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Measuring Preferences for Divided Government: Some Americans Want Divided Government and Vote to Create It

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Abstract Tests of theories of the electoral origins of divided government hinge on the proper measurement of voter preferences for divided government. Deriving preferences for divided government from voters' ideological positions or responses to the standard American National Election Studies question inflates estimates of the proportion of people who prefer divided government. We present two alternative survey measures of preferences for divided government and evaluate the measures across multiple surveys. We find that the percentage of voters who prefer divided government is smaller than previous studies suggest. Voters who prefer divided government according to the new measures are significantly more likely than other

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voters to vote in ways that create divided government in both presidential year and midterm congressional elections.

Keywords Elections · Split-ticket voting · Divided government · Nonseparable preferences

Relatively rare in earlier periods in US history, divided government has become the new normal. The party of the president failed to control at least one house of Congress in eighteen of the twenty-five congresses between 1969 and 2017. While some scholars claim that divided government has little effect upon legislative productivity (Mayhew 1991), others contend that more significant legislation is passed during periods of unified government (Binder 1999; Coleman 1999). Divided government may also influence other areas of governing such as bureaucratic rule-making (Epstein and O'Halloran 1996; Yackee and Yackee 2009) and the length of time for judicial confirmations (Shipan and Shannon 2003). The clearest recent example of how divided government can affect government operations is the Republican-controlled Senate's unwillingness to hold hearings for Merrick Garland's nomination to the Supreme Court in the last year of the Obama administration.

An unresolved question in American politics is whether divided government occurs because some voters prefer to divide power between the two political parties. At least since Fiorina (1988) proposed that voters intentionally divide government, researchers have sought to determine the percentage of the US public that prefers divided government. The 1992 American National Election Studies (ANES) found that 32% of Americans thought that "it is better when one party controls both the presidency and Congress," 40% believed that it is "better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans," and 28% responded that "it doesn't matter." Similar distributions of responses are evident on successive ANES surveys, with 49% of respondents in 2012 expressing support for divided government.

Do voters who prefer divided government vote in ways to create it? Empirical studies of split-ticket voting show mixed results. Some studies support the hypothesis that some voters prefer divided government and vote to create it (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995; Lacy and Paolino 1998; Smith et al. 1999; Carsey and Layman 2004; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2004; Mebane 2000), but others reject it (Beck et al. 1992; Alvarez and Schousen 1993; Born 1994; Burden and Kimball 1998, 2002; Geer et al. 2004; Grofman et al. 2000).

In this article, we demonstrate that the ANES measure of voter preferences for divided government vastly overestimates the percentage of Americans who prefer divided government and, consequently, may attenuate the effect of a preference for divided government on vote choice. We present alternate question formats that provide more valid measures of preferences for divided government and show that a smaller subset of American voters than previously documented prefer divided government and act on their preferences when voting in both midterm and presidential year elections.

A Theory of Preferences for Divided Government

Testing whether voters' preferences for divided government lead them to vote accordingly requires understanding the theoretical nature of these preferences. One theory of intentional divided government relies on a spatial model of voting in which parties adopt divergent positions on a one-dimensional issue space (Fiorina 1992; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995). Suppose policy outcomes are a weighted average of the policy positions of the executive and legislative branches, with respective weights w and $1 - w$. P_e and P_l represent the policy positions of the party controlling the executive and legislature, respectively. $\mathrm{E}(O|P_e, P_l)$ represents the expected outcome of government policy conditioned on the policy positions of the parties in control of the executive and legislature. The expected outcome of government policy is

$$\mathrm{E}(O|P_e, P_l) = wP_e + (1 - w)P_l \tag{1}$$

Unified government produces policy outcomes at the position of either the Democratic or Republican party, whereas divided government produces outcomes that fall in between. When the Democrats are to the left of the Republicans, voters located just to the right of the Democrats or just to the left of the Republicans may still have ideal points closer to unified Democratic and Republican government than to divided government. Some voters positioned between the two parties will prefer at least one form of divided government, whether a Democratic president and Republican majority in Congress or a Republican president and Democratic-controlled Congress.

Jacobson (1990) proposes a second explanation of intentional divided government that presumes voters prefer Republican presidential leadership of foreign policy but Democratic congressional control of domestic policy. Voters' preferences are two-dimensional in this theory, suggesting that they use Eq. (1) separately for domestic and foreign policy preferences, with $w < .5$ for domestic policy and $w > .5$ for foreign policy.

A slightly more complex variant of the policy balancing motivation for supporting divided government accounts not only for divisions between the executive and legislature, but also includes the effects of split legislatures in governments with bicameral legislatures. In this case, voters supporting divided government for policy reasons would need to consider the effect on policy of bargaining between the executive and both legislative houses.

Finally, some voters may prefer divided government simply as a means of increasing the ability of one branch to check the other, either to moderate policy or to prevent a concentration of power. Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2004) argue that this "Cognitive Madisonianism" drives support for divided government.

Preferences for unified or divided government concern two potentially separate issues: executive branch control and legislative branch control. Across two or more choices, a person's preferences may be *separable* or *nonseparable*. A person has separable preferences when her preference on one choice set is independent of her preference on another choice set. Suppose the two choice sets are elections for the president and Congress. Let *RD* indicate a Republican president and a Democratic Congress. Ignoring for now complications from a split Congress, the possible outcomes of a presidential and congressional election are *RD*, *DR*, *DD*, and *RR*. A voter ranking these outcomes $RR > RD > DR > DD$ has separable preferences. This voter always prefers a Republican to a Democrat as president, and, holding the party of the president fixed, always prefers a Republican-controlled to a Democratic-controlled Congress. Even though her most preferred outcome results in unified Republican government, she does not have an unconditional preference for unified government over divided government since she ranks *RD* and *DR* above *DD*. Unified Democratic government is her least preferred outcome.

A person has nonseparable preferences when her preference on one choice set depends on her preferences on another choice set. Suppose a voter ranks the outcomes $RD > DR > DD > RR$. She prefers a Republican over a Democrat as president when the Democrats control Congress, but she prefers a Democratic president when the Republicans control Congress. Likewise, she prefers a Democratic to a Republican majority in Congress when the president is a Republican, but she prefers a Republican to a Democratic majority in Congress when the president is a Democrat. Such a preference ranking is *completely nonseparable* since the voter's preference for party control of each branch of government depends on which party controls the other branch. Preferences may also be *partially nonseparable*, in which a person's preference for control of only one branch of government depends on which party controls the other branch.

Of the twenty-four strongly transitive preference rankings for combinations of president and Congress, eight are separable (see Table 1). Four of these reflect a

Table 1 Complete preference orderings for combinations of party control of the executive and legislature

Preference type		
Separable	Completely Nonseparable	Partially Nonseparable
Partisan Republican	Unified government	Unified government
$RR > RD > DR > DD$	$RR > DD > RD > DR$	$RR > DR > DD > RD$
$RR > DR > RD > DD$	$DD > RR > DR > RD$	$DD > RD > RR > DR$
Partisan Democrat	$RR > DD > DR > RD$	$RR > RD > DD > DR$
$DD > DR > RD > RR$	$DD > RR > RD > DR$	$DD > DR > RR > RD$
$DD > RD > DR > RR$		
Divided government	Divided government	Divided government
$RD > RR > DD > DR$	$RD > DR > RR > DD$	$RD > DD > DR > RR$
$RD > DD > RR > DR$	$DR > RD > DD > RR$	$DR > RR > RD > DD$
$DR > DD > RR > RD$	$RD > DR > DD > RR$	$RD > RR > DR > DD$
$DR > RR > DD > RD$	$DR > RD > RR > DD$	$DR > DD > RD > RR$

partisan preference for unified government and four reflect a preference for divided control. Of the sixteen remaining preference orderings, four are nonseparable preferences for unified government, four are nonseparable preferences for divided government, and eight reflect partially nonseparable preferences.

Models of intentional divided government arising from one-dimensional ideological balancing imply that some voters have completely or partially nonseparable preferences for party control of Congress and the White House. A voter with completely nonseparable preferences for divided government prefers divided government to unified government under either party. Partially nonseparable preferences for divided government also arise from ideological balancing that depends on the voter's and parties' locations and the voter's assessment of the weight that each branch has over policy. Referring to Eq. (1), an example of partially nonseparable preferences for divided government arising from ideological balancing occurs for a voter at 5 when $P_e = P_l = 2$ if the Democrats control the executive or legislature, $P_e = P_l = 6$ if the Republicans control the executive or legislature, and $w = .6$. In this case, the voter prefers $O|RD = 4.4$ to $O|RR = 6$, which, in turn, she prefers to $O|DR = 3.6$ and $O|DD = 2$ (see Fig. 1a). If this voter believes $w = .4$, she would then prefer $O|DR = 4.4$ to $O|RR = 6$ to $O|RD = 3.6$ to $O|DD = 2$ (Fig. 1b).

A voter may prefer divided government to unified Republican government with one set of beliefs about each branch's influence over policy, but prefer unified Republican government with only minor changes in those beliefs. It is also not clear that voters with partially nonseparable preferences are necessarily concerned with party balancing because such preferences can reflect a primary preference for partisan control of one branch followed by a secondary preference for divided or unified government. In this example, the voter prefers Republican control of the branch that she believes has more influence over policy.

A separable preference for divided government is not consistent with a one-dimensional policy balancing explanation because a voter with a separable

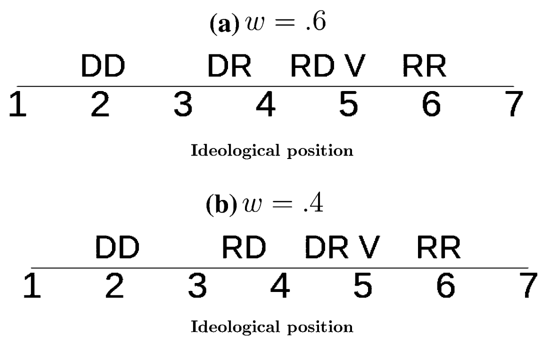

Fig. 1 Partially nonseparable preference orders. Figures present ideological positions for the expected policy outcomes for different combinations of government as derived from Eq. (1) when $P_e = P_l = 2$ if the Democrats control the executive (or legislature), $P_e = P_l = 6$ if the Republicans control the executive (or legislature), given the different weights for executive and legislative influence in **a** and **b**, and a voter's ideal point, $V = 5$

preference for divided government evaluates the consequences for foreign and domestic policy of party control separately for each branch of government. Separable preferences for divided government are consistent with Jacobson's theory that voters prefer a Democratic Congress to manage domestic policy, particularly budgets, and a Republican president to manage foreign affairs and perhaps taxes and general economic policy. Given the many different forms of preferences for divided government, tests of the balancing theory of divided government require measures of support for divided government that can distinguish between separable and nonseparable preference orderings.

Measuring Preferences for Divided Government

Testing the theory of intentional divided government requires valid measures of people's attitudes toward divided government that correspond to the theoretical mechanism connecting voters' preferences for divided government to their votes. We examine four different measures of preferences for divided government that have appeared in the literature: spatial, unconditional, conditional, and ranking. The priority in assessing these measures is to determine how well each correctly distinguishes clear preferences for divided government from some form of unified government.

Evaluating the validity of the measures requires a theory of survey response. Zaller and Feldman (1992) define four steps that respondents use when answering survey questions: interpreting the question, searching for information, formulating a response, and mapping their response onto the options provided. Proper measures of support for divided government require that respondents can interpret the question(s) as relevant to their preferences for divided government, lead them to think about considerations that make them support or oppose divided government, and, most importantly, provide them with options that reflect their preference.

Spatial Measures

Some empirical studies that reject the hypothesis that voters intentionally split their tickets use the ANES seven-point liberal-conservative ideology question[1] (Alvarez and Schousen 1993; Burden and Kimball 2002).

Using responses to a liberal-conservative ideology scale as a proxy for support for divided government poses several problems. First, respondents lacking an opinion on a question often place themselves in the middle of the scale (Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Bartels 1996). These uninformed voters may be more likely to cast ballots for valence-related concerns, obscuring whether they are ticket-splitters motivated by a preference for dividing government. Second, with only seven points on the ANES ideology scale, it is difficult to distinguish moderate voters who are

[1] "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?"

closer to divided government from those who are closer to unified government under one of the two parties. Third, spatial measures were not designed to provide direct measures of people's attitudes toward divided government. Voters who are asked about their ideological placements are not likely to interpret the question as asking about divided government or search for considerations concerning preferences for divided or unified government. Finally, spatial measures are inadequate for determining whether voters have separable or nonseparable preferences for divided government. Nonseparable preferences are consistent with the type of balancing that spatial measures may reflect, but one-dimensional spatial measures do not necessarily capture separable preferences for divided government over two dimensions. Therefore, a voter's ideology is not a good measure of preferences for divided government.

Non-spatial Measures

Preferences for divided government do not have to be defined in one-dimensional spatial terms. Voters may evaluate parties and candidates based on multiple issue dimensions or normative preferences for power being concentrated or dispersed. The best-known non-spatial measure of preferences for divided government is an *unconditional question*, which asks voters simply whether they prefer unified or divided government. A representative version of this question appears on the 1992, 2000, 2004, 2010, and 2012 ANES:

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

Several studies use unconditional questions to examine split-ticket voting, with mixed results. Sigelman et al. (1997) find that voters who prefer divided government are no more likely than other voters to split their tickets in the 1992 elections. Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2004), use the ANES and a similar unconditional question and find the opposite. At the state level, Beck et al. (1992) find that voters who prefer divided government are not more likely than other voters to split their ballots.

The ANES-style unconditional questions pose a problem for measuring preferences for divided government. If a voter prefers $RR > DD > RD > DR$ or $RD > DR > RR > DD$, then answering the unconditional ANES-style question is straightforward. But a person with a separable preference for unified Democratic government, such as $DD > RD > DR > RR$, may look at the low probability of a Democratic Congress and respond that she prefers divided government because there is no option to express support for unified government only in Democratic hands. Researchers use the unconditional question to predict split-ticket voting would be surprised (incorrectly) to find these "supporters" of divided government voting straight Democratic ballots. Unconditional questions cast too wide a net by classifying people as preferring divided government when their preferences are really partisan. Because of this imprecision, it is difficult to know what responses to the ANES unconditional question tell us about people's preferences for divided government.

One non-spatial method to determine whether preferences across multiple elections are separable or nonseparable involves *conditional questions* (Lacy 1997; Smith et al. 1999; Carsey and Layman 2004). Conditional questions for measuring preferences for divided government involve at least two items that, with slight variations, ask respondents:

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

Conditional questions improve on the ANES unconditional question because they allow respondents to express preferences not just for generic unified or divided government, but also for their party's control of one branch of government conditional upon which party controls the other branch. Partisan voters can record a separable preference for their party controlling each branch of government simply by expressing a preference for their party's control of the legislature regardless of the party of the president, while supporters of divided and unified government can show that their preferences are conditional on the party controlling the other branch.

Ranking questions, which ask respondents to rank the four different combinations of party control of the presidency and Congress, provide another means for ascertaining preferences for divided government, such as this question, which appeared on a 2004 Knowledge Networks survey:

> The list below contains four different possible outcomes of the November elections. Please rank these by clicking next to the outcome you want most:
>
> ○ The Republicans win a majority of seats in Congress and a Republican is elected president.
> ○ The Republicans win a majority of seats in Congress and a Democrat is elected president.
> ○ The Democrats win a majority of seats in Congress and a Republican is elected president.
> ○ The Democrats win a majority of seats in Congress and a Democrat is elected president.

Responses were presented in random order (see Appendix for survey description). Respondents clicked a circle next to one of the choices to indicate their most preferred outcome, which was removed from the list. The next screen presented the remaining options, and respondents were asked to "rank these by clicking next to the outcome you want second most." A final screen asked respondents to choose between the remaining two options. Similar ranking questions have appeared on the 2010 Wave 1 of the ANES Evaluations of Government and Society Study (EGSS) and the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey September (pre-election) wave, which asked respondents to rank combinations of John McCain or Barack Obama winning the presidency and Democrats or Republicans winning a majority of seats in Congress (see Appendix for question wording).

Assessing the Non-spatial Measures

Comparing results from several different surveys makes it possible to determine how well the non-spatial measures capture support for divided government. The results from the ANES show that potential biases in the unconditional instrument are very real. In 1992, when the question was asked with a Democratic majority in Congress and a likely Democratic Congress after the election, supporters of President Bush were more likely to say they preferred divided government, while Bill Clinton's supporters were more likely to say they preferred unified government (Table 2). Yet in 2004 with a Republican-controlled Congress, John Kerry's supporters were overwhelmingly more likely to say they supported divided government. While President Bush's supporters were also more likely to favor divided over unified government, a greater percentage of Republicans than Democrats opted for unified government.

The 2012 results offer another variation where Republicans preferred divided government, perhaps assuming that President Obama would be re-elected, while Democrats making the same assumption preferred unified government with the hope that they could re-take the House. Partisans' responses to this question appear to be a function of current partisan conditions in government.

Surveys in New Jersey and Virginia in 2001 that included the ANES-type question provide further confirmation that the ANES question forces some respondents with separable preferences into nonseparable categories, as 7.1% of respondents in New Jersey and 11.5% in Virginia *volunteered* "it depends on the party" (see Appendix for survey description). These results support our contention that the ANES question overstates support for divided government by misclassifying people with separable, partisan preferences.

Table 3 shows the percentages of respondents preferring divided, unified, Democratic, or Republican government according to the different survey instruments. The unconditional questions from the ANES, which do not provide an option for partisan preferences, reveal the highest support for divided and unified government, with support for divided government ranging from 40.0 to 56.8% and, for unified government, from 17.9 to 32.2%. These percentages far surpass those from the conditional format, which, with the exception of the 2010 study that we

Table 2 Presidential vote and support for divided government in the American National Election Studies

Year	Vote	Unified	Divided	Doesn't matter	N
1992	Bush	31.9	45.6	22.5	542
	Clinton	38.0	35.5	26.5	773
2000	Bush	25.0	57.5	17.6	517
	Gore	27.2	54.6	18.1	579
2004	Bush	31.8	52.0	16.2	402
	Kerry	19.4	65.0	15.6	391
2012	Romney	23.7	55.3	21.0	1860
	Obama	33.3	44.7	22.0	2161

Entries are row percentages

Table 3 Preferences for divided government vary by survey question

Survey	Type of government preferred				
	Divided	Unified	Republican	Democrat	No Diff.
US ANES unconditional, 1992	40.0	32.2	–	–	27.9
US ANES unconditional, 2000	51.2	23.2	–	–	23.2
US ANES unconditional, 2004	56.8	22.1	–	–	21.1
US ANES unconditional, 2010	44.4	17.9	–	–	37.4
US ANES unconditional, 2012	48.6	25.7	–	–	25.7
VA–NJ unconditional, 2001	44.0	25.2	–	–	30.8
VA–NJ conditional, Legislature, 2001	8.9	5.5	37.7	42.9	5.0+
VA–NJ conditional, Governor, 2001	6.5	4.9	36.5	49.5	2.6+
US KN conditional, congress, 2004	7.2	2.7	28.4	37.0	24.7
US KN conditional, president, 2004	1.5	2.0	39.1	41.6	15.8
US KN conditional, complete rankings, 2004	1.8	1.4	42.9	54.1	–
US KN conditional, partial rankings, 2004	8.6	1.4	39.1	51.1	–
US KN conditional, all rankings, 2004	10.1	1.4	37.6	51.1	–
US KN ranking, complete rankings, 2004	1.6	0.8	45.9	51.9	–
US KN ranking, partial rankings, 2004	9.3	0.8	43.2	46.9	–
US KN ranking, all rankings, 2004	16.7	0.8	38.9	43.8	–
US CCES ranking, complete rankings, 2008	4.4	1.2	40.2	54.1	–
US CCES ranking, partial rankings, 2008	14.2	1.2	33.8	50.7	–
US CCES ranking, all rankings, 2008	18.2	1.2	31.7	48.8	–
US EGSS ranking, complete rankings, 2010	16.3	5.3	35.9	42.6	–
US EGSS ranking, partial rankings, 2010	26.1	5.3	29.5	39.2	–
US EGSS ranking, all rankings, 2010	30.1	5.3	27.4	37.3	–

Source 1992, 2000, 2004, and 2012 American National Election Studies, 2001 Virginia and New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections Survey, 2004 Knowledge Networks Panel Study, 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, 2010 ANES Evaluations of Government and Society Study (Wave 1)

Entries are row percentages

+ Indicates a volunteered response

address below, shows support for any type of divided government as under 18% and unified government at less than 6%, but partisan control of government over 75%.

The 2001 New Jersey and Virginia surveys are valuable because they include both unconditional and conditional questions about control of the governorship and state legislature, which permits comparison of the question types for the same respondents. We focus for now on people who are strong partisans according to their answer to the standard party identification question because these respondents are most likely to have separable preferences for their party's control of government. Strong partisans' responses in these surveys indicate two things. First, both surveys show partisan differences in responses to the ANES question. In the Virginia survey, more strong Democrats answer the unconditional question by calling themselves dividers than unifiers, 44–27%, while more strong Republicans call themselves unifiers and not dividers, 39–24%. These difference suggest that responses are conditional on which party controls the legislature at the time. Yet when responding to the conditional questions, strong Democrats overwhelmingly respond (89%) with separable preferences for Democratic government, similar to the 86% of strong Republicans with separable preferences for Republican control of government. The New Jersey survey reveals a similar pattern, as over 80% of strong partisans display separable preferences for their party's control of government. Whereas the unconditional question pushes strong partisans into categories that are unlikely to reflect their true preferences, the conditional questions confirm our expectations that strong partisans prefer that their party controls both branches of government. The conditional questions also produce extremely low incidences of intransitive preferences (less then 0.5%), underscoring that the questions are not too difficult for respondents to understand.

A second issue with the unconditional questions is that many respondents avoid choosing either the unified or divided options and instead opt to reply that "it doesn't matter." The conditional questions on the Virginia and New Jersey surveys also provide an option for respondents to say that control of government "doesn't matter." Only 14 and 13%, respectively, on each survey answer "doesn't matter" to even one of the four conditional questions. But over 70% of the respondents on each survey who respond "doesn't matter" to the unconditional question reveal separable preferences for Republican or Democratic control of government. These results further show that the "doesn't matter" option on the unconditional question forces partisans to provide responses that do not reflect their true preferences. Clearly, the conditional questions more accurately measure people's preferences for divided government than the unconditional question.

The conditional questions also show a high degree of consistency across surveys. Table 4 shows the distribution of preferences as determined by the conditional questions on the 2001 Virginia and New Jersey surveys and the 2004 Knowledge Networks survey. The conditional questions are unable to distinguish between some preference rankings, thus the table includes response percentages for some groups of preference rankings aggregated. Because the surveys sample different populations and at different times, we would not expect results to be exactly the same across surveys. While we might expect different percentages of partisans from the three populations, there is no clear reason to believe that the populations would differ significantly in the percentages of supporters of divided government. These expectations are largely borne out. The national sample does have a larger percentage of people with Republican partisan preferences than in Virginia or New Jersey. The national sample also shows a slightly lower percentage of supporters of divided government, as we might expect in the midst of a highly partisan national campaign.

The similarities in proportions of people who prefer divided government across all three surveys are striking. People with completely nonseparable preferences for divided government are 1.8% of the KN conditional questions sample and 1.6% of the ranking sample. These percentages are higher in the CCES and EGSS, at 4.4 and 16.3%, respectively. The higher percentages in the 2008 CCES and the 2010 EGSS could be due to differences in the years, particularly since 2010 was a midterm

Table 4 Complete preference orders for divided government

Preference ordering	Survey question format					
	Conditional			Ranking		
	VA	NJ	KN	KN	CCES	EGSS
Separable preferences						
RR > RD > DR > DD	36.4	34.7	37.5	30.0	26.3	11.3
RR > DR > RD > DD				5.1	4.3	15.0
DD > DR > RD > RR	41.9	45.9	48.8	31.6	40.2	18.8
DD > RD > DR > RR				11.4	6.2	12.0
RD > RR > DD > DR	0.7	0.4	1.5	4.3	1.7	1.0
RD > DD > RR > DR				1.2	0.3	0.3
DR > DD > RR > RD	3.4	0.6	0.0	1.9	1.6	2.3
DR > RR > DD > RD				0.0	0.4	2.6
Completely nonseparable preferences						
RR > DD > RD > DR	1.8	4.4	1.4	0.1	0.4	1.2
DD > RR > DR > RD				0.0	0.4	1.8
RR > DD > DR > RD				0.7	0.3	1.0
DD > RR > RD > DR				0.0	0.1	1.3
RD > DR > RR > DD	4.9	4.8	1.8	1.2	2.8	4.5
DR > RD > DD > RR				0.2	0.6	5.0
RD > DR > DD > RR				0.2	0.5	3.0
DR > RD > RR > DD				0.0	0.5	3.8
Partially nonseparable preferences						
RR > DR > DD > RD	0.4	1.0	0.0	2.5	0.2	0.9
DD > RD > RR > DR	1.1	1.3	0.0	0.5	0.6	1.5
RR > RD > DD > DR	1.1	0.6	0.0	1.3	0.9	0.9
DD > DR > RR > RD	1.9	1.3	2.1	0.3	1.8	2.9
RD > DD > DR > RR	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.9	0.5	1.1
DR > RR > RD > DD	2.6	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	1.3
RD > RR > DR > DD	1.2	1.7	3.5	2.4	6.2	3.1
DR > DD > RD > RR	2.1	2.5	2.9	4.1	2.9	3.5
Intransitive preferences	0.2	0.4	0.2	NA	NA	NA

Source Percentages in the second column are from the 2001 Virginia survey, the third column are from the 2001 New Jersey survey, the fourth column (KN) the conditional questions from one split-half of the 2004 Knowledge Networks survey, the fifth column (KN) the ranking questions from the other split-half of the 2004 Knowledge Networks survey, the sixth column (CCES) from the 2008 CCES, and the seventh column (EGSS) from the 2010 ANES EGSS, Wave 1

election. However, the EGSS percentage of completely nonseparable preferences is clearly an outlier compared to the other surveys and is potentially due to a question order effect that we explore later. The KN and CCES surveys presented response options randomly. Completely nonseparable preferences for divided government represent the clearest support for the principle of balancing the parties between branches of government. Yet, completely nonseparable preferences for divided government are rare. Aside from the EGSS survey, less than 5% of the public appears to hold completely nonseparable preferences for divided government.

Partially nonseparable preferences are the most common form of preferences for divided government, with 6.8% of the KN sample that answered conditional questions, 7.7% of the KN sample that answered the ranking questions, and 9.8% of the CCES sample and 9.0% of the EGSS sample, both of which answered ranking questions. Within the set of partially nonseparable preference rankings, $DR > DD > RD > RR$ and $RD > RR > DR > DD$ are the most common rankings. This shows that people who have partially nonseparable preferences generally attach greater importance to the party that controls the presidency than to the party that controls Congress since they prefer one party to control the presidency, but their preference for control of Congress is conditional on which party occupies the White House.

Separable preferences for divided government appear in all of the surveys, though generally less frequently than partially nonseparable preferences. Separable preferences for divided government appear in 1.5% of the KN conditional questions sample, 7.4% of the KN ranking sample, 4.0% of the CCES sample, and 6.2% of the EGSS sample.

The most common preference profile supporting divided government is $RD > RR > DR > DD$, held by 3.6% of the KN conditional questions sample and 6.2% of the CCES sample. This profile also shows up in 2.4% of the KN sample that answered the ranking questions, whereas the most common profile in the KN ranking sample is the very similar $RD > RR > DD > DR$. The prevalence of preference profiles with *RD* at the top followed by *RR* is consistent with Jacobson's theory that a subset of voters prefer Republican presidents but Democratic congresses. Our findings add that most of these voters then prefer unified Republican government over divided government with a Democratic president and Republican Congress or unified Democratic government. More generally, the commonality of such partially nonseparable and separable preferences for divided government underscores that the conditional and ranking questions presented here capture subtle differences in support for divided government that the ANES unconditional question and ideological-placement measures miss. Support for divided government is heterogeneous and due to multiple motivations.

We now turn to the ranking questions. The 2004 KN survey is valuable because a randomly selected half of the respondents received the conditional questions while the other half received the ranking questions. Table 4 shows that the ranking questions produce a distribution of preferences similar to the conditional questions. The ranking questions reveal that the percentage of respondents with separable Democratic or Republican preferences are within 3% of each other for Democrats and 6% of each other for Republicans across the surveys. But recall that 4.3% of the KN ranking sample has a separable preference for divided government with *RD* first and *RR* second. Some Republican identifiers may prefer that Democrats control Congress as long as a Republican is president. Respondents receiving the ranking questions are more likely than those receiving the conditional questions to report separable preferences for divided government, 7.4% compared with 1.5%. The percentages expressing nonseparable preferences for unified (1.4 vs. 0.8%) and divided (1.8 vs. 1.5%) government are almost identical. Likewise, the percentages of respondents providing each type of partially nonseparable preference for divided government are similar across the two question forms.

Overall, the differences between the estimates of respondents' preferences in the 2004 Knowledge Network survey arrived at using the conditional questions and the ranking method (where the categories are combined to be comparable with the conditional questions) are minor. A χ^2 test of the difference is insignificant at p <.05. The 2004 KN ranking and conditional questions produce similar percentages of support for divided government. The conditional questions show that 8.5% of respondents in the conditional questions split-half and 9.3% of respondents in the ranking split-half hold complete or partial preferences for divided government. Using complete rankings, 1.8% of respondents have nonseparable preferences for divided government in the conditional questions sample, compared to 1.6% in the rankings sample. The two different question formats produce statistically indistinguishable differences in support for divided government. The ranking question does, however, uncover some nonseparable preferences for divided government that the conditional questions cannot discriminate. For example, note in Table 4 that the conditional questions cannot distinguish between $RD > DR > RR > DD$ and $DR > RD > DD > RR$.

The ranking question also shows similar percentages of people supporting divided and unified government between the 2004 KN survey and the 2008 CCES survey. Among partisans, the differences between the surveys for the Democrats and Republicans make sense given the outcome of the two years' presidential elections.

The 2010 EGSS survey produces larger percentages of respondents with nonseparable preferences for unified (5.3%) and divided government (16.3%) than the 2004 KN and 2008 CCES surveys, but these inflated levels appear to be related to the order in which the options were presented. The first two options presented to a random half of respondents were divided government, while the first two options the other half received were unified government. Support for divided government is 36% when those options were the first two, but only 26% when those options were presented third and fourth, with the largest differences for nonseparable preferences for divided government (see supplemental Appendix). Factoring out the order effects still suggests some increase in support for divided government in this particular mid-term election, which produced a loss of 63 seats for the president's party, the highest midterm loss since 1938. Respondents with nonseparable preferences for divided government had lower levels of approval for President Obama at 22.5% approval against 47.0% disapproval, compared with 30.8% approval and 43.3% disapproval for all respondents. It is plausible that support for divided government would increase in the midterm when a president with low approval ratings leads a unified government.

Responses to the various survey questions produce several insights. First, the ANES unconditional question greatly overestimates support for divided government by forcing partisans to choose either divided or unified government. In contrast, the conditional and ranking questions, which allow the expression of partisan preferences, show that fewer Americans prefer divided government. Second, there are respondents who do not think that it matters which party controls each branch of government, but this percentage is much smaller in the conditional and ranking question formats than in responses to the ANES item. Third, the presentation of the EGSS questions creates order effects that appear to have inflated respondents' expressions of preferences for divided and unified government beyond levels expected from the random response orders presented in the 2004 KN and 2008 CCES surveys.

The similarity of responses between the conditional and ranking questions suggests that two potential problems with the ranking questions—that they impose transitive preferences on respondents and that they do not provide an easy way for respondents to express the belief that the form of control of government does not matter—are not significant. Using the conditional questions, the percentage of respondents revealing intransitive preferences is small, less than 0.2%.

We recommend the ranking question with random response orders as the simplest and most accurate method to measure preferences for pairs of binary outcomes, such as which party controls each branch of government.

Do People Vote for Divided Government?

In evaluating whether voters who prefer divided government intentionally cast ballots to increase the likelihood of divided government, an obvious question is whether such instrumentally-oriented behavior would motivate many voters. A voter who prefers divided government can influence the outcome of the Electoral votes of only one state in a presidential election and the party holding one seat in the House and, at most, two seats in the Senate. This means that the relationship between split-ticket voting and support for divided government would likely vary across states and districts and depend upon electoral competitiveness. This still overlooks the extremely low joint probability of a single voter having the ability to alter the outcome of elections that determine the control of both branches of government.

All voters who support divided government are not necessarily casting ballots as a way of determining party control of government. Rather, voters who support divided government are more accepting of voting across party lines than partisan voters and do so as an expressive act (Brennan and Buchanan 1984; Brennan and Lomasky 1997). Casting a split-ballot may simply reflect a difference in the strength of party affiliation of partisan voters and supporters of divided government. Our analysis, therefore, needs to show that voting in a manner consistent with divided government occurs even controlling for strength of party identification or ideological extremity.

We cannot conclusively determine whether voters who support divided government are doing so expressively. Instead, we argue that when voters who support divided government cast votes to move government in that direction, they are similar to voters casting strategic votes in multi-candidate elections (Abramson et al. 1992; Kselman and Niou 2010). Voters may not believe that their votes will have a significant effect on the outcomes of the elections, but they vote in a way that reflects their preferred outcome of the elections and beliefs about the electoral context.

Voting for Divided Government in the Midterm

Voters who prefer divided government face a challenge during presidential years because they can only estimate the probability of a particular party controlling each branch of government. In 2004, for example, voters who supported divided government knew that the Republicans controlled government before the election, but could not be sure which branch was more likely to switch to Democratic control. While some voters may have cast split tickets based on their assessment that a Democrat was more likely to be elected president than Democrats retaking either house of Congress, others may have decided that their best strategy was to cast a straight Democratic ballot in the hope that at least one branch would become Democratic.

We first examine voters' behavior in the simpler decision environment of midterm elections, where voters know the party affiliation of the president and can focus efforts to divide government on Congress. The 2010 EGSS asked voters who they voted for in the 2010 House and Senate elections. The dependent variable in this analysis is whether a voter cast a split, a straight Republican, or a straight Democratic ballot across the House and Senate elections. We estimate a multinomial logit model, with a baseline of voting straight Democratic, to assess whether supporters of divided government were more likely to cast ballots that would create divided government, either through casting a straight Republican ballot or through splitting their House and Senate votes. Our expectation is that voters who prefer both arrangements of divided government (*DR* or *RD*) to any arrangement of unified government will be more likely to cast either a straight Republican or split ballot than a straight Democratic ballot.

The model includes dummy variables for Republican partisans, Democratic partisans, and supporters of unified government. We expect that partisan voters will be more likely to cast straight ballots for their party's candidates and that voters who prefer unified government will be more likely to cast straight Democratic ballots to further the likelihood of unified government. The baseline group is respondents with partially nonseparable or separable preferences for divided government. Because of the order effects (see supplemental Appendix Table A1), the model includes dummy variables to control for respondents with preferences for divided and unified government that matched the order in which options were presented in the ranking question under the premise that respondents whose preference order matched the order of presentation may not have true preferences for divided or unified government. The model also includes strength of party identification (by folding the seven-point scale), ideology on a seven-point scale from liberal to conservative, ideological extremity (by folding the ideology measure), retrospective evaluations of the economy, and congressional incumbency.[2]

The results (Table 5) indicate that people who prefer divided government and who do not display question order effects are more likely to cast split tickets for Congress than straight Democratic tickets, even controlling for strength of party identification and ideology. Holding other variables at their means, respondents who prefer divided government have a .27 predicted probability of voting a split congressional ballot, a .12 greater predicted probability ($p < .05$, one-tailed test) than for voters without strong preferences for divided government. This supports the hypothesis that voters who prefer divided government are more likely to cast split-ballots.

Either a straight Republican congressional ballot or a split ballot would be consistent with a desire to divide government in 2010. Of voters who had completely nonseparable preferences for divided government, 45.6% voted Republican in both House and Senate elections, 32.5% split their votes between the two houses of Congress, and 21.9% voted Democratic. Among voters with partially nonseparable preferences for divided government, 36.9% cast a straight Republican ballot, 20.2% split their ballots, and 42.9% cast a straight Democratic ballot. It is surprising that straight Republican ballots are not more common among all voters with nonseparable preferences for divided government. A compelling explanation is that people with nonseparable preferences for divided government prefer partisan divisions in government in any form in order to keep either party from gaining too much power. The 2010 EGSS survey provides some evidence for this with a question that asks respondents their preferred outcome of the 2010 congressional elections. People with nonseparable preferences overwhelmingly support a split congressional outcome over either party controlling both chambers. Over 74% of respondents with nonseparable preferences for divided government express a desire for split congressional control, compared with only 16.9% for Republican control and 9.0% for Democratic control.

Confirmation of this result comes from multinomial logit analysis of the model specified in Table 5, but using the question about split control of Congress as the dependent variable. A voter with a strong preference for divided government has a .27 greater probability, significant at $p < .01$, of supporting split congressional control compared to respondents with other preferences, holding party identification and the other control variables at their means (see supplemental Appendix Table A2).

Split Ticket Voting

We now turn to determining whether preferences for divided government explain split-ticket voting in presidential elections by using the 2004 KN and 2008 CCES surveys. The 2004 Knowledge Networks survey contains a presidential vote choice

[2] Incumbency is a set of dummy variables. A Republican delegation has Republican incumbents for House and Senate, a Democratic delegation has Democratic incumbents for House and Senate, and a divided delegation is one Republican incumbent and one Democratic incumbent. The baseline is all other cases: an open seat for one office or open seats for both offices.

Table 5 Voters who prefer divided government cast split ballots for House and Senate in 2010 midterm election

	Vote for Repub. Congress MLE coef (SE)	Vote for split Congress MLE coef (SE)
Nonseparable div gov't	1.03* (0.59)	1.34** (0.52)
Nonseparable div gov't (order)	− 2.15* (1.12)	− 3.82** (1.26)
Republican partisan	1.25* (0.64)	0.78 (0.71)
Democratic partisan	− 0.85 (0.55)	− 0.23 (0.42)
Nonseparable unified gov't	− 0.27 (0.79)	0.06 (0.75)
Nonseparable unified gov't (order)	0.51 (1.33)	3.02** (1.22)
Party identification	1.12** (0.15)	0.54** (0.13)
Strength of PID	− 0.09 (0.24)	0.09 (0.20)
Ideology	0.50** (0.15)	0.04 (0.14)
Ideological strength	0.10 (0.19)	− 0.04 (0.18)
Economic evaluation	− 0.81** (0.23)	− 0.30 (0.20)
H and S Republican Incumbents	2.42** (0.88)	2.12** (0.60)
H and S Democratic Incumbents	− 1.14** (0.49)	− 1.01** (0.38)
H and S incumbents divided	0.05 (0.55)	0.64 (0.56)
Constant	− 4.07** (0.84)	− 1.75* (0.84)
Observations	622	
χ^2	260.89	

Source 2010 EGSS survey. (order) refers to respondents providing nonseparable divided and unified government preferences that match the order in which the four options were presented. Estimated parameters are from a multinomial logit model with voting for a Democratic House and Senate candidate as the baseline category. Standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, one-tailed.

question and a generic party vote in the US House of Representatives election. The 2008 CCES contains a presidential vote question as well as a congressional vote question specific to the respondent's local congressional race. The dependent variable is dichotomous, indicating whether the respondent reported presidential and congressional votes that were a split ballot (see the Appendix for specifics). The key predictor is a dummy variable indicating whether the voter prefers divided government.

The percentages of split ballots cast by voters who prefer divided government reveals much about the validity of the survey questions. We define three categories of preferences for divided government. The categories are cumulative based on the completeness of a respondent's preference rankings. *Complete rankings* include people who have completely nonseparable preferences for divided government: *DR* and *RD* are their two most preferred outcomes. *Partial rankings* include people who have either completely or partially nonseparable preferences for divided government: one form of divided government, *DR* or *RD*, is their most preferred outcome, and the other form of divided government is at least third in their preference ranking, which means that one form of unified government is second in their ranking and the other form of unified government is fourth. *All rankings* includes all preference rankings with one form of divided government as the most preferred outcome, regardless of whether the other form of divided government is second, third, or fourth in the ranking. *Complete rankings* include only completely nonseparable preferences for divided government. *Partial rankings* include both completely and partially nonseparable preferences for divided government. *All rankings* include separable preferences for divided government as well as partially and completely nonseparable preferences.

Voters who prefer divided government in the pre-election survey are significantly more likely to cast split ballots than voters who do not prefer divided government. In the 2004 KN survey, only 6% of voters who did not prefer divided government by any measure in the pre-election survey reported splitting their ballots between presidential and House elections in the post-election survey. In contrast, in the split half sample that answered the conditional questions, 30% of voters with complete preferences for divided government reported splitting their ballots, and 27% of voters with any preference ranking with a divided outcome at the top reported splitting their ballots. In the split half that answered the ranking questions, 82% of voters with complete preferences for divided government reported splitting their ballots, and 53% of voters with any preference ranking with divided government at the top reported casting split ballots.

The differences in ticket splitting rates between people who prefer divided government and those who do not are substantial. Yet not all voters who prefer divided government split their tickets. Why? Some of the measures of divided government probably pick up erroneous responses and misclassify voters, albeit to a far lesser degree than the unconditional questions. Some voters may live in districts where their congressional candidates make it undesirable to cast a split ballot. For instance, a voter who wants a Democratic president with a Republican Congress could live in a district with an inexperienced Republican challenger facing a quality incumbent Democrat. The voter could cast a straight ticket while hoping for divided government produced by voters in other districts selecting Republicans.

To account for other variables that might explain split ticket voting, we estimate a set of binary logit models of casting a split ticket vote. The key independent variable in each model is one of the three measures of preferences for divided government—complete, partial, or all rankings—based on the conditional questions and ranking questions in the 2004 KN survey and on the ranking questions in the 2008 CCES. The tiny percentage of respondents who prefer unified government are included with respondents who prefer Republican or Democratic government since their predicted behavior is the same: a straight ticket vote.

The model in both years controls for strength of party identification to capture whether intensity of partisanship creates a spurious correlation between preferences for divided government and split ticket voting. The sign on this variable should be negative, with strong partisans less likely than independents or leaners to split their tickets.

Table 6 presents the results from the model estimated in 2004. A voter's preference for divided government in the pre-election survey is statistically

Table 6 Voters who prefer divided government more likely than others to cast split ballots for president and House of Representatives in 2004

Predictor	Conditional questions			Ranking questions		
	Complete	Partial	All	Complete	Partial	All
Prefer divided government	2.26** (.88)	1.40** (.58)	1.90** (.57)	3.04** (1.15)	2.25** (.55)	2.84** (.51)
Intensity of party ID	− .45** (.17)	− .45** (.19)	− .45* (.20)	− .67** (.18)	− .64** (.20)	− .67** (.24)
Constant	− 1.58** (.43)	− 1.71** (.48)	− 1.88** (.52)	− .75* (.38)	− 1.05** (.42)	− 1.35** (.53)
Change in probability of casting split ballot associated with Prefer divided government	.34* (.20)	.15* (.08)	.22** (.09)	.57** (.23)	.37** (.12)	.44** (.10)
N	227	227	227	232	232	232
$\chi^2(2)$	14.7**	11.5**	21.2**	20.2**	29.1**	36.9**
AIC	125.8	125.0	119.5	168.2	158.8	140.7
% Correctly predicted	93.0	92.1	92.5	87.9	87.1	88.4

Source 2004 Knowledge Networks survey. Entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, one-tailed

Table 7 Voters who prefer divided government more likely than others to cast split ballots for president and House of Representatives in 2008

Predictor	Preferences for divided government		
	Complete	Partial	All
Prefer divided government	1.52** (.69)	1.67** (.35)	2.10** (.34)
Intensity of party ID	− .35* (.16)	− .23 (.16)	− .20 (.17)
House incumbent from other party	1.09** (.33)	1.01** (.34)	.98** (.34)
Constant	− 1.72** (.33)	− 2.21** (.38)	− 2.44** (.42)
Change in probability of casting split ballot associated with prefer divided government	.24* (.15)	.24** (.07)	.31** (.07)
N	507	507	507
χ^2	15.7**	35.3**	53.6**
AIC	354.7	336.7	319.6
% Correctly predicted	88.8	88.4	88.6

Source 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey. Entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, one-tailed

significant as a predictor of a split ticket voting in the post-election survey. The models that include all preference rankings for divided government show a statistically significant effect of preferences for divided government, whether measured using the ranking question or conditional questions. In the cases of results that are statistically significant at $p < .01$, one-tailed, the increase in the probability of casting a split ballot among voters who prefer divided government ranges from .22 to .57, averaging .35 across all measures.

Because the 2008 CCES contains information about the party of the House incumbent, the model also includes a dummy variable coded as a 1 for each respondent who lives in a congressional district with a House incumbent from the party opposite her own. This variable is intended to capture whether split-ticket voting is due to voters who vote their party affiliation at the presidential level while living in districts where they are exposed to the large personal vote and incumbency advantage of a sitting House member from the other party. Voters who have an incumbent member of Congress from the opposite party should be more likely to split their tickets. The variable is coded 0 for voters whose party matches their House incumbent's and for any voters who call themselves Independents.

Results from the 2008 CCES appear in Table 7. The results are the same as for 2004. A voter's preference for divided government in the pre-election survey predicts split-ticket voting in the post-election survey. As expected, a House incumbent from the party opposite the voter's increases the rate of ticket-splitting. Since the preference for divided government and presence of an incumbent from the other party are both binary variables, their coefficients can be compared to each other directly. In the model using all preferences for divided government, the effect of a House incumbent from the other party is less than half the effect of a voter's preference for divided government on her probability of casting a split ticket. The complete and partial preference rankings for divided government also have larger effects on ticket-splitting than a House incumbent from the opposite party as the voter.

The results presented here add to previous studies in two ways. First, the measures of preferences for divided government are more precise than in several previous studies by eliminating the errors in using voters' ideological placements or the ANES unconditional question. Second, the models with all preference rankings for divided government include not only voters who have partially or completely nonseparable preferences for divided government, consistent with the policy balancing models of Fiorina (1988) and Alesina and Rosenthal (1995), but also voters who have separable preferences, consistent with Jacobson (1990).

Across these two elections, the new survey measures of preferences for divided government consistently predict split-ticket voting. Both the conditional questions and ranking method produce valid measures of an attitude that voters act on in the voting booth. Even in models controlling for strength of partisanship and the presence of a House incumbent from a party opposite the voter's, preferences for divided government explain split-ticket voting. Split-ticket voting is not an accident of circumstances. It is a choice made by voters—albeit a smaller group than previous studies estimate—that is consistent with their pre-election preferences.

Conclusion

The results in this paper show that common measures of support for divided government, notably the ANES question, miscategorize many voters because the questions use an incomplete approach to measuring people's preferences. New measures based on conditional and ranking questions provide evidence for theories that voters intentionally balance government, supporting findings by Lacy and Paolino (1998), Smith et al. (1999), Mebane (2000), and Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2004), using different data and methods. These findings stand in contrast to research showing no support for intentional ticket-splitting (Alvarez and Schousen 1993; Born 1994; Sigelman et al. 1997; Burden and Kimball 1998, 2002). This earlier work did not have conditional questions and ranking questions to detect preferences for divided government and classified too many voters as preferring divided government.

To accurately assess preferences for divided government for the executive and legislature, researchers should use ranking questions or a complete set of four conditional questions. Extensions to this research could also include both houses of the legislature. Ranking questions would then ask respondents to rank all combinations of partisan control of the executive branch and each house of the legislature, requiring ranking 2^3 or 8 different possible outcomes.

Using the new measures presented here, we find that less than 20% of voters prefer divided government in any form. Less than 2% of voters have completely nonseparable preferences for divided government. Another 7–10% have partially nonseparable preferences for divided government, depending on the survey measure and year. A further 2–7% of voters have separable preferences for divided government with most preferring a Republican president combined with a Democratic Congress followed by a second preference for unified Republican government. Only 1–3% of voters prefer unified government. The vast majority of voters are partisans who should not be expected to support divided government, yet are classified as such by prior measures. These percentages hold across the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections and across state (Virginia & New Jersey) and national elections. It is not surprising that studies using the prior measures find statistically insignificant effects of preferences for divided government on voting. The newer survey instruments presented here show that fewer voters prefer divided government than originally believed, but that this smaller group votes in ways that reflect a desire for divided government and, at the margins, can create divided government in close elections.

In the 2004 election, about 17% of voters cast split tickets for the presidency and House of Representatives. Our data from the same election show that about 17% of the public prefer divided government, including all preference rankings that have any form of divided government as the most preferred outcome. In the 2008 CCES, 18% of voters prefer divided government. Preferences for divided government, measured either using the 2004 KN ranking measure or conditional questions measure or the 2008 CCES ranking method, are statistically significant as a predictor of split-ticket voting between presidential and House elections. In 2010, 15% of respondents in the EGSS survey reported casting a split congressional ballot, but we find that 32% of respondents with nonseparable preferences for divided government did so, compared with 7% of Republican and 15% of Democratic partisans.

Our research is not intended to suggest that voters' preference for divided government is the only factor producing divided government. Ambivalence (Mulligan 2011), indifference (Davis 2015), and partisan sorting (Davis and Mason 2016) also influence split-ticket voting. Contextual factors, such as economic conditions and changes in government (Calcagno and Lopez 2012), also help explain the origin of divided government. Factors that make divided government more likely may do so by increasing the set of voters who prefer divided government, or by making preferences for divided government more salient in vote choice decisions. All of our results also support the hypothesis that incumbency effects at the congressional level lead partisans to support opposition candidates. But even while other factors surely produce some split ballots, voters' intentions to divide government contribute significantly to the pattern of divided government in recent elections.

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