divided government from voters' positions on an ideological scale, but these tests are biased against finding evidence of intentional ticket-splitting. Other tests use an ANES instrument that taps preferences for divided government, but this instrument does not capture that preferences for divided government may depend on which party is currently in office. We develop a measure of preferences for divided government that presumes such preferences are nonseparable preferences. Various forms of the measure were tested in surveys during the 1994 and 1998 Ohio gubernatorial elections, the 2001 Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections, and the 2004 US presidential election. Preferences for divided government derived from these measures explain split-ticket voting in the 2004 US presidential and House elections, while party identification and voter information levels do not.

1 Introduction

The causes of divided government and split-ticket voting have created much debate and little resolution since Fiorina (1988) proposed that voters intentionally divide government. Fiorina theorizes that moderate voters engineer moderate public policy by creating political compromise between one party in the legislature and its opponent in the executive branch. Jacobson (1990) also offers a theory of intentional divided government based on voters preferring Democrats as legislators and Republicans as chief executives, a premise that appeared to be falsified when the 1994 midterm elections produced a Republican Congress with a Democratic president. The debate may have been a time-bound preoccupation with the prevalence of divided government at the federal level in the 1980s and 1990s. A recent era of unified government at the federal level may have quelled the debate for a time, though divided governments remain at the state level, and the 2006 midterm election or 2008 presidential election may launch another case of divided government at the federal level.

Ticket splitting as an intentional act of voters may or may not be theoretically appealing, depending on one's perspective. But other explanations of divided government lack much supporting theory. Instead, competing explanations suggest that divided government is an accidental or unintended by-product of differences in candidate quality between the parties, differences in fundraising, or other features of the set of candidates who run in legislative and executive elections (Jacobson 1990, Burden & Kimball 1998, Burden & Kimball 2002).

Empirical studies of the causes of divided government have proved inconclusive. Some studies find support for the hypothesis that some voters prefer divided government and vote to create it; other studies reject the hypothesis that voters who prefer divided government act on their preferences. Most studies do find that some voters prefer divided partisan control of the executive and legislature. The methods for uncovering which voters may

prefer divided government vary widely. Estimates of the proportion of the electorate the prefers divided government vary just as widely.

In this paper, we catalog and evaluate the various methods for measuring preferences for divided government. Two of these methods were developed in surveys we conducted in the 2001 Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections and the 2004 US presidential election. We compare the validity and reliability of the methods, showing that the standard American National Election Studies instrument vastly overestimates the percentage of people who prefer divided government. Better instruments, employed in various studies by the authors and by Smith, Brown, Bruce & Overby (1999), show a lower incidence of preferences for divided government, and a stronger relationship between such preferences and split ticket voting.

2 Methods for Uncovering Preferences for Divided Government

Several books and articles have assessed the causes of divided government in the US. Most of this work focuses on testing whether voters intentionally divide government between the parties in a manner consistent with theories due to Fiorina (1988) or Alesina & Rosenthal (1995). The results have been mixed.

Several studies operationalize Fiorina's model by examining the ideological positions of voters who split their tickets (Alvarez & Schousen 1993, Born 1994, Burden & Kimball 1998). These studies measure preferences for divided government as a function of voters' self-placements on seven-point left-right ideology scales in the American National Election Studies. The authors hypothesize that voters who place themselves between the two political parties should be more likely to split their tickets. Burden and Kimball operationalize

Fiorina's hypothesize as predicting that voters between the two positions of the two parties will split their tickets. But some voters between the two parties should prefer unified government under Fiorina's theory: a voter slightly to the left of the Republican party should prefer unified Republican government over a divided government, likewise for voters just to the right of the Democrats.

Alvarez and Schousen use voters' placements of the parties on the ideology scales to construct positions for unified Republican, unified Democratic, and divided government. Voters' own self-placement relative to these positions are then used to test Fiorina's theory, again finding no support for the hypothesis that voters who are closer to the constructed positions of divided government are more likely than other voters to split their tickets. In these and other studies, voters' ideological self-placement has never been shown to predict ticket-splitting.

Representing voters' preferences for divided government using their self-placement on a left-right ideology scale may not adequately capture such preferences. A second method of testing intentional tickets splitting has focused on asking voters directly whether they prefer divided government. The American National Election Studies of 1992 included the question:

Is it better when one party controls both the presidency and Congress, better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans, or doesn't it matter?

We included a similar question on surveys during the 2001 Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections.¹ Likely voters in both states were asked:

¹Survey data were collected by the Center for Survey Research at the University of Virginia, using random-digit-dialing of independently-sampled telephone numbers in Virginia and New Jersey. A respondent of voting age was randomly selected from each household. Only respondents who said they would definitely vote or were likely to vote in the November 6 election for governor were interviewed. Interviews were conducted between October 18 and November 5, with a total of 724 completed interviews in Virginia

Do you think it is better when one party controls both the governorship and the state legislature; better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans; or doesn't it matter?

Table 1 shows responses to this question in Virginia and New Jersey as well as responses to the same question in the 1992 ANES post-election study. Preferences for unified government and the response that "it doesn't matter" are very nearly identical between the states, with no statistically significant difference between them. In both states, more voters prefer divided government than unified government, with slightly more in New Jersey preferring divided government.

Responses to the 2001 VA-NJ surveys are also very similar to the 1992 ANES responses. About 38 to 44 percent of respondents prefer divided government in all three surveys. A smaller percentage of respondents prefer unified government in the Virginia and New Jersey surveys than in the ANES survey. Fewer respondents say it "doesn't matter" whether government is split or unified in the 2001 gubernatorial surveys. But in the gubernatorial surveys, seven percent of respondents in New Jersey and 11 percent in Virginia volunteered the response that "it depends on the party," which is not recorded in the 1992 ANES.

The ANES and Virginia-New Jersey questions pose a problem. It is entirely possible that responses to the ANES item depend on which party a voter believes will hold the presidency or Congress. For instance, in 1992, when the question was asked with a Democratic majority in Congress and a likely Democratic Congress after the election, Democrats may have preferred unified government since to them it meant a Democratic president. Republicans might prefer divided government, meaning a Republican president. Similarly, after the 1992 election, Democrats may have preferred unified government, while Republicans may

and 699 in New Jersey. The response rate (AAPOR's RR3) was 13 percent in Virginia, 9 percent in New Jersey. The cooperation rate (COOP4) was 66 percent in Virginia and 62 percent in New Jersey.

have preferred divided government. After 2000, Democrats may prefer divided government; Republicans, unified government. Since the question does not allow respondents to express a preference for unified government of a certain party, it is not clear how partisans should answer the question. Furthermore, if voters think of divided government as meaning that their party would win an office it does not currently have, which Republicans might have thought in 1992, then the question will overestimate the percentage of respondents who prefer divided government. That 6.7 percent of respondents in New Jersey and 10.8 percent in Virginia volunteered that “it depends on the party” confirms that this question elicits at least some conditional opinions that cannot fit neatly into the response categories.

We refer to the instrument used in the 1992 ANES and the 2001 Virginia and New Jersey surveys as *unconditional* since it does not allow respondents to express a preference for divided government conditional on the current or expected occupant of one of the branches of government. The meaning of unconditional will become more clear as we contrast this instrument to others.

Responses to the ANES unconditional question do not explain split-ticket voting, again casting doubt on theories of intentional divided government. Sigelman, Wahlbeck & Buell (1997) and Lacy (1997) use the ANES instrument and find that respondents who claim to prefer divided government were no more likely than other voters to split their tickets in the 1992 elections. However, since the instrument may overestimate preferences for divided government, it may also underestimate the effect of preferences for divided government on vote choice by categorizing many partisans as potential ticket-splitters.

A third approach to measuring preferences for divided government starts with the premise that such preferences are nonseparable. A person has nonseparable preferences when her preference for the outcome of one dimension of choice depends on the outcome of another dimension of choice. A person has separable preferences when her preferences for the outcomes of a choice does not depend on the outcome of another choice. Voter preferences

for multiple elected offices may be nonseparable. Lacy (1997) tested whether voter preferences were nonseparable in the 1994 midterm congressional elections. The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS), 1994, included the following questions, which tap voter preferences for which party occupies one branch of government conditional on the occupant of another branch of government:

If the president is a Democrat, would you prefer that the Democrats or the Republicans control Congress?

If the president is a Republican, would you prefer that the Democrats or the Republicans control Congress?

A crosstabulation of responses to these questions, in Table 2, uncovers nonseparable preferences. In the 1994 midterm elections, 40 percent of Ohio voters preferred that Republicans control Congress regardless of which party held the presidency, while 23 percent preferred Democratic control of Congress. Only 18 percent of voters preferred divided government, far less than the 36 to 44 percent found in the 1992 US presidential or the 2001 Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections. Nineteen percent preferred unified government.² The important innovation of these survey questions, called *conditional* questions, is to separate support for straight party government by a particular party from preferences for unified or divided government.

Similar questions appeared on a 1996 survey conducted through the University of Mississippi in the month prior to the presidential election between Democrat Bill Clinton and Republican Bob Dole (Smith et al. 1999):

If Bob Dole were to be elected president, which would you prefer: a Republican Congress to help him pass his agenda or a Democratic Congress to serve

²The survey was conducted by RDD telephone interviewing after the 1994 midterm elections by the Center for Survey Research at The Ohio State University.

as a check on his agenda?

If Bill Clinton were to be elected president, which would you prefer: a Democratic Congress to help him pass his agenda, or a Republican Congress to serve as a check on his agenda?

Based on responses to these questions, Smith et al. (1999) show that 25 percent of respondents favored a Democratic Congress regardless of who is president, 34 percent favored a Republican Congress, 5.6 percent favored unified government, and 27 percent favored divided government.

Lewis-Beck & Nadeau (2004) criticize these questions as lacking the face validity of the ANES question, prone to priming effects due the mention of candidate's names, and overly-complex and wordy. We disagree with these criticisms. The ANES question, as we have already noted, elicits responses that may be conditional or contextual by depending on which party a voter expects to hold office. See, for example, the volunteered responses of "it depends on the party" in our Virginia and New Jersey surveys. While the question may include some unnecessary modifiers, such as "to help him pass his agenda" and "to serve as a check on his agenda," it seems no more difficult to comprehend than the ANES item.

We have included similar items on a number of other surveys. The 1998 Ohio Political Survey contained items tapping preferences for divided government at both the state and national levels. At the state level, the question read:

If Republicans control the state legislature, would you rather have Republican Bob Taft as Governor, Democrat Lee Fisher as Governor, or would it not make a difference?

If Democrats control the state legislature, would you rather have Republican

Bob Taft as Governor, Democrat Lee Fisher as Governor, or would it not make a difference?

This question taps whether the respondent's vote in the 1998 Ohio gubernatorial election may depend on which party holds a majority of seats in the legislature. In 1998 the Republicans held a two-thirds majority in both houses of the legislature.

The same 1998 Ohio survey contained similar questions about preferences for the midterm congressional elections conditional on the party of the president. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two question formats, which presented questions either by identifying the party of the presidency or by naming a specific person holding the office. One half of the sample (N=231) answered the questions:

When the president is a Democrat, would you rather have the Democrats control Congress, the Republicans control Congress, or would it not make a difference?

When the president is a Republican, would you rather have the Democrats control Congress, the Republicans control Congress, or would it not make a difference?

A separate half (N=210) received the questions with specific persons named:

With Bill Clinton as president, would you rather have the Democrats or the Republicans control Congress, or would it not make a difference?

Suppose Bob Dole were president. Then, would you rather have the Democrats control Congress, the Republicans control Congress, or would it not make a difference?

The purpose of this split-half design was to determine whether preferences for divided government are party-centered or candidate-centered.

We also tested these questions in the 2001 surveys conducted just before the gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia (?). The question format was candidate-centered, but we assessed voter preferences for legislative election outcomes conditional on the governor, and for the gubernatorial election outcome conditional on the legislature. The conditional questions for the legislature were:

If it turns out that James McGreevey (Mark Warner), the Democrat, is elected governor, would you prefer that the Democrats or the Republicans have a majority of the seats in the New Jersey (Virginia) state legislature?

If it turns out that Bret Schundler (Mark Earley), the Republican, is elected governor, would you prefer that the Democrats or the Republicans have a majority of the seats in the New Jersey (Virginia) state legislature?

The conditional questions for the governorship were:

If it turns out that the Democrats have a majority of seats in the New Jersey (Virginia) state legislature, then would you prefer to have James McGreevey (Mark Warner), the Democrat, or Bret Schundler (Mark Earley), the Republican, as governor?

If it turns out that the Republicans have a majority of seats in the New Jersey (Virginia) state legislature, then would you prefer to have James McGreevey (Mark Warner), the Democrat, or Bret Schundler (Mark Earley), the Republican, as governor?

Candidate names were presented in random order in these questions.

We tested similar questions in a 2004 election panel study conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN). The divided government questions appeared in the second wave of the survey, in August, 2004. Unlike the other studies examined this far, the 2004 KN survey

was conducted via Web Television. Respondents were drawn from the Knowledge Networks panel of over 50,000 randomly-drawn respondents. A sample of 1308 respondents was drawn for the first wave of the panel, with 947 respondents completing the second wave of the survey.

We varied question wording and format in the 2004 KN panel. A randomly selected half of the sample received conditional questions. Unlike the Virginia-New Jersey surveys, we offered “doesn’t matter” as an on-screen choice, along with “Republican” and “Democrat.” Respondents could also skip the question and move on to the next question without additional prompting for a response. The wording of the conditional questions was:

When the president of the United State is a Republican, which party do you want to have a majority of seats in the U.S. Congress?

When the President of the United States is a Democrat, which party do you want to have a majority of seats in the U.S. Congress?

When the Republicans have a majority of seats in the U.S. Congress, do you want a Democrat as president or a Republican as president?

When the Democrats have a majority of seats in the U.S. Congress, do you want a Democrat as president or a Republican as president?

The other half of the KN panel responded to ranking question.

The list below contains four different possible outcomes of the November elections. Please rank these by clicking next to the outcome you want most.

The Republicans win a majority of seats in Congress and a Republican is elected president

The Republicans win a majority of seats in Congress and a Democrat is elected president

The Democrats win a majority of seats in Congress and a Republican is elected

president

The Democrats win a majority of seats in Congress and a Democrat is elected

president

Responses were presented in random order. Respondents clicked a circle next to one of the choices to indicate their most preferred outcome, which was then removed from the list. The next screen would present the remaining three options, and respondent were asked to “rank these by clicking next to the outcome you want second most.” A final screen asked them to choose between the remaining two options. A ranking question is another method to determine whether respondent’s preferences are separable or nonseparable over two or more choices (Lacy 1994, Lacy & Niou 2000).

3 Comparing the Survey Questions and Responses

The format and wording of questions to detect preference for divided government have varied significantly. We compare the items first on their rates of non-response and then on the prevalence of responses indicating a preference for divided government.

Table 3 shows the rates of non-response, either through “don’t know” responses or refusals to answer. The state-level races (VA-NJ 2001 and OH 1998) generally have the highest rates of non-response, as one would expect given the generally lower levels of voter attention to and information about state politics (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996). The candidate-centered conditional questions, rather than the party-centered, also have higher rates of non-response, as seen in the University of Mississippi 1996 survey and the Ohio 1998 survey. The 1998 Ohio survey contained a split-half design in which half of respondents answered a candidate-centered questions and half a party-centered question. the candidate-centered question had a non-response rate almost five times higher than the party-

centered question. However, the Ohio survey was conducted during a mid-term election and used a hypothetical scenario that 1996 Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole had been elected president. The 1996 Mississippi survey was conducted during a presidential election and posts a higher non-response rate than the party-centered questions from the 2004 KN survey.

The ANES questions are next highest in their non-response rates, with 6.0 percent non-response in the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections and 4.3 percent in the post-election 1992 ANES. The post-election non-response is probably deflated in the ANES compared to the pre-election surveys in the remainder of the table since many potential non-responders were probably lost to panel attrition.

The Knowledge Networks ranking question has a non-response rate similar the ANES item, though it was an August pre-election survey with likely higher potential non-response. Slightly over five percent of respondents did not answer the initial ranking question, and another four percent, for a total of 9.1 percent, did not answer the second question. The second ranking question is necessary to detect preferences for unified government in general from preferences for unified government by one party or another. A respondent who prefers that Republicans hold the presidency and Congress in their first ranking may be a straight party Republican if he ranks Republican-Democrat (RD) or Democrat-Republican (DR) government next. But we would not know that the respondent prefers unified government unless she ranks Democrat-Democrat (DD) government next, or if she ranks Democrat-Democrat first followed by Republican-Republican (RR). Preferences for divided government are indicated by ranking DR followed by RD or RD followed by DR.

The Knowledge Networks conditional questions show the lowest rates of non-response of any of the surveys. This may be due in part to the generally lower non-response rates in computer-based surveys. Respondents answer the questions in the comfort of their own homes and at their own pace. Knowledge Networks surveys have been criticized for cre-

ating a professional group of respondents. If by “professional,” critics mean that the respondents have learned survey formats and how to enter responses, then we take this as a strength rather than a weakness of the sample. Chiang and Krosnick (cite) show that computer-based surveys better predict the vote choice of respondents than telephone surveys, probably because computer-based surveys better capture the experience of voting than telephone surveys. It could also be that the Knowledge Networks sample is exposed to so many surveys with political content that the respondents are more informed and aware than the rest of the public. However, our KN survey recorded the number of surveys with political content that the respondents had taken in the previous three months. Two-thirds of the sample had answered no surveys with political content; 26 percent had answered one survey; 7 percent, two surveys; only .7 percent three or more surveys. We do not know the comparable numbers for respondents to typical telephone surveys or the ANES since such numbers are not recorded by survey houses. There is no relationship between the number of surveys with political content that respondents have been exposed to and the rates of preference for divided or unified government.

Non-response rates alone do not cast much doubt on any of the questions, except in the state-level races. The fact that so many respondents could answer questions about hypothetical scenarios or high-minded issues of divided and unified government strongly suggests that the questions may be tapping a real consideration about electoral politics.

Comparing the responses to the questions provides starker contrasts between them. Table 4 shows the percentage of respondents preferring divided, unified, Democratic, or Republican government for each survey instrument. The *Unconditional* instruments do not allow respondents to express a preference for unified government under either the Democratic or Republican parties; respondents must choose divided government, unified government in general, or “it doesn’t matter.” The unconditional questions show by far the highest preferences for divided government, which is the modal category in both surveys.

The candidate-centered conditional questions show the next highest rates of divided government, with the Mississippi survey cited by Smith et al. (1999) showing a higher percentage of divided government than the other surveys. In Smith et al.'s (1999) 1996 survey contains the phrase "to serve as a check on his agenda" as a modifier for divided control of government. This phrasing may be attractive to respondents not in a sense of divided government but in a general sense of Congress "keeping an eye on" the president, regardless of party. The normative wording of the question may explain the significantly larger percentage of preferences for divided government in Smith, et al.'s survey than in all of the surveys except those using the ANES item. The Mississippi survey also does not contain a "no difference" or "it doesn't matter" response.

The 1998 Ohio survey using candidate-centered questions contained a "no difference" response and shows a much smaller group of respondents preferring divided government just two years later. The survey was of Ohio residents only. Ohioans may be less inclined toward divide government than the sample of Americans from Smith, et al's survey, but such a large difference is hard to imagine. Instead, it appears that the "no difference" response draws responses away from divided government since the responses to the Ohio and Mississippi items are so similar in the other response categories.

The 1998 Ohio survey allows a direct comparison of party-centered and candidate-centered questions in its split-half design. In the Ohio split-half experiment, it is clear that the party-centered question generates significant "no difference" responses, almost half of all responses in Table 3. The candidate-centered question significantly reduces such responses to just over ten percent, with most of the responses moved into the partisan categories. The percentages of respondents who prefer unified government remains constant across the question wordings, while the percentage who favor divided government increases slightly, from 11.7 to 14.1 percent. From these results we conclude that the candidate-centered question is probably a better measure of preferences due to the lower

rate of “no difference” responses and to the rates of partisan responses that roughly match the percentages of Democrats and Republicans in the sample.

The party-centered questions in Ohio, Virginia, New Jersey, and the 2004 Knowledge Networks national survey show much lower preferences for divided government. In the VA-NJ and KN surveys, respondents prefer divided government more in legislative elections than in presidential elections, yet preferences for unified government are about the same. The VA-NJ surveys did not contain a response category for “it doesn’t matter,” but a small percentage of respondents offered this response anyway. In the 2004 KN survey, which did offer “it doesn’t matter” as an on-screen response, the rates of preference for divided government drop only slightly. Most of the shift to “it doesn’t matter” appears to come from partisan responses.

The break-down of responses by party identification further confirms the usefulness of the measures. In the candidate-centered questions, 71 percent of Democrats prefer unified Democratic government, with the next highest percentage preferring divided government. Among Republicans, 86 percent prefer unified Republican government, with the next highest percentage preferring divided government. Among Independents, 42 percent preferred Republican government; 25 percent preferred Democratic government; 22 percent, divided government; the remainder, unified government.

The KN ranking question shows the lowest rate of support for either divided government or unified government. We divide the KN ranking into two categories — complete and partial — depending on the depth of a respondent’s preference for divided government. In a complete ranking, a person is counted as preferring divided government if their first preference is either DR or RD and their second preference is the inverse, meaning that their first two preferences are for divided government in either form. Only 1.9 percent of respondents have complete preferences for divided government. But about six percent of respondents rank RD followed by RR, meaning that they wanted Bush to win the presidency

with a Democratic Congress, followed by Bush winning the presidency with a Republican Congress. Another six percent ranked DR followed by DD, meaning that they wanted Kerry to win regardless of which party controlled Congress, but they preferred Kerry face a Republican Congress than a Democratic Congress. Another two percent of respondents favored either RD followed by DD or DR followed by RR, indicating that their preference for control of Congress was fixed, but their preference for who won the presidency depended on which party would control Congress. In the complete ranking category, all of these respondents are classified as preferring either Democratic or Republican unified government. In the partial ranking category, we classify these respondents as preferring divided government since their responses indicate a weak preference for split control. The ranking question provides a new insight to the debate about divided government: Some voters may not strictly prefer divided government, but they do want their preferred candidate, usually for president, to face opposition in the other branch of government. In the partial ranking, over 15 percent of respondents to the 2004 KN prefer divided government of some sort.

In the KN rankings, regardless of whether partial or complete, 78 percent of people who ranked RR first ranked a Republican president and Democratic Congress as their second most preferred outcome. Among Democrats, 71 percent ranked a Democratic president and Republican Congress as their second most preferred outcome. These results point clearly to the conclusion that electoral supporters of both parties value the presidency more than Congress, but Republicans more so than Democrats. The results support Jacobson's (1990) thesis that Democrats weigh most heavily the policy arenas where Congress dominates, such as domestic spending, while Republicans attach more importance to executive policy arenas, such as national defense.

Responses to the various divided government items leave some clear lessons. First, the ANES unconditional item is not a valid as a measure of preference for divided government since it vastly overestimates preference for divided government by forcing partisans to

choose either divided or unified government. No study that has used these questions has found a relationship between preference for divided government and split-ticket voting (Lacy 1997, Sigelman, Wahlbeck & Buell 1997).

Second, state level races generate lower preferences for divided or unified government. Voters may know less about the party of their state legislature, which Lacy & Paolino (1998) confirm, or they may care less about the potential power of one party controlling both the executive and legislature.

Third, candidate-centered questions generate higher rates of preference for divided government. It is not clear whether the candidate-centered or party-centered questions are more accurate in their assessment of voter preferences. Fiorina's and Alesina and Rosenthal's theories of policy-balancing are rooted in party-centered elections. Voters know the positions of the parties and choose to balance them in office. Therefore, the party-centered questions are closer to existing theory. If voters engage in policy-balancing in response to some candidates or office-holders rather than others, policy-balancing models do not provide clear empirical predictions. Policy-balancing theories need modification to recognize that candidates or personalities, not parties, are responsible for most voters' preferences for divided government. It is also not clear whether candidate-centered questions simply tap evaluations of the candidates independent of concerns about divided government. Voters who dislike an office-holder may want the opposition party in office for a variety of reasons other than policy-balancing.

Fourth, an "it doesn't matter" or "no difference" response option significantly reduces expressed preferences for divided government. Smith et al.'s (1999) 1996 question may overestimate the extent of support for divided government.

The ANES unconditional question is not a valid measure of preferences for divided government. Conditional candidate-centered questions may not reflect accurately the theories they are designed to test. But all of the questions appear reasonably reliable by pro-

ducing similar distributions of responses across elections. The unconditional items in the 1992 ANES and 2001 VA-NJ studies are similar in responses. The 1996 Mississippi and 1998 Ohio conditional candidate-centered questions are also similar, though the presence of a “no difference” response in the Ohio survey reduces by half preferences for divided government. The Conditional party-centered questions in the 2001 VA-NJ study and 2004 KN study are also similar, even in the relative percentages of voters preferring divided government in legislative versus executive elections. We have only one observation of a conditional ranking question. Counting complete preferences for divided government only, the ranking question produced results very close to the KN conditional questions in the same election.

Although we do not have a survey instrument to track consistently over time, preferences for divided government and unified government appear to be declining. This may be a response to increasing polarization of the parties at the elite level. If voters do engage in policy-balancing, we should see increasingly common preferences for divided government as more voters are “caught in the middle” between two ideologically polarized parties. Instead, the rates of ticket-splitting and preferences for divided government are declining over time while the parties are moving farther apart. This phenomenon does not seem consistent with policy-balancing.

4 Explaining Split-Ticket Voting

The validity of measures of divided government may be assessed on the basis of how well they predict split-ticket voting. Such a test is troublesome since researchers should choose a measure of a theory to be tested before checking whether the measure supports the theory in empirical testing. However, in this case with multiple possible measures of preferences for divided government, we are left with little choice but to turn to the data.

The ANES unconditional item has already failed the test of predicting split ticket voting, as documented by both Lacy (1997) and Sigelman, Wahlbeck & Buell (1997). The candidate-centered conditional item has passed the test of predicting split-ticket voting in Smith et al. (1999) and Lewis-Beck & Nadeau (2004). Both studies examine one election, 1996, using the same set of survey data from a University of Mississippi survey.

We test the effects of responses to each of the Knowledge Networks questions—conditional and ranking—in a model where the dependent variable is a respondent’s vote in the 2004 presidential and US House of Representatives elections. The dependent variable is whether a respondent reported voting for George W. Bush and a Democrat for House of Representatives or for John Kerry and a Republican for the House. These voters cast split ballots and are coded as (1). Voters who cast straight party ballots, DD or RR, are coded as (0). Independent variables include whether the respondent is a self-reported political independent on a standard party identification scale (recorded in the August wave), and the respondent’s level of political information taken as the sum of responses to a five-item battery of questions about politics from the April wave of the survey (Delli Carpini & Keeter N.d.). We include a measure of political information, which no other studies do, to test whether split-ticket voting is due to uninformed voters.

We test each of four measures of preference for divided government taken from the August wave of the survey. The fact that our measures of partisanship and preferences for divided government are from a wave of the survey conducted three months prior to the election should reduce concerns about the endogeneity of these measures to vote choice. Table 5 shows the results from the model estimated using responses to the presidential conditional question, with respondents favoring divided government coded as a (1) and all others as (0). The second model uses the same question, but with respondents favoring divided government or answering “doesn’t matter” coded as (1), as Lewis-Beck & Nadeau (2004) do. In neither case does being an Independent predict split-ticket voting. Politi-

cal information is positively related to split-ticket voting but not statistically significant. Expressing a preference for divided government in August, is, however, statistically significant as a predictor of split ballot voting in November. The fit of the model is better using divided government plus “doesn’t matter” responses.

Table 6 estimates the same two models, but with responses to the question about Congress conditional on which candidate is elected president. Once again, being an Independent does not predict split-ticket voting nor does information level, though the sign is again positive but the coefficient is not statistically significant. Expressing a preference for divided government is highly substantively significant, increasing the probability of a split ticket by .35, as well as statistically significant.

Table 7 shows estimates of the model once again, though with the ranking question. The first column codes respondents who expressed a complete preference for divided government as (1), all others as (0). The second column codes as (1) respondents who have a partial preference for divided government. The pattern holds again: a preference for divided government is statistically significant and substantively significant, increasing the probability of a split ballot by .60. Independent is not statistically significant. A voter’s information level is, however, statistically significant and negative, meaning that voters with more information about politics are more likely to cast a straight party ballot.

The results confirm for all question types that a preference for divided government is a strong predictor of casting a split ticket. The partial ranking question appears to produce the best fit to the data, but not by much. From the results we can conclude that preferences for divided government are closely related to split ticket voting and robust to different survey instruments.

5 Conclusion

The results in this paper provide support and also some caveats to theories of intentional ticket splitting. Research by Lacy & Paolino (1998), Smith et al. (1999), citeasnounlewisbeck:04, and Mebane (2000) have all confirmed, using different data and methods, that voters use their votes for multiple office to create divided government. These findings stand in contrast research showing no support for intentional ticket-splitting (Alvarez & Schousen 1993, Born 1994, Sigelman, Wahlbeck & Buell 1997, Burden & Kimball 1998). This earlier work did not have the advantage of the introduction in the 1994 Ohio Political Survey of new conditional questions to detect preferences for divided government. Survey instruments used since then have been based on the theory that preferences for divided government are essentially nonseparable preferences (Lacy & Niou 1998, Lacy & Paolino 1998, Smith et al. 1999).

Research that has not found evidence of intentional ticket-splitting uses the ANES unconditional question (Sigelman, Wahlbeck & Buell 1997) or constructs preferences for divided government from voters' self-placements on an ideological scale (Alvarez & Schousen 1993, Born 1994, Burden & Kimball 1998). These measurement strategies have cast too wide a net, classifying too many voters as preferring divided government. The newer survey instruments show that far fewer voters prefer divided government than originally believed. By capturing the smaller set of voters who truly prefer divided government, we find a stronger effect of such preferences on the vote.

While our results support theories of intentional ticket-splitting, they also offer an important caveat. At the national level, at most about 16 percent of the public prefers divided government, based on the most inclusive KN ranking measure. The conditional questions that allow "it doesn't matter" as an outcome show that less than 10 percent of the public prefers divided government, and possibly as little as two percent. The percentage of voters

who prefer unified government is nearly as high, suggesting that the two groups may cancel each other's votes on election day. As a theory of divided government, intentional ticket splitting may be only part of an explanation, perhaps not enough to explain the prevalence of divided government in the 1970s through 1990s. In recent national elections, even a shift of two or three percent of votes due to a preferences for divided government could have changed the outcome of presidential elections.

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Table 1: Responses to the ANES Divided Government Question, 1992 US and 2001 VA and NJ Elections

	US 1992	NJ 2001	VA 2001
Divided Government	38.3	44.1	38.7
Unified Government	30.8	23.5	23.9
Doesn't Matter	26.7	19.9	20.5
Depends on Party (vol.)	–	6.7	10.8
Don't Know/Refused	4.3	5.8	6.1

Source: 1992 ANES and 2001 Virginia and New Jersey Gubernatorial Election Survey.

Table 2: Nonseparable Preferences in Congressional Elections, 1994

	If the president is a Democrat	
	Democrats	Republicans
Democrats	23%	19%
Republicans	18%	40%

Source: The Ohio Political Survey, 1994. Entries are percentages

Table 3: Non-Response Rates Across Question Formats and Survey Modes

	Mode	Sample	Election	N	Non-Response
ANES, 1992	Face-to-face	adults	US	2255	4.3%
US (OH) Conditional (Party), 1994	Telephone	adults	US	?	?
US (U. Miss.) Conditional (Person), 1996	Telephone	adults	US	983	7.8
OH Conditional (Person), 1998	Telephone	adults	State	441	31.1
US (OH) Conditional (Party), 1998	Telephone	adults	US	210	3.9
US (OH) Conditional (Person), 1998	Telephone	adults	US	231	19.0
VA-NJ ANES, 2001	Telephone	registered voters	State	1308	6.0
VA-NJ Conditional: Legislature, 2001	Telephone	registered voters	State	1315	12.1
VA-NJ Conditional: Governor, 2001	Telephone	registered voters	State	1317	12.5
KN Conditional: Congress, 2004	Web TV	adults	US	484	2.1
KN Conditional: Presidency, 2004	Web TV	adults	US	484	2.7
KN Ranking (First Preference), 2004	Web TV	adults	US	463	5.2
KN Ranking (Second Preference), 2004	Web TV	adults	US	463	9.1

Source: 1992 American National Election Study, 2001 Virginia and New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections Survey, 2004 Knowledge Networks Panel Study. Non-response is the total of “don’t knows,” refusals, and voluntary skipping of questions.

Table 4: Preferences for Divided and Unified Government Across Question Formats, Non-Responses Deleted

	Divided	Unified	Republican	Democratic	No Difference
US ANES Unconditional, 1992	40.0	32.2	–	–	27.8
OH Conditional (Party), 1994	18.0	19.0	40.0	23.0	–
US (MS) Conditional (Person), 1996	29.6	6.1	36.9	27.5	–
US (OH) Conditional (Party), 1998	11.7	7.7	15.8	14.4	49.5
US (OH) Conditional (Person), 1998	14.1	7.6	40.0	27.6	10.6
VA-NJ Unconditional, 2001	48.5	27.8	–	–	23.7
VA-NJ Conditional: Leg., 2001	8.9	5.5	43.0	37.8	4.7+
VA-NJ Conditional: Gov., 2001	6.5	5.0	49.6	33.3	2.4+
US KN Conditional: Cong., 2004	6.7	2.5	33.3	34.2	23.3
US KN Conditional: Pres., 2004	1.9	2.1	42.0	38.2	15.7
US KN Ranking (Complete), 2004	1.7	1.0	49.3	47.7	–
US KN Ranking (Partial), 2004	15.9	1.0	42.3	40.9	–

Source: 1992 American National Election Study, The Ohio Political Survey (1994, 1998), 1996 University of Mississippi survey (Smith, et al.), 2001 Virginia and New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections Survey, 2004 Knowledge Networks Panel Study.
 + = Volunteered response.

Table 5: Preferences for Divided Government Explain Split-Ticket Voting in 2004, Conditional Questions for President

	Divided Government	Divided + “Doesn’t Matter”
Independent	.60 (.40)	.40 (.42)
Information Level	.10 (.15)	.24 (.16)
Prefer Divided Gov’t	1.07* (.52)	1.72* (.38)
Constant	-2.61 (.59)	-3.60 (.70)
N	294	294
-2xLL	6.64	22.89*

Source: 2004 Knowledge Networks Panel Study. * indicates $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Table 6: Preferences for Divided Government Explain Split-Ticket Voting in 2004, Conditional Questions for Congress

	Divided Government	Divided + “Doesn’t Matter”
Independent	.52 (.40)	.27 (.43)
Information Level	.11 (.14)	.22 (.15)
Prefer Divided Gov’t	1.37 (.95)	1.85* (.44)
Constant	-2.55 (.58)	-3.22 (.66)
N	293	293
-2xLL	4.74	19.94

Source: 2004 Knowledge Networks Panel Study. * indicates $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Table 7: Preferences for Divided Government Explain Split-Ticket Voting in 2004, Ranking Method

	Complete Ranking	Partial Ranking
Independent	.76 (.41)	.68 (.44)
Information Level	-.31 (.14)	-.12 (.16)
Prefer Divided Gov't	2.89* (1.19)	2.31* (.46)
Constant	-1.10 (.54)	-2.21 (.66)
N	255	256
-2xLL	15.69*	33.57*

Source: 2004 Knowledge Networks Panel Study. * indicates $p < .05$, two-tailed.