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Downsian Voting and the Separation of Powers

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Theory: Voters, as Downs (1957) argues, cast instrumental rather than expressive votes. Voters choose between candidates based on the *policy outcomes* they expect from the candidates rather than on the *policy platforms* of the candidates. Voters' expectations about the policy outputs of candidates depend on the partisan control of the separate branches of government in a separation of powers system.

Hypotheses: Voters perceive differences between a presidential candidate's policy platform and the expected policy outcome of a government with the candidate in office. The perceived differences in policy outcomes and policy platforms are influenced by voters' expectations about partisan control of the legislature. Voters' choice of candidates depends more on the distance between voter ideal points and expected policy outcomes under each candidate than on the distance between voter ideal points and candidate platforms.

Methods: Analysis of data from a 1996 Texas poll in which voters were asked to place the ideological positions of Bob Dole and Bill Clinton along with the ideological position of the government with Bob Dole or Bill Clinton as president.

Results: Voters' support for presidential candidates is more strongly related to their proximity to the policy outcomes they expect from each candidate's election than to their proximity to the candidate's policy position.

In a system of government characterized by a separation of powers, policy outcomes are, at the very least, a function of the policy preferences of the executive and legislature, which, in turn, can influence how the courts, bureaucracy, and even state and local governments shape public policy. Yet studies of voting behavior usually ignore the possibility that voters base their vote decisions upon an understanding that members of different political institutions interact with one another to produce *policy outcomes* (Downs 1957). Instead, political scientists usually assume that voters evaluate the candidates' *policy platforms*, with little regard for the policy outcomes that the candidates are likely to produce, given the constraints imposed by other branches or levels of government.

The original Downsian model of voter behavior posits that a voter evaluates the policy outcomes that a candidate would likely produce in of-

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fice rather than the policy platform that a candidate announces. As Downs (1957, 39) writes of a voter:

if he is rational, he knows that no party will be able to do everything that it says it will do. Hence he cannot merely compare platforms; instead he must estimate in his own mind what the parties would actually do were they in power.

Downs makes it clear that rational voters cannot consider only what candidates say they will do, but rather what they *will* do if elected.

Political scientists—both within and outside the Downsian and spatial modeling traditions—examine voters' use of issues and ideology by focusing on candidates' announced positions. Hinich and Munger (1994, 46) describe the classical spatial theory of issue voting by writing, "voters evaluate candidates based on a *loss function*, related to the spatial distance between the candidate's proposed platform and the voter's ideal point" (emphasis in original). If voters recognize differences between what candidates promise to do in office and what they are capable of doing in office, then vote choice models are misspecified.

We focus on one element of the difference between what candidates announce and what they are likely to do: the separation of powers. Candidates for an office such as the American presidency are constrained by the legislature in their implementation of policy. During the 1996 American presidential election, we included on a statewide Texas survey a set of questions to assess whether voters recognize and act on the separation of powers when casting their votes. The survey asked voters to place on an ideological scale the positions of the major party presidential candidates and then to place on the same scale the position of the federal government with each candidate as president. Respondents clearly perceived a difference between each candidate's policy platform and the policies that a government under that candidate would likely produce. The differences in voter perceptions of the candidates and a government led by the candidates depend, among other things, upon voters' expectations about which party would control Congress. In a vote choice model, the spatial distance between voters and the expected policy outcomes under the candidates outperforms the spatial distance between the voters and candidates' announced positions. Our measure of the position of the government under each candidate appears particularly powerful as an explanation of the vote choice of nonpartisan voters. The results suggest that voters recognize and act on the separation of powers in American presidential elections.

1. VOTERS AND THE SEPARATION OF POWERS

When political scientists use measures of the candidates' announced policy positions to explain vote choice in presidential elections, they implicitly assume two things about voters. First, they assume that voters behave as

if the president enacts policy without interference from other political institutions, such as Congress or the bureaucracy. In a political system constructed around the separation of powers, this assumption is rarely met. Second, researchers assume that voters cast expressive, not instrumental, votes: voters are more interested in using their votes to express which policy platform they prefer, instead of the policy outcomes they would like to obtain. As a result, the theoretical and empirical treatments of issue voting that focus upon voters' proximity to candidates' positions (e.g., Enelow and Hinich 1984) present a limited view of voters' decision making capabilities.

The Downsian formulation of voter behavior clearly assumes that voters choose candidates based on expected policy outcomes rather than on the candidates' announced positions. In trying to estimate what a candidate will do if elected, a voter must consider veracity, ambiguity, and feasibility.¹

Voters may be able to estimate what parties will do from their platforms (Downs 1957, 99) because parties must be honest and reliable; they must do what they promise. If not, voters will not trust that party's platforms in the future because the platform offers little basis for predicting the party's performance in office (Hinich and Munger 1994, 74–75). Parties and candidates, however, may have incentives to lie. If candidates' primary concern is securing election, then lying about their true position is one way of moving themselves into the ideological position that will maximize their vote share. While there is a risk to their reliability, the process of governing is sufficiently complex, especially in a system with a separation of powers, that a candidate may take such a risk in order to get elected. Politicians may hope that information asymmetries between the politician and voters enable the politician to explain away any inconsistencies between campaign promises and performance.²

Voters also face ambiguity when evaluating what candidates will do if elected. Voters, particularly ones who are less politically sophisticated, can believe that candidates are truthful about their policy positions, yet have a difficult time figuring out what the candidates want to do. Page (1978) and Shepsle (1972) argue that candidates have incentives to make ambiguous statements about what they will do in power. Even if candidates are penalized for ambiguity, as Hinich and Munger (1994) and Alvarez (1997) argue, some amount of uncertainty is unavoidable because many people do not

¹Downs (1957, 39) also writes that parties may face unforeseen obstacles.

²One can easily imagine parties developing reputations that provide them with leeway to deviate from their promises (Fenno 1978; Bianco 1994). Developing a reputation of reliability means that candidates must carry out their promises sometimes, but candidates that have been elected on platforms that they truly prefer may be able to develop a favorable reputation that enables them to deviate from its promises when necessary.

have an incentive to gather the information to evaluate accurately what the candidates want to do if elected (Downs 1957).

The third difficulty that voters face in evaluating what candidates will do if elected, particularly in presidential elections, is that the president's program can pass only with cooperation from the legislature. If a candidate's party does not control Congress (and even when the candidate's party does), it is far from certain that the candidate's platform reflects the policies that voters will get if that candidate is elected. As Fiorina (1992) argues, recent experience with divided control of government may give some voters an incentive to vote for candidates based not upon candidates' announced positions, but upon the voter's assessment of how the different branches' powers, in combination with candidates' positions, will produce policy outcomes somewhere between the positions of the president and Congress.³

Fiorina (1988, 1992) was among the first scholars to explicitly model the calculation voters might make when projecting presidential candidates' announced positions onto likely policy outcomes and thus to take seriously Downs's model of voter decision making. Fiorina's divided government hypothesis suggests that a voter considers the power and issue positions of the executive and the legislature and votes for the combination of control over both branches that produces an expected outcome closest to the voter's ideal point. While Fiorina recognizes that voters may not consciously act to obtain divided government, he does acknowledge that "people may have a vague appreciation of the overall picture that plays some role in how they vote" (Fiorina 1992, 65). Fiorina does not, however, directly test whether voters anticipate the interaction between presidential candidates and the rest of the government.

To better assess the extent to which voters act on the policy positions of the candidates versus the expected policy position of a government with each candidate as president, we included on a Texas poll four questions about the major party candidates for president in 1996.⁴ First, respondents

³For convenience, we speak of Congress as a unitary actor, even though the institution's ideal point really represents some aggregation of its members' ideal points. Since Congress is a collective, voters face even greater difficulties in congressional elections when estimating the likely impact of a congressional candidate on policy outcomes.

⁴The data we use for this study come from a telephone survey conducted between September 10 and 21, 1996. The survey questioned 1001 respondents (out of 1484 contacted, for a response rate of 67 percent) from the state of Texas using a random-digit-dialing sampling method. For our purposes, examining Texas respondents only should not produce any problems because we are interested in how voters make decisions, not the outcome of those decisions. Consequently, there is little reason to believe that Texans make their decisions in ways that are markedly different from other Americans. Below, we also show that many of their assessments of the presidential candidates are completely consistent with the rest of the nation's.

were asked the standard NES question about the ideological positions of the two candidates:

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Please think of a seven-point scale in which the political views that people might hold range from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. On this scale, a measurement of one means extremely liberal political views, and a measurement of seven means extremely conservative political views. Where would you place Bill Clinton (Bob Dole) on this scale?

In this question, the focus is on the candidates' personal views or announced position. Although this is not made explicit—a respondent might not be sure whether to use a candidate's personal views or the views that the candidate runs on—the final policies of the government are certainly not the focus of this question. The personal focus is likely to be primed when the question is asked, as is often the case, after a similar question eliciting the respondent's ideological position.

Immediately following the two candidate-position questions, respondents were asked to place the policy outcomes they expected from the federal government conditional on the election of each candidate.

Generally speaking, where on this scale would you place the policies that you think the federal government will enact if Bill Clinton (Bob Dole) wins the Presidential election?

The difference between this question and the traditional question is that voters are asked to consider the role of the President within the federal government rather than in isolation from the other branches.

We accept the value of the traditional question, but we think that the policy expectations question is also useful. In a system with responsible party government, the distinction might not be terribly important, but in systems where the executive has different powers and is elected separately from the legislative branch, rational voters should consider more than the policy preferences of the presidential candidates.⁵ Anecdotaly, pundits looking toward the 1996 election thought that many people who might not fully agree with Clinton's policy positions would still vote for him as a check upon the excesses of a Republican Congress—exactly as the Founders intended. Because the Texas survey includes a series of questions about respondents' preferences for President, their knowledge of the current control of Con-

⁵Downs (1957, 39) does assume responsible party government: "The governing party in our model has such broad powers that perhaps it could carry out all its promises."

gress, and their expectations for party control of the next Congress, we can see the extent to which voters' beliefs about policy outcomes are influenced by Congress and the separation of powers. Finally, the measure of policy expectations may help us better understand how voters' uncertainty about the candidates' positions or their beliefs about the truthfulness of the candidates' platforms affects their ability to vote on candidates' personal ideological positions or campaign platforms.

2. VOTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF POLICY POSITIONS

The traditional candidate placement question and our new policy expectations question clearly elicit different responses. While a significant minority of respondents believed that the candidates' platforms reflected the policies that their governments would enact, a majority of voters provided different responses to both questions for each candidate. 60.1 percent of the 775 respondents who responded to both questions about Bill Clinton placed him at a different position than the government he would direct. Likewise, 56.7 percent of the 762 respondents who answered both questions about Bob Dole saw his personal position as different from that of the government with him as president. Respondents also perceived clear differences between the policies that the federal government would enact under each of the candidates. Over 86 percent of the respondents thought that a Dole government would enact different policies than a Clinton government. These data indicate that our measure is not simply replicating information from the standard measure.

The differences people perceive between each candidate's personal policy position and the policy outcomes that would result from each candidate's election prove significant, both statistically and substantively. Table 1 presents summary statistics for responses to both types of questions, for the full sample and broken down by likely voters and respondents' party identification. On average, all groups see Clinton as more liberal than the policies produced by a government under him, and, with the exception of Independents, they see Dole as more conservative than a government where he is president. For likely voters, the difference between the mean assessment of Clinton's own position and the position of the government under him is .45, while the difference between Dole and the government under him is .22. The larger difference for Clinton is probably related to voters' expectations that the Republicans would retain control of Congress.⁶ All partisan groups see a large difference between the position of

⁶57 percent of the respondents expected the Republicans to control Congress after the election, compared with only 27 percent for the Democrats. Among respondents who knew that the Republicans already controlled Congress, 69 percent expected continued Republican control.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Voter and Candidate Placements

	Full Sample	Likely Voters	Democrat ID	Republican ID	Independents
Self-Placement	4.65 (1.51) 922	4.70 (1.45) 772	4.21 (1.49) 264	5.32 (1.25) 286	4.44 (1.55) 355
Clinton	3.14** (1.73) 883	3.02** (1.69) 746	3.66** (1.70) 254	2.41** (1.47) 272	3.26** (1.73) 344
Gov't with Clinton	3.53 (1.58) 804	3.47 (1.53) 686	4.01 (1.46) 223	2.95 (1.48) 260	3.65 (1.58) 309
Dole	5.15** (1.53) 842	5.22** (1.44) 724	5.24 (1.68) 229	5.41** (1.15) 272	4.88 (1.63) 328
Gov't with Dole	4.97 (1.38) 805	5.00 (1.33) 697	5.15 (1.59) 219	4.97 (1.06) 267	4.88 (1.44) 308

Source: September 1996 Texas Poll. Entries are means with standard deviations in parentheses and number of cases below.

**Indicates difference between candidate position and government outcome significant at $p < .05$.

Clinton and the government under Clinton, but Democrats and Independents see little difference between Dole's position and the government under Dole.⁷

The differences between voters' perceptions of a candidate's personal position and expectations about the government policy given that candidate's election are due largely to the separation of powers, even when we control for voter trust in the candidates. Voters may respond to the standard candidate position question by placing the candidate at the position he advocates while understanding that the candidate may not truthfully pursue his promises. The distance between candidate position and expected policy may be due to voters' suspicions about a candidate's veracity rather than to

⁷For the purposes of comparison, the means for the personal ideological placements questions from the 1996 National Election Study are 3.14 for Clinton and 5.14 for Dole. Similarly, Republican identifiers in that survey also saw Dole as more conservative than Democrats and nonpartisans, with means of 5.35, 5.01, and 5.09, respectively. The lack of any major differences between the distribution of perceptions in our survey and the National Election Study should quell any concerns about the smaller population from which our sample was drawn.

expectations about how the candidate will interact with Congress. The Texas survey asked respondents whether they believe each of the candidates is "trustworthy enough to be president." Of the respondents, 54 percent thought Clinton was trustworthy enough to be president while 79 percent thought Dole met this criterion.⁸ While voters' evaluations of candidates' veracity has an independent impact on the differences voters perceive between candidates' positions and expected policies, there is no question that differences in these two measures are also related to expectations about which party will control Congress after the election. For Clinton, the candidate seen as less trustworthy, the difference between the average personal and policy outcome ideological placements is .11 for respondents trusting Clinton and thinking that the Democrats would control Congress, but .36 for trusting respondents who thought that the Republicans would control Congress after the election. The disparity in these averages is even greater for respondents who did not trust Clinton. Among these respondents, the difference in the mean personal and policy outcome placements is .29 for respondents expecting the Democrats to control Congress and .71 for respondents expecting Republican control.

Voters appear to expect the government, especially Congress, to pull presidential candidates toward the center. Of the 775 respondents who answered the two questions about Bill Clinton, 41.4 percent placed Clinton's personal position as more liberal than that of a government he would lead, while only 18.7 percent thought he was personally more conservative than the position of his government. Part of this disparity can be accounted for by voters' expectations about which party would control Congress after the election. Of those who anticipated Democratic control, 23.5 percent perceived Clinton as more conservative than the government he would lead. By contrast, only 14.2 percent of those who expected a Republican Congress placed Clinton as more conservative than his government. A substantial majority of voters saw Clinton as either moderate or more liberal than the government he would lead.

The results do not reflect the conventional wisdom that the electorate perceived Bob Dole as a moderately conservative Republican whose government might be pulled rightward by an extremist Congress (cf. Wayne 1997, 151, 153). In fact, only 20.3 percent of the 762 respondents answering both questions thought that Dole was more liberal than a government led by him. By contrast, 36.4 percent of these respondents thought that Dole was more

⁸The differences between the two candidates in this survey are very similar to those found in the 1996 National Election Study, where 43 percent and 69 percent thought that "honest" described Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, respectively, "extremely" or "quite well." Differences in the question wording may account for the difference in the absolute levels.

conservative than the policies his government would produce. Of those who thought Dole would be more conservative than his government, over 50 percent believed that the Republicans would control both houses of Congress after the 1996 election. Voters' rejection of the conventional wisdom, however, may be reasonable. In 1994, Bob Dole's ADA rating was 0, placing him among the ten most conservative Senators. By contrast, Newt Gingrich's 1994 ADA score was 5 (Duncank and Lawrence 1995). Dole may have appeared more conservative during his presidential campaign by focusing on his supply-side tax cut, rather than the balanced budget policies that he had pursued in Congress.

To explain in more detail the differences in voter perceptions of the candidates' positions and the government under each candidate, we estimate an ordered probit model. The dependent variable is the respondent's perception that the candidate is more liberal (coded 2), ideologically similar to (coded 1), or more conservative (coded 0), than the policies of the government he would lead.⁹ The independent variables include two dichotomous variables for the respondents' party identification; identification with neither party is the baseline. We also include knowledge of who controlled Congress prior to the election, education, evaluation of the candidate's trustworthiness, and expectations about the control of Congress after the election.¹⁰

The results from the probit models reveal much about voters' expectations about the interaction between the president and Congress. For Clinton, respondents with more education and those who expected the Republicans to control the Congress were more likely to believe that a government under Clinton would produce policies more conservative than Clinton's personal preferences. These results are consistent with the belief that a Republican Congress would constrain Clinton's ability to enact his preferred policies. Likewise, respondents who did not trust Clinton thought that he was more

⁹We also estimated the model using the difference between a respondent's estimate of the candidate's position and the government under the candidate. Since respondents were able to place candidates only at the integer values on the ideological scales, the differences between the candidate and government under the candidate are in most cases either -1, 0, or 1. Some values were more extreme. To limit the influence of outliers on the results, we collapsed responses to a trichotomy and estimated the model using ordered probit. Using the distances between personal and policy outcomes provided no reason to reject the validity of the conclusions from Table 2. These results are available from the authors.

¹⁰The survey, unfortunately, did not ask respondents the questions from which we could construct the traditional seven-point party identification scale. Knowledge of control of Congress is a dichotomous variable equal to 1 for respondents knowing that the Republicans control both the House and Senate and 0 for everyone else. The expectations of control variable was a three-point scale, where 0 equals expectations of Democratic control, 1 equals expectations of split control, and 2 equals expectations of Republican control. Trustworthiness is a dichotomous variable equal to 1 if the respondent thinks that the candidate is trustworthy enough to be President and 0 otherwise.

Table 2. Differences Between Candidates' Positions and Government Under Candidates

Independent Variables	Clinton	Dole
Constant	0.25 (0.26)	1.12** (0.26)
Threshold	1.10** (0.07)	1.23** (0.07)
Democrat	0.15 (0.14)	-0.03 (0.13)
Republican	-0.02 (0.13)	-0.43** (0.12)
Know Republicans Control Congress	0.04 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.11)
Education	0.11** (0.04)	-0.10** (0.04)
Expectations for Next Congress	0.16** (0.07)	-0.02 (0.07)
Candidate Trustworthy	-0.25** (0.13)	-0.02 (0.07)
Number of Cases	512	518
χ^2_6	24.86**	30.96**
% reduction error	6.6	4.1

Source: September 1996 Texas Poll.

Entries are maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

** indicated $p < .05$.

liberal than the policies his government would enact. Oddly enough, this might indicate that conservatives who did not believe Clinton's self-proclaimed centrism could take some comfort in believing that he would not enact his stated policies.

Republican identifiers and respondents with more education were more likely to see Dole as more conservative than the government he would lead, $p < .05$. The clearest interpretation of this result is that Republican respondents projected their own positions onto their perception of Dole's personal ideological position, and estimates from multivariate models with Dole's personal position as the dependent variable support this interpretation. We

do not, however, find similar projection from Republican identifiers' ideological position onto the government policies of Dole.¹¹ Putting these findings together with our estimate of the public's perception of a slightly conservative Congress, the best explanation for the perception that Dole was more conservative than his government is that Republican identifiers viewed Dole as slightly conservative and Congress as moderate, while other voters perceived Dole as ideologically similar to Congress.

The contrast between the results for the two candidates indicates some interesting aspects of the 1996 election. First, expectations about control of Congress produce greater divergence between personal positions and policy outcomes given the prospect of divided government, with the election of Clinton, than unified government. As we saw in Table 1, respondents saw fewer differences between the personal policies of Bob Dole and a government he would lead (which most respondents believed would have a Republican Congress) than the personal policies of Bill Clinton and the government under his direction. In short, voters seem to be aware of the policy consequences of divided government.

These preliminary results indicate that voters do perceive differences between the candidates' personal positions and the likely policies of the federal government given their election. These perceptions are affected by respondents' information, their beliefs about the candidates' veracity, and their expectations of how the separation of powers constrains the executive's ability to implement his preferred policies. For our purposes, the important issue is whether or not voters choose candidates based upon the candidates' personal positions or on expected policy outcomes.

3. CANDIDATE POSITIONS VERSUS EXPECTED POLICIES IN VOTER CHOICE

The Downsian model focuses on how voters use their expectations about government policy when making their vote decision. By including voters' assessments of candidate positions and expected government policies in a model of vote choice, we can compare the impact of each on voter decision making in the 1996 American presidential election. We model voters' choices as a function of party identification, race, ethnicity, a retrospective evaluation of Clinton's performance as president, evaluations of Congress' performance, evaluations of the candidates' trustworthiness, voters' relative ideological distance from each candidate, and voters' relative ideological distance from the government's position under each candidate. For the relative ideological positions, we use the square of Bob Dole's distance from the

¹¹Results available from the authors upon request.

respondent and subtract from that the square of Bill Clinton's distance from the respondent. For both variables, an increasingly positive score indicates a respondent who is increasingly closer to Clinton than to Dole.

The results are quite clear. Voters' proximity to the expected outcomes of government policies contributes to voters' decision making, $p < .05$, while their proximity to the candidates' comparative positions does not meet conventional levels of statistical significance. The substantive effect of the relative distance between voters' ideological preferences and their expectation of the government policies is also noticeably greater than the same effect for the comparative candidate positions. Holding other variables at their mean values, moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above for the government distance variable increases the probability of voting for Clinton by .48. The same change in the candidate distance variable produces an increase of only .22. The results support the importance that voters attach to policy outcomes when deciding for whom to vote for president.¹²

If respondents' consideration of government outcomes influence their vote decisions, the next question is the degree to which this consideration helped or hurt Clinton. In general, we believe that Clinton benefitted from voters' overall consideration of government policies. We examined the degree to which respondents had a higher score (which is more favorable to Clinton) on the comparative ideological scale that considered government outcomes than the scale that considered candidates' personal preferences. 43.8 percent of the respondents were closer to Clinton's government than to his personal position. By contrast, 33.0 percent of the respondents were relatively closer to Clinton's personal policies than to the policies that his government would produce.

¹²We considered that the government distance variable simply replicated some of the effects of the candidate distance variable, but this was not the case. Using a likelihood ratio test, it is clear that the government distance variable has an independent contribution to the model. The likelihood ratio statistic, $\chi^2(1) = 7.30, < .05$. We also considered the problem of projection. If projection is affecting our results, we expect that the effect should favor voters' estimates of the candidates' personal position more strongly. A voter who is projecting her own ideological position onto her preferred candidate is more likely to say that the candidate is close to her, but that he might not be able to enact his preferred policies. A voter is less likely to say that her preferred candidate is unlike her even though a government run by him will be close to her ideal position. Second, because both candidate personal ideological placement questions were asked prior to the governmental policy questions, the policy outcome questions should be less reflective of any projection because it would not make sense for respondents to project their own attitudes onto the policy outcomes after not projecting their attitudes onto the personal questions. Finally, adding the variables for candidate trustworthiness to the vote choice model reduces the effect of comparative candidate positions, but does not greatly change the effect of the expected outcomes variable.

As expected, these differences varied by party identification. Democratic identifiers were, on average, more favorably disposed to Clinton's personal position than to the policies that his government would produce by a margin of 44.9 percent to 31.9 percent. By contrast, Republicans were more favorably disposed to Clinton if they considered comparative government policies instead of comparative candidate preferences, 54.6 percent compared with 25.2 percent, respectively. Both of these conclusions make sense if voters believe that a Republican Congress would move Clinton away from liberal policies (that many Democrats favor) and toward conservative policies (that Republicans prefer). For partisans, these differences probably are not so large that many votes were changed. Among Independents, however, 43.0 percent evaluated Clinton more favorably when considering the outcome of government policies than when considering comparative candidate positions, while the reverse was true for only 31.7 percent of the Independents. If Clinton had to attract Independent voters to gain election, then, to the extent that government outcomes were a larger factor in vote decisions than personal ideological proximity, Clinton was favored by voters considering governmental policy outcomes.

To better evaluate how the two conceptions of ideological proximity affected the election, we estimated the model with interaction variables for partisanship and the proximity measures. The second column of Table 3 shows the effects of ideological distances interacted with party identification. The interaction terms show that the outcome proximity measure was significantly more strongly related to support for Clinton among Independents than it was for Democrats. Because neither the interaction effects nor the substantive effects upon voting for Clinton are obvious, Table 4 shows the overall effects of ideological proximity for Democrats and Republicans.¹³ The results show clearly that, while both Independents and Republicans were affected by proximity to government outcomes, their vote choice was not significantly related to proximity to the candidates' personal positions. Both ideological distances were insignificant for Democrats.¹⁴

The substantive effects, in the last two columns of Table 4, show that respondents' evaluations of their relative proximity to Clinton on the policy outcomes proximity measure had a great effect upon Republicans' and Independents' support for Clinton. Among these respondents, and holding the

¹³For Independents, the coefficients are simply the main effect replicated from Table 3. For partisans, the coefficients are the main effect plus the interaction effect in Table 3. Standard errors in Table 4 are recalculated based on the variance and covariances in the direct effects and interaction effects.

¹⁴The likelihood ratio test statistic for the addition of the 4 interaction variables is $\chi^2(4) = 12.674$, $p < .02$.

Table 3. A Model of Voter Choice

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Constant	-0.28 (0.64)	-0.34 (0.70)
Democrat	0.68** (0.30)	0.79** (0.32)
Republican	-0.93** (0.27)	-0.89** (0.31)
Black	0.76 (0.63)	0.80 (0.67)
Hispanic	0.50 (0.31)	0.55 (0.33)
Candidate Distance	0.023 (0.018)	0.019 (0.025)
Government Distance	0.067** (0.026)	0.138** (0.057)
Rating of Clinton	0.79** (0.20)	0.91** (0.22)
Rating of Congress	-0.29 (0.18)	-0.32 (0.20)
Clinton Trustworthy	1.20** (0.29)	1.23** (0.31)
Dole Trustworthy	-1.90** (0.42)	-2.05** (0.48)
Candidate Dist*Dem		0.023 (0.055)
Government Dist*Dem		-0.174** (0.077)
Candidate Dist*Rep		0.019 (0.056)
Government Dist*Rep		0.035 (0.084)
Number of Cases	494	494
χ^2 (d.f.)	530.3 (10)	542.9 (14)
% reduction error	88.1	89.0

Source: September 1996 Texas Poll. Entries are maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

**indicates $p < .05$.

Table 4. Effects of Ideological Distance by Party ID

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Prob(Clinton) $\mu - \sigma$	Prob(Clinton) $\mu + \sigma$
Candidate Distance (Dem)	0.042 (0.050)	.57	.91
Government Distance (Dem)	-0.037 (0.051)	.88	.65
Candidate Distance (Rep)	0.038 (0.050)	.02	.16
Government Distance (Rep)	0.172** (0.064)	.01	.64
Candidate Distance (Ind)	0.019 (0.025)	.25	.44
Government Distance (Ind)	0.138** (0.057)	.03	.86

Source: September 1996 Texas Poll. Entries in the first column are maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors in parentheses for the effects of ideological distance for partisans. Entries in the second and third columns are predicted probabilities given a 1 standard deviation change from the mean in the independent variable.

** indicates $p < .05$.

other variables at their means, moving from one standard deviation below the mean proximity score, -13.33, to one standard deviation above, 7.92, had a very sizable effect upon the probability of the respondent supporting Clinton, a .63 increase for Republicans and a .83 increase for Independents. The same change in the personal proximity measure, from -17.95 to 9.00, produced a .14 and .19 change in the predicted probability of support for Clinton among Republicans and Independents, respectively. By contrast, Clinton's support among Democrats was much more strongly related to their proximity to his personal ideological position.

These results support the hypothesis that the presence of the Republican Congress helped Clinton win reelection. First, moderate Republicans (defined as having an ideological self-placement of 3-5) were more likely to defect to Clinton, 10.1 percent, than moderate Democrats were to defect to Dole, 5.3 percent. Part of this difference might be seen in Table 1. On average, both Republicans and Independents saw a sizable (favorable) difference between Clinton's personal views and the policies that would be enacted under a Clinton government. By contrast, Democrats and Independents, on average, saw little difference between Dole and a Dole government. Republicans concerned that a unified Republican government would

be too radical might have thought that a government under Clinton would be held in check by a Republican Congress. Dole, by contrast, was not perceived by Democrats, or for that matter by Republicans, as a check upon a Republican Congress.¹⁵

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CAUSES OF DIVIDED GOVERNMENT

While the focus of our measure of voter proximity to the likely policies enacted by political candidates is founded on the Downsian conception of voter behavior, our results also have implications for theories of divided government. Fiorina (1988, 1992) argues that divided government is a product of voters' desire to split control of the executive and legislature between the two major political parties. Fiorina's hypothesis that some voters intentionally split their ballots in order to balance what they perceive as two relatively extremist parties has undergone several empirical tests, most of which find little support for Fiorina's policy-balancing model. Our results suggest that there may be some validity to policy-balancing, at least in 1996, that other tests have been unable to capture.

Recent tests of Fiorina's divided government hypothesis use a measure of voters' general attitudes toward divided government to explain split-ticket voting. Sigelman, Wahlbeck, and Buell (1997) use an NES question that asks voters,

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

Voters who favor divided government should be more likely to split their tickets in elections or to vote against the party of the president in midterm congressional elections. Sigelman, Wahlbeck, and Buell (1997) estimate a multinomial logit model of voter choice in the 1992 election, where the four-category dependent variable is a voter's choice of presidential and congressional candidates: Clinton for president and a Democrat for Congress, Bush for president and a Republican for Congress, Democrats for both president and Congress, and Republicans for both offices.¹⁶ Voters who prefer divided government in general are no more likely to split their ballots than voters who prefer unified government or who believe that it does not matter whether government is unified or divided.

¹⁵Among Republicans who knew that their party controlled Congress, over 51 percent thought that Congress was doing either a fair or poor job, and only 7 percent described the Republican Congress's performance as excellent.

¹⁶As in the current study, Sigelman, Wahlbeck, and Buell exclude voters who voted for Ross Perot or a third-party candidate for Congress.

The work of Sigelman, Wahlbeck, and Buell is constrained by the NES questions on divided government, which do not directly test Fiorina's argument that voters may balance the position of one branch of government by electing the opposition to another branch of government. First, the NES questions ask about parties, not candidates. But in an age of candidate-centered elections, voters act on evaluations of candidates, not parties. Thus, a voter may say it does not matter whether the government is unified or divided, but the same voter might vote for Clinton for president and Republicans for Congress if she thinks Clinton and a Democratic Congress would be too far left and Dole and a Republican Congress too far right.

Second, the NES questions contain a strong partisan component. Some Republicans are more likely to prefer divided government if Congress is held by Democrats, while some Democrats may be more likely to favor unified government. But when Congress is controlled by Republicans, some Democrats are more likely to favor divided government, and some Republicans are more likely to favor unified government. The NES question does not allow voters to express a preference for straight Democratic government or straight Republican government, and therefore does not separate a sincere preference for divided government from a conditional preference that depends on which party is already in power.¹⁷

Third, the NES questions probe what Sigelman, Wahlbeck, and Buell argue is a nonmeaningful attitude. Voters may not think about divided and unified government explicitly. But they may form expectations that policy outcomes from a Democratic president and Republican Congress are more moderate than policy outcomes from a Republican president and Republican Congress or a Democratic president teamed with a Democratic Congress.

Our measure of voter expectations about government policy provides a direct test of the hypothesis that voters care about policy outcomes rather than the policy pronouncements of candidates. Voters see policy outcomes as a function of partisan control of Congress and the presidency, which is consistent with Fiorina's hypothesis. Our model of voter choice suggests

¹⁷Lacy (1997) included on a 1994 Ohio poll a set of questions that allowed voters to express an opinion for party control of Congress conditional on the election of a Democratic or Republican president. 19 percent of respondents expressed a preference for divided government: they prefer a Democratic Congress with a Republican president or a Republican Congress with a Democratic president. 18 percent of respondents prefer unified government since they want to elect a Congress that is controlled by the party of the president, regardless of which party that is. 22 percent of respondents prefer that Democrats control Congress regardless of who is president, and the remaining 40 percent prefer that Republicans control Congress, regardless of the president. Brown et al. (1997) include a similar set of questions on a 1996 survey. Both papers reveal that the NES question about divided government actually overestimates the percentage of people who prefer divided government.

that voters enter the voting booth with potentially conflicting evaluations of presidential candidates: should they vote for the candidate whose personal position is closest to their own, or for the candidate who, in conjunction with Congress, will produce policy outcomes that the voter prefers? By operationalizing two candidate distance measures—one that captures the candidate's position and one that captures likely government policies—we are able to test the relative weights voters attach to each of the evaluations of presidential candidates. We find that the expected policy outcome, and hence the potential for intentional policy-balancing, outweighs the policy positions of the candidates as an explanation of the vote.

5. CONCLUSION

Using a measure of anticipated policy output under each candidate contributes explanatory power to a model of the presidential vote independent of the traditional measure of each candidate's policy position. Voters use their vote more as an instrument to achieve preferred policy outcomes and not just expressively to voice support for one platform instead of another. Future work on voters' decision making in presidential elections should account for voters' assessments of not only what the candidates would like to do if elected, but also what they believe is feasible for the candidates to achieve.

The election of 1996 may have been a good election to test our hypothesis, as Clinton did use a Gingrich-led Congress as an argument for his own reelection. Consequently, the difference between the candidates' policy positions and expected policy outcomes may have been more salient in 1996 than in other elections. But even when presidential candidates are wary of arguing that their election will serve as a check on an opposition Congress, the ability of Congress to check the president may still affect voters' decisions. It is certainly plausible that voters in 1980 who were not satisfied with Carter were a little less reluctant to vote for Reagan because they presumed that a Democratic Congress would prevent Reagan from enacting his more extreme policies. And from 1984 through 1992, Republican presidential candidates campaigned vigorously against the Democratic Congress. Such a strategy may not only have rallied their partisans, but also unintentionally reminded Independents and Democratic identifiers that Congress would be able to check any excesses of a Reagan or Bush presidency.

The contribution of our measure of voters' expectations about government policy extends beyond its explanatory power. The measure reveals two things about voters. First, voters know—or at least behave as if they know—that presidential candidates cannot fully enact their policy agenda once elected. In a political system characterized by a separation of powers, the position of the Congress and other political institutions will likely factor in

voters' evaluations of presidential candidates. Voter preferences for presidential and congressional candidates may be nonseparable (Lacy 1997; Lacy and Niou 1998). That is, voters' preferences for presidential candidates may depend on which party controls Congress and vice-versa. Second, voters seem to know that the party controlling Congress is an important indicator of the distance and direction in which a president's agenda may be pulled. If voters can piece together the separation of powers and its influence on policy, as our results suggest, then Fiorina's theory of divided government becomes much more plausible.

More generally for the spatial model, the analysis in this paper has shown that voters' evaluations of the issue packages presented by candidates is influenced by voters' information, their assessment of the candidates' truthfulness, and their expectations about how the nature of separation of powers in the United States makes it possible that candidates will not be able to do everything that they say. The findings in this paper have important implications for the link between candidates' campaigning and governing. If voters recognize that presidents are constrained by Congress in enacting their preferred policies, and presidential candidates realize that voters are aware of this, then presidential candidates in our system have much more leeway to campaign on issues that they do not necessarily intend to implement once elected. Particularly under divided government, the burden of broken campaign promises can be shifted to the intransigence of the other branch.

Finally, the findings in this paper have implications for the Downsian prediction of party convergence. If voters make their decisions based upon what they believe the parties will accomplish in office, rather than what their platforms say, and the parties recognize this, then parties may realize that moving their platforms toward the median voter in order to increase their vote share is futile and may even be costly to their reputation (Hinich and Munger 1994). At a minimum, our findings introduce a complication that any party trying to move toward the median voter would have to consider. Specifying how, or even whether, our findings change the prediction of convergence in the Downsian model is beyond the scope of the current paper, but future work should examine this complication.

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