A New Look at Split-Ticket Outcomes for House and President: The Comparative Midpoints Model*

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We argue that conservative districts that go Democratic for the House should be likely to choose a Republican for president, while liberal districts represented by a Republican should be likely to opt for a Democrat for president. We test these and related predictions about split-ticket voting with election data from the eight presidential elections between 1964 and 1992. We show that ideological differences in the estimated location of the district's median voter explains a substantial component of the systematic variation in patterns of split outcomes in this period across districts, but that other factors (e.g., an especially popular incumbent or a particularly poor challenger, the magnitude of presidential election victory, region-specific realignment effects) also play a role.

Why do voters split their tickets between a president of one party and a representative or senator of another party? Why do some districts register a majority of votes for one party's presidential candidate but simultaneously give their support to another party's candidate for House or Senate? Why has the degree of ticket-splitting and the number of constituencies with split outcomes generally been on the rise from the minuscule proportions they were in elections earlier in this century?

The best-known line of argument seeking to answer these questions can be labeled the "candidate-centered politics" thesis. According to this thesis, declining voter party loyalties, the rise in the number of voters who call themselves independents, media-centered campaigns, the decline of party machines, and an

increase in incumbency advantage all have contributed to an increase in ticket-splitting (see Wattenberg 1991, 1994; cf. Gerber and Many 1995). A second answer to why voters split their tickets is offered by Jacobson (1990). He suggests that voters look for different things in a president and a House member, such as competence in addressing issues vital to the national interest from the former, but ability to bring home the political bacon to the district from the latter. Because Democrats are currently seen by voters as being better at constituency service and pork-barrel politics, Democrats have had the edge in House elections but have had a hard time winning the presidency.[1] A third answer is based on the differences in the qualifications of the candidates that each party is able to recruit for different levels of government. Jacobson (1990) observes that in recent decades, Democrats have been much better at recruiting experienced candidates to run for the House. The Democrats' long incumbency advantage has translated into a considerable funding advantage; Democrats thus have generally had the edge in elections to the House. In contrast, Republicans have been able to raise more money than Democrats for presidential campaigns and have been able to offer well-known/experienced candidates for that office.[2]

A fourth explanation for split-ticket voting, the policy-balancing model (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995; Fiorina 1992) argues that voters split their ticket in order to elect a "set" of elected officials that is more likely to achieve policies preferred by the voter. For example, if slightly left of center voters who generally support Democrat candidates see (or expect to see) a Democrat in the White House, they may now wish to vote for a conservative Republican for the House of Representatives in order to (try to) move overall policies (slightly) to the right and thus closer to their ideal point than would be obtained were the federal government unified under either a Democratic (leftist) or a Republican (rightist) regime.[3]

There are, however, features of ticket-splitting visible at the aggregate level that none of the previous approaches in the literature can explain.

Reduced partisan loyalties and increased incumbency advantage cannot account for the observed patterns of ticket-splitting and split House/President (or Senate/President) outcomes because they cannot provide a systematic account for why some incumbents run so much better than the presidential candidates of their party while others do not. Arguments that suggest a generic advantage for Democrats in the House and a generic advantage for Republican presidential nominees have this same problem.[4] These arguments cannot easily explain why

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[1] A Wuffle (personal communication, April 1, 1995) has (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) restated this argument, in language drawn from the 1950s, as "Republicans make good daddies, Democrats make good mommies; everybody is in favor of a two-parent family."

[2] See also Krehbiel (1996: 8).

[3] With supplementary assumptions about shifts in either voter preferences or party/candidate locations or about differences in voter certainty about probable election outcomes, the policy-balancing model can also be used to explain variations in the amount of ticket-splitting across elections (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995).

[4] Of course, the House elections of 1994 and 1996 suggest the need for a rethinking of the supposed Democratic advantage in House contests.

the pattern of observed split-ticket outcomes for Congress and the presidency varies so much across regions and, as we shall see, across types of districts grouped according to their ideology.

Similarly, while it is true that voters are increasingly willing to say that they prefer divided government to unified government at the federal level (Bean and Wattenberg 1996), policy-balancing by moderate voters simply cannot account for the huge number of split-ticket votes cast. Also, the policy-balancing model cannot account for the fact that, as we shall see, either very conservative or very liberal congressional districts have the highest proportions of split outcomes, rather than moderate districts. In these districts, moderate voters are presumably to be found in large numbers, and moderate voters might be thought to have the greatest incentive to shift their vote in a policy-balancing fashion because the choices of voters like themselves are most likely to be decisive for outcomes.[5]

While most previous research on split-ticket voting has dealt largely with voting at the individual level, the focus in this article will be on aggregate level outcomes. In what types of districts is split-ticket voting at the individual level most likely to lead to House (or Senate) districts that go one way for Congress and the other way for the presidency? When can we expect split outcomes with a Democratic presidential candidate and a Republican House candidate winning the district, as opposed to splits with a Republican presidential candidate and a Democratic House candidate winning the district?[6] Our new model, which we call the "comparative midpoints" model (CM for short), rests on three simple (stylized) empirical facts.

The first fact is that *contra* Downs (1957), candidates of opposite parties within any given constituency do not usually offer identical policies. Rather, we may expect the Democrat, *ceteris paribus*, to be to the left of the Republican (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995; Brady and Lynn 1973; Fiorina 1974; Grofman, Griffin, and Berry 1995; Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990; Poole and Rosenthal 1984).[7]

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[5] Since we posit that candidates will by and large reflect their party constituencies (see discussion below), only in constituencies where there are large numbers of moderates could we expect to see a moderate as a representative from either party.

[6] Because our focus is at the aggregate level, there are limits to our ability to test competing explanations of split-ticket voting. In particular, we do not purport to directly test the policy-balancing model in this paper since a true test of that model requires individual-level data and a look at motivations. In most such tests, however, the policy-balancing model has not fared well (see, e.g., Alvarez and Schousen 1993; Burden and Kimball 1997; Lowenthal 1998; Sigelman, Wahlbeck and Buell 1997).

[7] For example, Poole and Rosenthal (1984), Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer (1990), and Grofman, Griffin, and Berry (1995) show that when we look at senators of the same party from the same state, they look remarkably similar in ADA scores, while senators from the same states of opposite parties vote very differently from one another (an average ADA score difference of over 40 points in recent decades). See also Bullock and Brady (1983). There is a considerable literature offering reasons why two-party competition in single-member districts will not yield full convergence of policy stands (see, e.g., Aldrich and McGinnis 1989; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995; Aranson and Ordeshook 1972; Bullock and Brady 1983; Coleman 1971, 1972; Jung, Kenny and Lott 1994; Owen and Grofman 1995; Shapiro et al. 1990).

The second fact is that constituencies differ in their distribution of voter ideological preferences; in particular, districts may be expected to differ in the ideological location of their median voter (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1989): For instance, in some districts the median voter is right of center, in some districts the median voter is left of center.

These two facts lead to a third fact: Candidates of the same party running for office in different constituencies are unlikely to have identical policy positions.[8] The most likely location of candidates/incumbents of a given party varies with the ideological makeup of the constituency. In general, in any constituency we expect the Republican to be to the right of the position of the overall median voter in that constituency and the Democrat to be to the left. Indeed, in general, we expect candidates of a given party to be located somewhere between their party's median voter in the constituency and the overall median voter in that constituency (Aranson and Ordeshook 1972; Coleman 1971, 1972; Owen and Grofman 1995; Shapiro et al. 1990; cf. Fenno, 1978).

Thus, Democratic incumbents (or candidates) in conservative congressional constituencies will, on average, be more conservative in voting behavior than the average Democratic representative; and, similarly, Republican incumbents (or candidates) in liberal congressional constituencies will, on average, be more liberal in voting behavior than the average Republican representative. In general, the Democrat in a conservative constituency will not be quite as conservative as a Republican elected from that constituency, and a Republican elected from a liberal constituency will not be quite as liberal as a Democrat elected from that constituency (Brady and Lynn 1973).

In most congressional districts, the median voter in that district will be either to the left or to the right of the national median voter, and the median Democrat or Republican voter in the district may be either to the left or the right of the national median voter of the party. Most important, in most congressional districts will be a set of voters who are to the Democratic side of the midpoint between, say, the Democratic and Republican candidates for House or the presidency, but who also are to the Republican side of the midpoint between the Democratic and Republican candidates for president, or the House.

Some of the most important of the possible links between the locations of district level and national level medians and expected party candidate locations are laid out in Figure 1, in an example in which the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates are at roughly equal distances on either side of the national median voter and in which we illustrate results for three generic types of

[8]This is true both for candidates of a given party running for different levels of office and for candidates of that same party running for the same level of office (e.g., the House of Representatives) in different constituencies, even constituencies within the same state. In contrast, when we compare candidates of the same party running for the same office in two successive elections within the same constituency, the policy positions of these two candidates are likely to be very similar—especially, of course, when it is the same candidate in both elections! (Fiorina 1974; Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990; cf. Grofman, Griffin, and Berry 1995.)

FIGURE 1

Illustrating Voter Choices for the Presidency and Congress under the Comparative Midpoints Model in Liberal, Moderate, and Conservative Constituencies
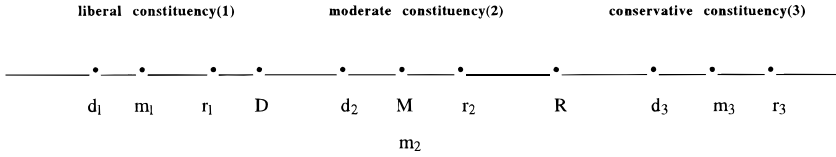
Notes: Capital letters are used to represent the positions of presidential candidates and the location of the national median voter both overall and within each of the two parties; lower case letters are used to represent the positions of congressional candidates and the location of the median voter within each of the three types of congressional districts both overall and within each of the two parties. Note that the relative location of r_1, D, and d_2 need not be the same as shown above; similarly the relative location of r_2, R, and d_3 need not be the same as shown above. Also, m_2 need not coincide with M.

district: liberal (type 1), moderate (type 2), and conservative (type 3).[9] In Figure 1, we use capital letters to refer to the location of the presidential candidates (**D** and **R**) and the national median (**M**), while we use lower case letters to refer to the location of each party's candidates in each of these generic types of districts (e.g., $\mathbf{d_1}$, $\mathbf{r_1}$) and for the district medians ($\mathbf{m_1}$, $\mathbf{m_2}$, $\mathbf{m_3}$).[10]

From Figure 1, we can see that in our hypothetical election, conservative districts (category 3) should vote Republican for president since the median voter in those districts is far closer ideologically to the Republican presidential candidate than to the Democratic presidential candidate. The local Democratic candidate in such districts may well be quite conservative and, thus, some number of conservative districts may also vote Democratic for the House. *Thus, in a conservative district, if there is a split, under the CM model it will tend to occur,* ceteris paribus*, with a Democrat winning the congressional election and a Republican presidential candidate carrying the district, and not conversely.*

On the other hand, liberal districts (category 1) should go Democratic for president since the median voter in those districts is far closer ideologically to the Democratic presidential candidate than to the Republican presidential candidate. Some of these liberal districts may also vote Republican for the House, since the local Republican candidate in such districts may be quite liberal and closer to the

[9] To keep life simple, we will deal only with two-party competition.

[10] By taking the medians as fixed, we do not mean to exclude the possibility of random error in candidate location assignments. However, we do not deal with the potential biases in assigning candidate locations generated by rationalization, assimilation, and contrast effects (see, e.g., Page and Brody 1972). Acknowledging the presence of such effects would substantially complicate our exposition but not, we believe, fundamentally change the results.

district median than the Democratic opponent. *Thus, in a liberal constituency, if there is a split, under the CM model, it will tend to occur,* ceteris paribus*, with a Republican winning the congressional election and a Democratic presidential candidate carrying the district, and not conversely.* When we turn to the category of moderate districts (category 2), it is easy to see that in some moderate districts, outcomes for president will be the same as those for the House, but in others it will not—depending upon the exact location of m_2, i.e., whether that location is on the same side of both the d_2r_2 midpoint and the **DR** midpoint. Unlike the results we obtained for the CM model in liberal and conservative districts, *in moderate districts, if there is a split, it can occur either with a Republican winning the congressional election and a Democratic presidential candidate carrying the district, or the other way around.*

Although the directionality of the split can be expected to be different for liberal districts than for conservative districts, split-ticket outcomes can occur in all three types of districts. However, *ceteris paribus*, the likelihood of split-ticket outcomes is not identical in the three types of districts. We posit two additional (stylized) empirical facts: First, the more liberal the district, the more likely, *ceteris paribus*, the district is to be carried by the Democratic presidential nominee. Second, liberal House districts are likely to elect liberals and conservative House districts to elect conservatives. Thus, we may use the conservatism/liberalism of the representative (of a given party) as a (rough) proxy for the conservatism/liberalism of the district. It follows, then, that the Democratic presidential candidate should be less likely to carry the districts in which there are winners of the candidate's own party when the Democratic winners are conservative than when the Democratic winners are liberal—with districts won by moderate Democrats falling in between; while the Democratic presidential candidate should be less likely to carry the districts in which there are winners of the opposite party when those Republican winners are conservative than when the Republican winners are liberal—with districts won by moderate Republicans falling in between.[11]

Thus, *in general, for winners of a given party, we would expect the highest proportion of split outcomes to occur in those districts that are ideologically extreme in a fashion that is* atypical *of that party.*[12] In the comparative midpoints

[11] In general, a Democratic presidential candidate should be least likely to carry the set of districts in which there are conservative winners of the opposite party and most likely to carry the districts in which there are liberal winners of his own party; a Republican presidential candidate should be least likely to carry the set of districts in which there are liberal winners of the opposite party and most likely to carry the districts in which there are conservative winners of his own party.

[12] The Democratic presidential candidate should be more likely to carry the House districts in which there are Democratic winners when the winners in these districts are liberal than when the Democratic winners are conservative; the Republican presidential candidate should be more likely to carry the House districts in which there are Republican winners when the winners in these districts are conservative than when the Republican winners are liberal. Indeed, if a winning presidential candidate fails to capture a significant number of the districts won by his own party's House candidates only in those districts that are ideologically atypical of the party, this is clear evidence in support of the comparative midpoints model.

model, it is the interaction of the ideology of the district (i.e., the policy location of its median voter) with the locus of party control in the district that predicts which seats will be split and in which direction.

Although the comparative midpoints model is more complex than the standard simple Downsian model by virtue of added realism (e.g., persistent party differences) and institutional detail (e.g., multiple constituencies), some readers might feel that the main conclusion of our model can best be described as obvious. But, *sometimes even the obvious needs to be pointed out for it to become obvious*. In this context, it is useful to remind readers that our simple story about why (and where) we get split-ticket voting (at the aggregate level) is quite distinct from the four most common explanations of split-ticket voting in the literature. For example, and quite importantly, in the comparative midpoints model, unlike the Fiorina/Alesina and Rosenthal policy-balancing model, voters split their votes for "sincere" rather than strategic reasons.[13]

While works like Jacobson (1990, 1992), Fiorina (1992), and Alesina and Rosenthal (1995) deal with many of the same issues as we do, and they do contain a clear recognition that constituencies differ in their ideological composition as do many other studies (e.g., Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989; Bullock and Brady 1983; Hurley and Wilson 1989; Shapiro et al. 1990), none of these authors state clearly that ideological differences across constituencies is a driving force behind ticket-splitting. Frymer (1994) and Frymer, Kim and Bines (1997) do, however, offer intuitions that are very similar to those in this paper.[14] Unfortunately, the empirical test used in the first of these papers is not compelling,[15] and the second paper uses survey data that give rise to hypotheses slightly different from those given above. Brady et al. (1996: see especially Table 8) also anticipate the argument in this paper, but their data analysis is limited to 1994 and does not focus on ticket-splitting *per se*.

Data Analysis

Our interest in this paper is in split-ticket outcomes at the constituency level rather than in the total amount of split-ticket voting at the individual level, or

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[13] We use the term "sincere" in the sense of Farquharson (1970) to mean voters simply vote for the candidate they most prefer.

[14] The comparative midpoints model we develop in this article was developed by the first author in 1992, and we were not familiar with Frymer's 1994 paper until after a near-final version of this paper was completed. We are indebted to Morris Fiorina (personal communication, September 1996) for calling the Frymer article to our attention.

[15] Frymer (1994) finds that Democratic presidential candidates generally run stronger in constituencies held by liberal representatives, but this is not surprising and is not a direct test of the comparative midpoints hypotheses we presented above. Fiorina (1996: 154–55) criticizes the Frymer (1994) article for overly broad empirical claims *vis a vis* testing the policy-balancing model and for failing to take into account the possibility of variations in the locations of the Democratic and Republican congressional candidates relative to the presidential candidates in terms of testing his own model (see esp. Fiorina, 1996: Figure 10-5, p. 155).

even in the amount of split-ticket voting within any given constituency.[16] By focusing on aggregate-level predictions about which districts should be most likely to exhibit split outcomes, we have derived reasonable (and testable) implications of the comparative midpoints model. Since we do not have data on the ideological location of the median voter for each individual House district, in testing these, our two central hypotheses, we will focus on the House seats where we have information about the winner's ideological location, using that information to draw inferences about the seat's ideological characteristics.[17]

> *Hypothesis 1: For districts with Democratic House winners, the proportion of split outcomes should increase as we move from liberal districts to conservative districts, and thus, the proportion of split outcomes should increase as we move from districts with very liberal representatives to districts with very conservative representatives.*

> *Hypothesis 2: For districts with Republican House winners, the proportion of split outcomes should decrease as we move from liberal districts to conservative districts, and thus, the proportion of split outcomes should decrease as we move from districts with very liberal representatives to districts with very conservative representatives.*

For election outcome data pooled for 1964–92, Table 1 shows the number of unified and divided outcomes for House and president in these eight presidential elections, sorted by which party won the district in districts grouped (by quintile categories), according to the liberalism (ADA scores) of the winner.[18] The ADA scores of the victorious Democratic candidate will, of course, overstate the liberalism of the median voter in the district (since the Democratic winner will be shifted toward his own party's median voter), while the ADA scores of the victorious Republican candidate will understate the liberalism of the district's median voter for the same reason.[19] Nonetheless, because we are grouping by party of the winner, the ADA score of that winner should be a not unreasonable proxy

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[16] We hope to work on a companion paper in which we investigate the determinants of the within-constituency *gap in vote share* between a party's House or Senate candidate and its presidential candidate.

[17] Ideally, we would like *independent* information on the location of the median voter (of each party) in each district. In principle, as one reviewer suggested, we could estimate these from demographic features of the district or from survey data on voter attitudes. However, at the level of individual congressional districts, given the limited cell sizes for the usual survey datasets, measurement error would be too great. We are also skeptical that estimates derived solely from demographic features of the district would yield sufficiently precise estimates.

[18] We have replicated the analyses reported in Table 1 limited to those seats where there was an incumbent running, but the results are so similar to those in Table 1 that we have omitted them.

[19] We may not equate the views of the representative with those of the median voter in the district unless there is perfect Downsian convergence in candidate/party positions. As noted earlier, to the contrary, we expect persistent party divergence.

TABLE 1

Proportion of Split Outcomes in House Contests 1964–92: Grouped According to Party of Winner
and Winner ADA Score

	Very Liberal (79–100)	Liberal (60–79)	Moderate (40–59)	Conservative (20–39)	Very Conservative (0–19)
All Democratic Winners, 1964–92					
Mean ADA Score	90.0	70.1	49.5	29.7	8.7
Number Unified	498	250	161	97	112
Number Split	170	249	190	129	168
Total	668	499	351	226	280
Percent Unified	74.6	50.1	45.9	42.9	40.0
All Republican Winners, 1964–92					
Mean ADA Score	85.8	69.3	48.2	27.0	7.4
Number Unified	5	31	81	200	797
Number Split	3	22	20	50	142
Total	8	53	101	250	939
Percent Unified	62.5	58.5	80.2	80.0	84.9

for the location of the median voter in the district relative to the location of the median voter in the other districts captured by members of that same party.[20]

We see that both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 are supported by Table 1, especially when we compare the two extreme ideological categories. For Democrats, the percent of unified outcomes falls from 74.6% in the most liberal districts to only 40% in the most conservative districts. For Republicans, the percent of unified outcomes rises from 62.5% in the most liberal districts to 84.9% in the most conservative districts.[21] Thus, the direction is exactly as predicted. For Democrats, liberal districts exhibit the lowest proportion of split-ticket outcomes and conservative districts, the highest. For Republicans, this pattern is exactly reversed.

Since there are numerous other factors besides ideology affecting the likelihood of split-ticket outcomes (e.g., the relative attractiveness on non-policy dimensions of the various pairs of candidates at both the House and the presidential level, including regional "friends and neighbors" effects for presidential candidates, and the magnitude of the presidential margin of victory), issues that are not captured by a unidimensional model, we regard the fit of the data shown in Table 1 to be quite good for a single-factor explanatory model. Indeed, since the comparative midpoints model works despite our failure to control for potential complicating factors, we can be reasonably confident that our tests are actually understating its predictive usefulness. Nonetheless, the reader may be suspicious that the pooled results in Table 1 may not be reflective of all the years. To allay such concerns, we show in Table 2 the difference in split-ticket outcomes between the most liberal and the most conservative districts for Democratic and Republican winners, respectively, for each presidential election.[22] Because of the small number of very liberal Republican winners, for this group we combine data for the "very liberal" and "liberal" districts.

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[20] There is a major problem with simply grouping districts according to the ADA score of the district representative without introducing a control for party. Since what is desired are districts grouped according to the liberalism of the median voter, if we group districts according to their mean ADA scores without separating out incumbents by party, as noted previously, Republican representatives in the grouping have scores (on balance) to the right of their district median and Democratic representatives have scores (on balance) to the left of their district median, thus potentially confounding the ordinality of the groupings. Nonetheless, simply for illustrative purposes, we have calculated examples of what happens when we judge liberalism relative to the overall House mean rather than the within-party mean. Results are very similar to those in Table 1 (data omitted), but we have to be much more cautious about interpreting the data because of some of the very small cell sizes and cases with missing data and because of the potential "confounding" problem in groupings alluded to above.

[21] Because there are only eight cases in the "very liberal" category among Republican winners, it is important to note that the predicted pattern is equally strong (actually slightly stronger) if we use the proportion of split outcomes among Republican winners in the "liberal" category (58.5%, N = 53) rather than that in the very liberal category (62.5%).

[22] Note that in Table 1 we are pooling using the House district as our unit of analysis, rather than treating proportions in each year as the basis for pooling. Thus, the means reported for the pooled date in Table 1 are not identical to the values we would obtain by averaging the year-by-year data reported in Table 2.

Difference in the Proportion of Split Outcomes Between the Most Liberal
and the Most Conservative House Districts: 1964–92*

	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
Democratic House Winners	41.8	41.0	47.6	5.8	27.3	51.0	75.4	61.9
Republican House Winners	−26.9	−58.7	−11.2	−39.1	−23.6	−16.7	−55.5	−78.5

*For Democratic House winners, the difference in proportions reported is between the cases in the "very liberal" ADA category (79–100) and the "very conservative" category (0–19). For Republican House winners, because of very small N in the "very liberal" category, the difference in proportions reported is between the combined set of cases in the "very liberal" and "liberal" ADA categories (60–100) and the "very conservative" category (0–19).

We see from Table 2 that in each presidential year, in House districts won by Democrats, the liberal districts give rise to the greatest proportion of split-ticket outcomes (as signaled by positive values to the difference in proportions), while for Republican-held House districts the conservative districts give rise to the greatest proportion of split-ticket outcomes (as signaled by negative values to the difference in proportions).[23]

Now, let us turn briefly to various factors that may account for some of the differences in the magnitudes of the effects shown for the different election years in Table 2. The first two we shall consider are directionality and magnitude of presidential victory margin.

Directionality of Presidential Victory

A winning presidential candidate might be expected to carry most of the districts won by House members of his own party, regardless of the ideological characteristics of those districts. *Thus,* ceteris paribus*, for House districts won by a given party, the absolute magnitude of differences in split-ticket voting levels across districts of different ideological types should be higher in years when that party's candidate loses the White House than in years when that party's candidate wins the White House*. This expectation is confirmed, but the magnitude of the effect is not that great. In years when a Democrat wins the presidency (1964, 1976, 1992) among seats won by Democrats, the difference in the proportion of split outcomes between very liberal and very conservative districts is 31.7; while in years when a Republican wins the presidency (1968, 1972, 1980, 1984, 1988), the difference in the proportion of split outcomes between very liberal and very conservative districts is 40.6. Similarly, in years when a Republican wins the presidency (1968, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988), among seats won by

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[23] Year-by-year data in a format parallel to that of Table 1 is available from the authors upon request.

Republicans, the difference in the proportion of split outcomes between liberal and very conservative districts is −35.5%; while in years when a Democrat wins the presidency (1964, 1976, 1992), the difference in the proportion of split outcomes between liberal and very conservative districts is −40.0%. The main reason the expected effect is muted is that even in years when a Democrat captures the presidency, there are a substantial number of southern House districts held by conservative Democrats which are won by the Republican presidential candidate.

Margin of Presidential Victory

As long as there is some incumbency advantage, so that the opposing party is not wiped out in a presidential landslide, we would expect that *the greater the presidential victory margin, the more districts with split outcomes we can expect* since the president will then be carrying more and more districts that are normally safe territory for the opposing party and that are still being held by the other party's incumbents. Indeed, we find that for the period 1964–92, the proportion of districts in which a Democrat wins for the House that is also captured by the Democratic presidential nominee (i.e., the proportion of districts unified for the Democrats) has a correlation of .96 with the Democratic share of the two-party vote, while the proportion of districts in which a Republican wins for the House that is also captured by the Republican presidential nominee (i.e., the proportion of districts unified for the Republicans) has a correlation of .92 with the Republican share of the two-party vote.

The extent to which split-ticket outcomes occur should be in part a function of presidential margin of victory. When a very high proportion of districts of the losing presidential candidate's party exhibit split-ticket outcomes, the expected differences predicted by the comparative midpoints model are apt to be nearly invisible. In the limit, if the winning presidential candidate carried every district, then clearly, all the seats won by the losing side would exhibit split-ticket outcomes and all of the seats won by the candidate of the winning party would be unified; thus, in this worst-case scenario, we will observe no differences in split-ticket outcomes across ideologically different types of districts.

We expect that *in election years in which a candidate wins with a substantial margin of victory, the magnitude of the differences in split-ticket outcomes between liberal and conservative districts predicted by the comparative midpoints model should be dramatically reduced for the party of the winning candidate.* This expectation is largely confirmed for years (1972, 1984) with substantial Republican presidential victory margins, but not for 1964, the year a Democrat won a resounding presidential victory. In lopsided Republican presidential victory years, 1972 and 1988, the differences for Republican House winners in the proportion of split-ticket outcomes between liberal and very conservative districts are only −11.2% and −16.7%, respectively (see Table 2)—lower than in other presidential years, as expected by the hypothesis we proposed about the effect of presidential victory margin. However, in 1964, the gap in split-outcome proportions among Democratic House winners in ideologically different types

of districts remains a substantial 41.8% (see Table 2). Even in a year like 1964, when a Democrat captured the presidency with a substantial margin of victory, a large number of southern House districts held by Democrats were won by Goldwater (36 of the 75 southern seats won by Democrats that year).[24] Thus, for Democrats, because of the peculiarities of southern history, presidential margin of victory failed to have the expected impact of reducing the magnitude of the link between district ideology and split outcomes in 1964.

Other Effects

The magnitude of effects for Democratic House winners shown in Table 2 is reduced during the years when Jimmy Carter was running as the Democratic nominee, especially in 1976. As we can see when we look separately at the South (data omitted for space considerations), in 1976 (and to a much lesser extent in 1980) Carter was able to win the districts held by conservative southern Democrats. We attribute this fact to the perception in 1976 by many southerners that Carter was "one of them." We also see from Table 2 that the two most recent elections show the most striking effects of ideology on the proportion of split outcomes. We attribute this fact to an ongoing (albeit glacial) realignment that has made it very difficult for a liberal Democratic presidential nominee to capture the (increasingly few) House districts held by conservatives of his own party, whereas a conservative Republican presidential nominee has no chance to capture districts held by liberal House Democrats. Because the ideologically extreme districts most typical of a party's constituency are now largely under unified control in presidential election years, the difference in proportions in split-ticket outcomes between those districts and ideologically extreme districts that are atypical of a party is enhanced.[25]

Discussion

Models are best judged not in terms of either their surface plausibility or their mathematical elegance, but in terms of empirical fit. As we have seen, one clear implication of the comparative midpoints approach is that, *ceteris paribus*, con-

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[24] The South includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.

[25] At the same time as the differences in the proportion of split-ticket outcomes between very liberal and very conservative districts have been growing, realignment (largely but not entirely in the South) has led to the virtual elimination of liberal Republicans and a dramatic decline in the number of very conservative Democrats. Thus, increasingly, liberal House districts elect Democrats and very conservative districts elect Republicans. Indeed, since 1958, there have been very few liberal congressional districts held by Republicans. Even in the South, the number of conservative districts held by Democrats has been shrinking. However, the fact that the number of districts in which the comparative midpoints effect could be expected to be most clearly visible is small is obviously important for purposes of testing that model. In particular, we must be sensitive in our data analysis to distinguishing magnitude of effect in terms of clear *directionality* of impact across districts of different types, from magnitude of effect defined in terms of the actual *number* of districts in which we can find evidence for the comparative midpoints effect.

servative constituencies with Democratic winners are most likely to vote Republican for president and Democratic for House, while (the few) constituencies that elect liberal Republicans are most likely to vote Democratic for president. We have tested these predictions and found them strongly confirmed for data from the period 1964–92.

Of course, we do not wish in any way to claim that the comparative midpoints model tells the whole story of ticket-splitting. Rather, its aggregate-level focus should be seen as complementary, rather than in opposition, to other models that seek to explain ticket-splitting at the individual level.[26] But we would claim that much of the regularity in the observed patterns of split outcomes across districts can be explained via the comparative midpoints model in terms of sincere choices, without the need to posit the relatively complex cognitive processes and strategic choices required by the policy-balancing model.[27]

The focus of this article has been on split ticket outcomes between the House or Senate and the president, rather than on divided government *per se*. The exact nature of the link between ticket-splitting and divided government must be addressed elsewhere. Suffice it to say that ticket-splitting is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for divided government and that there are multiple causes of divided government whose relative importance has almost certainly varied over time (Brunell and Grofman 1998; Fiorina 1992; Grofman et al., 1996; Stewart 1991). Nonetheless, there is one important implication of the comparative midpoints model for divided government that needs to be mentioned.

Because in recent decades there are far more conservative constituencies with Democratic incumbents than liberal constituencies with Republican incumbents, especially in the House, the comparative midpoints model leads us to expect that the usual pattern of divided government during this period should have involved Democrats retaining control of the House in a year when a Republican wins the presidency. The comparative midpoints model thus provides an explanation for the well-known fact that there has been a clear directional bias to the recent pattern of frequent divided government that does not rely on any supposed in-

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[26] A focus on individual-level data (such as in Frymer, Kim, and Bines 1997; Alvarez and Schousen 1993, and numerous other authors) may lead to an inattention to district-specific effects. For example, Alvarez and Schousen (1993) test whether ideologically moderate voters are more likely to split their tickets (as would be predicted by the balancing model) and do not find empirical support for this expectation. In the comparative midpoints model, ideological "moderates" must be defined *relative to* the composition of the districts in which they find themselves. In very conservative districts, where most voters are conservative, even the median voter is going to be a conservative. However, in the comparative midpoints model, it is not moderate voters *per se* who are expected to split their vote but voters whose location gives them different party preferences at different levels of government.

[27] Also, while the Alesina and Rosenthal (1995) model can be applied to predicting changes from off-year to on-year, it is easiest to test in midterms when presidential control is known and thus the calculus of voters determining whether or not to balance can be more easily specified. Moreover, unlike the Alesina and Rosenthal version of the balancing model, which can be seen primarily if not exclusively as a predictor of *change* in votes/outcomes from on-year to off-year, or perhaps vice versa, the comparative midpoints model is intended simply to predict which districts are most likely to exhibit split outcomes.

evitable advantage that the Republicans have in winning the presidency or that the Democrats have in winning House seats.

In most presidential election years of the past several decades, the Democrats won a majority in most regions of the country. Still, without their edge of dominance in southern seats, in many recent elections Democrats would have lost control of the House. In particular, in 1972, 1980, 1984, and 1988, if the districts in the South (10 states) which went Democratic for House and Republican for president (64 in 1972, 31 in 1980, 61 in 1984, 53 in 1988)[28] had gone Republican for both, then the Democrats would have lost control of the House in each of those years (see data in Ornstein, Mann and Malbin 1991), which means the ticket-splitting in conservative southern constituencies that retained conservative Democratic incumbents even when voting for a Republican for president is, in principle, enough to account for divided government in these years.[29] However, in 1992, only 28 House seats in the South retained Democratic incumbents while voting for a Republican for president—not enough to have affected control of the House even if all those Democratic incumbents had been defeated.[30]

As the number of conservative House districts that remain in Democratic hands decreases, our model leads us to predict that Democratic performance for House seats held by Democrats will mesh ever more closely with Democratic performance for the presidency. Indeed, given Republican gains in House seats in the South that are very unlikely to be reversed (Grofman and Handley 1998), we believe that in a year when a Republican wins the presidency, a pro-Republican electoral tide will almost inevitably also lead to Republican control of the House. Hence, *in presidential years*, the long-standing pattern of Republican president and Democratic House should now be the *least* likely, rather than the most likely, occurrence. Indeed, we saw in 1996 that the Republicans were able to hold onto the House even though Clinton won reelection. In part, that was because they actually gained House seats in the South, even while they were losing House seats in the rest of the country.

Thus, if our analysis of trends is correct then, while many scholars were highlighting past electoral patterns to project the near inevitability of split-ticket voting leading to a Democratic House and a Republican president (see literature review in Fiorina 1992), realigning forces in the South—*when viewed in conjunction with the operation of the comparative midpoints model*—were in the process of making this form of divided government an unlikely outcome in presidential election years.

[28] For the country as a whole, there were 196 House-president splits in 1984 and 148 such splits in 1988, but only 100 in 1992.

[29] On the other hand, using the 10-state definition of the South, in 1968, if the Democratic presidential candidate (Humphrey) had captured the 10 southern states whose state congressional delegations were under Democratic control, Humphrey would have won with 271 Electoral College votes.

[30] In addition, there were six seats in 1992 that were **Dr**. The other 28 split outcomes were districts that voted Republican for president.

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