CANDIDATE POSITIONING IN U.S. HOUSE ELECTIONS [1]

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August 2000

1. Introduction

In an extended republic, the desires of citizens are translated into law through the election of representatives. Candidates present themselves to voters, who decide to support some candidates and not others. Having won election, officials enact policies and then return to the electorate, seeking their just desserts. This cycle is surely a crude way of expressing the public's preferences, but it is said to work over time through an electoral version of natural selection.

What sort of representation does this dynamic produce? What sort of choices do voters get? In many modern democracies, voters choose among national parties, each with a distinctive ideology. Individual politicians seem to have little ability or incentive to differentiate themselves from the rest of their party. The United States appears to be the exception to all of this. Over the past three decades, the main thrust of scholarship on the behavior of members of Congress has emphasized the ability of individual politicians to position themselves so that they can appeal most strongly to their own districts' interests. The most important works on congressional elections and representation describe the willingness of politicians to abandon their party in order to compete for the votes back home (Mayhew, 1974a, pp. 19-28; Fenno, 1978, p. 113). Indeed, American politicians are reputedly so responsive to their districts' interests that they are often driven to make irresponsible public policy (Fiorina, 1974; King, 1997).

We argue that this view overstates the differences between elections held in America and in the rest of the democratic world. Even in the U.S., when candidates – incumbents, challengers, and open seat contestants alike – balance the broad policy views of the local district and the national party, the national party dominates. It does so today, as it has for over 100 years. District-by-district competition exerts some pressure on candidates to fit with their constituents, and there have been times in American history when this pressure has been more acute than others. Overall, however, the amount of ideological "choice" that voters get as a result of such positioning is minor compared to the weight of the national parties' ideologies.

This paper provides a broad historical picture of candidate positioning in U.S. House elections and places contemporary elections in that historical context. To portray the landscape of electoral competition over the past century, we have constructed a data set that contains the estimated policy positions of congressional candidates running in races where the two major party candidates both had a roll call record in the House of Representatives. This is essentially the method used in

Fiorina (1974). To get a detailed picture of the contemporary setting and to validate the historical analysis, we rely on a data set constructed using responses to Project Vote Smart's National Political Awareness Test (NPAT), a survey administered to all House candidates in the 1996 general election. A series of papers provide similar snapshots of recent elections – most notably Fiorina's and Sullivan's studies of elections in the 1960s and Erikson and Wright's studies of elections in the 1980s and 1990s (Fiorina 1974; Sullivan and O'Connor 1972; Sullivan and Minns 1976; Erikson and Wright 1989, 1993, 1997). Our results confirm the main pattern of non-convergence detected elsewhere and confirm that this is both a macro- and district-level phenomenon.

The contemporary snapshots are a gateway to historical analysis which is unique to this paper. The historical analysis reveals two important patterns. First, non-convergence of candidates has been a general phenomenon of competition in congressional races for more than a century. Second, the responsiveness of candidates to their districts' particular ideological shadings waxed considerably in the middle of the twentieth century, but was waning rapidly as the century drew to a close.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we review the existing literature concerning the spatial competition of legislative candidates, focusing on the empirical and theoretical literatures that were spawned by the Downsian framework. In Section 3, we describe the data and measurement methods we use. In Section 4, we provide a snapshot of candidate positioning in the 1996 U.S. House elections. In section 5, we present the broad historical picture of candidate positioning in U.S. House elections. We conclude in Section 6.

2. Existing Evidence of Candidate Positioning

What policies do competing candidates offer voters? To what degree are candidates responsive to their constituents? How much do voters reward candidates who emphasize local preferences over national party positions? These three questions hold center stage in the empirical study of representation, and they frame the current inquiry. We are most keenly interested in understanding the degree to which local and national interests shape the choices voters face.

The spatial theory of elections provides the analytical foundation for most contemporary theorizing about representative politics in the United States. As introduced to political science by Downs (1957), it is a model of disciplined parties that seek to control government. One of the

most appealing features of the approach, however, is that it can be applied to both national party actors and to local candidates. We use it here to distinguish the patterns of candidate competition that will emerge under both conceptions, local and national, about how the cycle of representation works in the U.S.

The theory, as Downs presented it and as it has been applied to the U.S., is about how candidates compete for votes in a first-past-the-post system by offering policies to voters. Policies are points along a single "ideological" dimension. Each voter has a most preferred policy, or ideal point, along this dimension. Policies farther away from this point are preferred less than policies closer to this point.

The logic of spatial competition leads to three main empirical predictions about the behavior of candidates for the U.S. Congress, and for legislatures more generally. First, opposing candidates should converge to the electoral center. The core analytical result of the spatial theory of elections is the Median Voter Theorem. Competition for votes will drive opposing candidates or parties to the ideal policies of the median voter (Downs 1957; Black 1958; Enelow and Hinich 1984). If the Median Voter Theorem holds at the *national* level, then all candidates should cluster around a common point. If the Median Voter Theorem holds at the *district* level, then all candidates in a particular distict should converge to the same point, but the point itself should vary across districts in line with variation in the local Median Voter's ideal point.

There is considerable evidence against the prediction of candidate and party convergence at the national level, beginning with evidence that presidential nominees of the two major parties take divergent positions (Page 1978; Enelow and Hinich 1984). Continuing on to Congress, there is strong evidence that Democratic and Republican congressional candidates, considered as a whole, take different positions (Erikson and Wright 1989, 1993, 1997) and that once in Congress, Democratic and Republican members are ideologically distinct (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).

Those who wish to salvage the simple spatial model as a framework for studying U.S. elections argue that it applies at the district level. Evidence of divergence of the national parties does not, the argument goes, imply divergence of candidates at the district-level. For example, it may be that in each district the Democratic and Republican candidates converge, but, for whatever reason, all conservative districts elect Republicans and all liberal districts elect Democrats.[1] In this simple

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[1]The theoretical reasons are many: differential turnout, voting for national parties as opposed to individual

example, the Democratic and Republican parties nationally will offer distinct platforms but in each district candidates behave according to a simple spatial model.

Fiorina (1974) finds some evidence of non-convergence at the district level in the 88th and 89th Congresses. Sullivan and O'Connor (1972) and Sullivan and Minns (1978) find little evidence of convergence in the 1966 House and Senate elections. And although they do not examine district-by-district candidate convergence directly, Erikson and Wright document that the national pools of congressional candidates were so divergent in the 1982, 1990, and 1994 elections that the amount of local candidate convergence could not have been great (Erikson and Wright 1989, 1993, 1997).

We document that these snapshots of recent elections reflect an enduring historical pattern in American politics. Candidates diverge at the district level, just as parties diverge nationally. The theoretical literature is replete with explanations for why we might observe candidate divergence under spatial competition. Formal theorists have shown that differential turnout, party activists, potential third party candidates, and the policy references of candidates may cause divergence.[2]

The second main empirical prediction that the Downsian model proposes about the behavior of candidates for the U.S. Congress concerns responsiveness or congruence. Candidates' positions, when viewed across districts, should respond to the preferences of voters. The more conservative the district, the more conservative we expect both candidates to be. The classic examination of this idea was by Miller and Stokes, who termed this idea policy "agreement" or "congruence" (Miller and Stokes 1963, p. 49). Achen (1978) termed it "responsiveness." Studying the 1958 House election and relying on simple bivariate correlations between representatives' and constituents' attitudes, Miller and Stokes found no evidence of congruence in foreign policy, strong evidence of congruence in civil rights, and weak evidence in social welfare policies. Miller and Stokes's analysis, however, has been criticized for sample design, conceptual problems, and measurement error (Achen 1977, 1978, 1983; see also Erikson 1978, 1979). Erikson and Wright (1989, 1993, 1997) find responsiveness among incumbents running in 1982, 1990, and 1994, but not among challengers. We replicate their findings for 1996.

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candidate positions, etc.

[2]See Aranson and Ordeshook (1972), Whittman (1983), Hinich and Pollard (1981), Enelow and Hinich (1981, 1982), Aldrich (1983a, 1983b), Palfrey (1984), Bernhardt and Ingberman (1985), Calvert (1985), Aldrich and McGinnis (1989), Ingberman (1989), Feddersen (1992), Ingberman and Villani (1993), Londregan and Romer (1993), Snyder (1994), and Ansolabehere and Snyder (1997a).

Theoretical work suggests an even more subtle treatment of responsiveness may be in order. Mayhew's (1974b) analysis of marginal races suggests that the more vulnerable the incumbent, the more attentive to the mainstream of the general electorate he or she will have to be. Hence, in very marginal seats responsiveness will be highest. Huntington (1950) and Fiorina (1974) suggest that the opposite pattern will hold. They argue that politicians serve two constituencies, their core voters and the general election constituencies; in marginal seats disproportionately more attention must be paid to the core voters, in order to avoid losing one's base of support. Thus in marginal districts, incumbents will appear less responsive to the median voter because the constituencies they are most responsive to are a smaller fraction of the electorate. We find that convergence is greater in competitive races, suggesting a view closer to Mayhew's than to Huntington's and Fiorina's.

The third main empirical prediction is that candidates should gain electorally from moderation within their district. A fundamental result of the Median Voter Theorem is that candidates can post significant vote gains by changing their positions to fit their districts' interests better. Even though this is a core prediction of the Downsian model applied to district competition, there is very little direct empirical examination of this hypothesized effect.[3] The definitive synthesis of research on congressional elections (Jacobson 1997), which otherwise heavily emphasizes candidate strategy as a determinant of election outcomes, contains no estimation of the effect of ideological positioning on the vote. The prime example of the effect of candidate positioning on the vote has been produced by Erikson and Wright (1980, 1989, 1993, 1997) who, using data comparable to our own, studied various elections from 1974 to 1994.[4] They have consistently found rewards to moderation among incumbents, but mixed results among challengers and open seat candidates. As we demonstrate in Appendix B, mixed results in the estimation of the effects of candidate positioning on the vote may be due to a methodological problem that may manifest itself in particular elections, which we address in this paper. Consistent with previous findings, we discover small but persistent benefits to candidates for their moderation. However, because of

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[3]Early attempts to discern the effect of candidate positioning on the vote include Erikson (1971) and Sullivan and O'Connor (1972).

[4]Of course, Campbell, et al (1960) and Converse (1964) mounted an early challenge to the premise that candidates could help themselves by carefully moderating their ideological appeals, arguing that, while elites might think in ideological terms, voters do not. Likewise, Miller and Stokes (1962, 1963) themselves strongly reject the idea that voters decide between candidates based on their policy appeals, much less convergent policy appeals.

the methodological problems we identify, we cannot estimate asymmetries between candidates.[5]

3. The Data

In order to gauge the extent to which candidates converge toward each other and whether such convergence (if it occurs) affects electoral outcomes, we require measures of candidate policy positions, voter preferences, and electoral outcomes. Past research has stumbled upon these data requirements. First, roll call studies have been able to answer questions about whether the parties converge nationally, but they only focus on incumbents and do not, in themselves, say anything about the strategies of competing candidates. Second, surveys of candidates and constituents have been limited in the number of candidates, respondents, and the scope of the questions asked. The best-known of all these studies, which produced the Miller and Stokes research, resulted in data from 116 districts about opinions in three issue domains. Achen's (1997, 1978) critique of Miller and Stoke's findings relies on analyzing between 28 and 56 of their sampled races.

We have developed measures of candidate policy positions, voter preferences, and electoral outcomes for use in this paper. The conceptualization behind each is straightforward. There are some technical issues involved in constructing some of the measures, particularly our measures of candidate preferences. In this section we summarize our methods and data. In Appendix A and Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (forthcoming) we provide a more detailed accounting of our data-gathering strategy.

Candidate preferences using NPAT responses

The National Political Awareness Test (NPAT) avoids many of the data problems that have plagued past research into district-by-district candidate positioning.[6] There are five major strengths with the NPAT survey. First, the survey was sent to all congressional candidates, incumbent and non-incumbent. Hence, we can assess the strategies of opposing candidates directly. Second, the survey asked over 200 policy questions across a wide range of topics. It was designed to

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[5]A further problem in assessing whether voters view incumbent and challenger issue positioning symmetrically is due to selection bias. If candidates are rewarded for moderating ideologically, then the average incumbent will more often already be in the "right" district than the average challenger.

[6]We thank Project Vote Smart for permission to use the NPAT data in our research. Information about NPAT may be found at the following URL: http://www.vote-smart.org/about/data.html. To our knowledge, there have been only two other studies published that have used NPAT data—Erikson and Wright's study of the 1994 congressional election, which relied on NPAT data drawn from that year (Erikson and Wright 1997), and Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart's (forthcoming) research into party influence in the 105th Congress.

explore "only those issues or political questions that are determined to be both major concerns of the American public, and issues that are likely to be addressed by the candidates once they are in office." Thus, the range of questions was as great as the range of questions arising on the congressional roll call agenda during a Congress.

Third, the questions were asked in anticipation of the election, and were a form of free advertising for candidates. Responses to the questions were displayed prominently on the Project Vote Smart web site; the survey responses are likely to reflect accurately the positions taken by the candiates in these elections. Fourth, the response rate was sufficiently high that we could perform our analysis using data drawn from most districts. (We provide a more detailed assessment of the quality of the NPAT survey in Appendix A and Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (forthcoming).)

We scaled the NPAT data using principal components factor analysis, relying on previous work reported by Heckman and Snyder (1997). We report the details of this scaling in Appendix A and Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (forthcoming), summarizing the pertinent highlights here. In this principal components scaling, one factor is clearly dominant, being tapped to some extent by almost all items on the survey. The scale locations on the first factor, or "dimension," produced results that are highly correlated with other well-known measures of ideology, such as ADA and NOMINATE scores. An informal perusal of individuals' scale locations indicated that well-known "liberals" tended to be at one end of the scale and "conservatives" at the other. We therefore are comfortable referring to first dimension scores as measures of left-right ideology. Consequently, we fixed the sign of the first dimension so that positive values indicate more conservative members. Finally, we normalized the scale scores so that they ranged from 0 (most liberal candidate) to 1 (most conservative candidate).

Candidate preferences using the historical roll call record

We were interested in placing the findings from 1996 in historical context, which required us to construct a comparable data set of challenger and incumbent issue positions across all elections from 1874 to 1996. NPAT surveys do not exist before 1994, which obviously limited our ability to extend this particular measurement strategy back in time. However, other scholars have approached this problem of describing the issue positions of non-incumbent congressional candidates by taking advantage of the following fact: A non-trivial subset of congressional elections involve a candidate who *currently* has a roll call record running against a candidate

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who either *will* have a roll call record in the future or has one from the distant past. The most obvious case of this is when an incumbent is defeated by a challenger. In such a case, the *past* roll call record of the incumbent might be paired with the *future* roll call record of the challenger to create comparable measures of ideal points for both candidates. Past research that has relied on this strategy includes Strain (1963), Brady and Lynn (1973), Fiorina (1973; 1974, chap. 5), and Hurley (1984).

We constructed ideal point estimates of all House members who served between 1874 and 1996, using the Heckman/Snyder method. We used the adjustment technique suggested by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) to address intertemporal comparability problems that arise when roll call-based voting scores are constructed in individual Congresses and then combined into one time series. Then, searching through the historical election record, whenever two candidates faced each other who had their own roll call records (as when a challenger defeated an incumbent), we added them to the data set. In the resulting data set of 2,520 candidate pairs, 1,690 pairs were challengers beating incumbents, 47 were two incumbents facing off, and 783 were cases in which one of the candidates' House service was not contiguous to the election.

There are three potential problems with this approach. First, candidates may switch their positions from one election to the next. Previous research reveals that the voting records of members of Congress remain very stable from one Congress to the next, and indeed over long periods (Stone 1980; Poole and Rosenthal 1997, pp. 71–73). It is likely, then, that if a candidate commits to an ideological position in a campaign, it will be hard to deviate from that stance in the next Congress. The one exception to this pattern emerges following redistricting. Incumbents in new districts may have to adjust ideologically to new voters. To avoid this problem, we omit these cases.

Second, biases may arise because these districts hardly represent the universe of congressional seats. Challengers typically beat incumbents in marginal seats, where the parties hold similar numbers of supporters in the district. In such cases, we expect that the electoral pressures should create a bias toward greater convergence. As we discover using the NPAT data, the greatest amounts of convergence occur in the marginal seats (measured by the closeness of the presidential vote in the district), even though this effect is rather small. Our sample may, therefore, overstate the degree of convergence between candidates in the past. Since our primary findings confirm a general pattern of candidate *divergence* within districts, the sample of candidate pairs in our

historical data set probably yields a conservative estimate of the phenomenon we report.

Third, the metric is difficult to interpret over long periods of time. There is stability in candidates' positions between Congresses and even throughout a decade. Over a century, though, the scales become hard to compare, because national agendas and even the positions of the parties change dramatically. This is a feature of all preference measures derived from roll calls, including the well-known NOMINATE scores and interest group ratings. We are not interested in the absolute values of the scales so much as the relative locations of the candidates in the short term. To correct for drift in the scales, we will gauge the degree of convergence relative to the positions of the contemporaneous national parties, which we measure as the average position of all incumbents belonging to a given party in a given Congress.

Voter preferences

To study responsiveness and the effect of positioning on the vote, we need a summary measure of voter preferences in each district. As is common in other studies, we rely on the two-party presidential vote in each district (Schwarz and Fenmore 1977; Erikson and Wright 1980, 1989, 1993, 1997; Nice 1983; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2000).

Although this is a common procedure, our interpretation of what the two-party presidential vote measures is slightly different from most other studies. We assume that the issue positions espoused by the two parties' presidential candidates are perceived similarly by everyone and that all voters vote according to the spatial model. If that is true, then the Republican vote share across districts will be a monotonically-increasing function of the conservatism of the district's median voter.[7] Equally important, this measure allows us to control for the district median voter's ideal point when we examine the relationship between vote choice and candidate positioning.

For our analysis of the 1996 congressional election, we simply rely on the Census Bureau's report of the presidential vote at the congressional district level. Likewise, for the historical part of our empirical work, we can rely on Census Bureau reports of the presidential vote at the district level stretching back to 1952. The Census Bureau does not report the presidential vote at the congressional district level before 1952, requiring us to construct a measure of our own from county-level returns. To do this we rely on the ICPSR data file (ICPSR Study number

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[7]Republican vote share is an indicator of the conservatism of the median voter, but it is not a measure of the median's ideal point that is on the same scale as the candidates. Therefore, we must be cautious about the inferences we draw from its effects on the vote. See Achen (1978).

0001), which reports presidential vote at the county level to estimate district-level presidential vote before 1952. By summing across all counties in a congressional district we could measure precisely the presidential vote for congressional districts that were composed of whole counties. For districts composed of a mixture of whole and partial counties, this mapping is less precise. We discuss this procedure in more detail in Appendix A.[8]

Electoral outcomes

The least problematic data we collected are the results of congressional elections, although here, too, we expended considerable effort in cleaning existing electronic data sets. The electoral data we use in this paper were based on ICPSR Study 0001, double-checked with ICPSR Study 6311 and Dubin's (1998) recent volume of historical congressional election returns. Party affiliations were judged using a combination of these ICPSR data sets and Dubin (1998).

4. Candidate Positioning and Responsiveness in the 1996 Congressional Election

To provide an empirical grounding for the later historical analysis we perform, we begin with an analysis of candidate positioning and responsiveness in the 1996 congressional election.

Candidate convergence in 1996

One of the starkest facts revealed in the 1996 data is that candidates clearly do not converge, either nationally or district-by-district. Nationally, there appear to be two "pools" of candidates, one Democratic and one Republican, and little overlap between the two. Figure 1 displays the estimated issue positions of all Democrats and Republicans running for the House in 1996, plotted against our measure of district conservatism.[9] On a zero-to-one scale, the average position of Democratic candidates is .28 and the average position of Republicans is .75, making the gap

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[8]Although we must be cautious in using this county aggregation method, we are able to cross-validate it for the 1952–1988 period—the period for which we have both the district-level presidential returns constructed using our county-aggregation technique and district-level returns as reported by the Census Bureau. For the decade of the 1950s, when we used presidential vote constructed using the county aggregation method, we got substantively similar results to those produced when we used the Census Bureau data. On the whole, the Census Bureau data produced findings of greater responsiveness than the county-aggregation data, but year-to-year fluctuations in responsiveness paralleled each other across the two methods. The same cannot be said of the two methods after the 1960s, at the start of the *Baker v. Carr* era, when the number of split counties increases dramatically. Hence, we are comfortable with the county-aggregation method for constructing presidential vote prior to 1952. We rely on the Census Bureau reports for presidential vote at the district level after then.

[9]Erikson and Wright (1997, fig. 6-7) provide a similar picture for 1994.

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between the two parties' averages .47. The within-party standard deviations are .15 for Democrats and .14 for Republicans, less than one-third as large as the gap between the parties.

Burrowing down to the districts themselves, partisan divergence remains the main story. Figure 2 displays the estimated ideological positions of all Republican candidates plotted against the issue positions of the corresponding Democratic candidates. The diagonal line graphs where we would expect the scatterplot to be located if Democrats and Republicans converge district-by-district. Instead, what we see is that the Republican candidate, with one exception, is always more conservative than the Democrat running in the same race, and in the vast majority of cases the Republican is much more conservative.[10] The average gap between Democrats and Republicans running in the same race is about .48 points. Out of a total of 301 races, there are only 5 where the gap between the candidates is under .1 points.

One might think that the scalings miss the nuances of the election. We have combined many different issues to derive the ideological measure used here, but voters may care about only a handful. In 1996, many Republican legislators broke with their party in the House and passed minimum wage and clean drinking water legislation in order to appear more moderate than they were in 1995. If convergence on salient issues is what matters electorally, then we should observe strong correlations between the incumbent's and challenger's positions across districts on a few important questions. We do not. The only items on which even moderately strong associations exist are cigarette taxes and NASA spending, while the salient issues of that time—the minimum wage and environmental protection, for instance—remain highly partisan.

Candidate responsiveness in 1996

Even if candidates do not fully converge, spatial competition might still exert strong centripetal pressures on politicians. As the median voter in the district becomes more conservative, spatial politics might pull both candidates to the right. There is evidence of this pattern in Figure 1, which displays the relationship between the positions of the Republican and Democratic candidates against the Republican presidential vote. In that figure, two regression lines describe the responsiveness of the two parties' candidates to local ideological factors, compared across districts. For both parties, there is a statistically-significant tendency for more conservative dis-

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[10]The exception is the Christopher Smith-Kevin Meara race in the 4th district of New Jersey, which featured the "fiercely independent" (Barone and Ujifusa 1997, p. 919) Republican incumbent Smith.

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tricts to consider more conservative nominees from both parties, with the tendency being greater among Democrats.[11]

Even within this context of candidate divergence and weak resonsiveness, it might be possible to observe greater or lesser ideological responsiveness among candidates as other political circumstances change in the district. For instance, having run the electoral gauntlet before, incumbents may be more ideologically moderate in their districts than any random challenger she or he is likely to face.

We explore such politically induced moderation in Table 1, where we test for the effects of incumbency status and candidate quality on candidate ideological position, controlling for district conservatism. We see here that after controlling for district conservatism, incumbents are more moderate than open-seat candidates and that open-seat candidates are more moderate than challengers.[12] For Republicans running in a 50-50 district the predicted average ideological locations are .686 (incumbents) vs. .766 (open seats) vs. .804 (challengers), while for Democrats in a 50-50 district the predicted locations are .369 vs. .326, vs. .253, respectively.

Table 1 also suggests that more competitive races tend to produce more moderate candidates. First, as noted above, open-seat candidates are more moderate than challengers, even after controlling for district partisanship. This effect is especially strong and robust for Democrats, and is also significant for Republicans when the candidate quality variable is not included in the regressions. Second, "high quality" non-incumbents are more moderate than other non-incumbents. This effect is similar in both parties, and the estimates imply that the positions of high-quality non-incumbents are more moderate than those of other non-incumbents by .08 to .10 points, or about one-half to two-thirds of the within-party standard deviations.

Table 2 shows more directly how the competitiveness of the race reduced the ideological gap between the candidates in 1996. Here, the dependent variable is the ideological gap between the two candidates. The independent variables are district conservatism and measures of candidate quality and primary competition. First, marginal districts induce a significantly smaller gap than safe districts. The effect of partisan competition is measured by including, along with our measure of district conservatism, the square of that measure, as well. This allows us to test

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[11]The slope coefficient for Democrats is 0.50 (s.e.=0.06, t=8.27); for Republicans it is 0.28 (s.e.=0.06, t=4.52).

[12]This finding is clearly at odds with Achen's (1978) re-analysis of Miller and Stokes's data, in which he estimates that losers were more representative than winners in 1958, at least in the North, by two of his three measures of representativeness.

whether maximal convergence occurs when a district is ideologically balanced. Depending on the controls used, we calculate that the smallest gap should occur when the average Republican share of the two party presidential vote is somewhere in the range from 48.4% to 48.9%. Viewed another way, holding all other variables at their means and moving from a district where the Democratic presidential percentage equaled 65% to a district where it equaled 50%, the average gap falls by .069 points, from .509 to .440, using the results in column (1).

The gap is also smaller when "good" candidates compete. For example, in a race with an incumbent and a high-quality challenger or an open-seat race with two high-quality non-incumbents, the expected gap is .070 points lower. (See column (2).) This represents a change of nearly one-half of one standard deviation in the gap. Finally, the gap is approximately .05 points smaller if at least one of the two candidates was involved in a closely contested primary.[13]

These effects are summarized in Figure 3, where we illustrate the results reported in column (2) of Table 2. Here, we have plotted the ideological gap between the candidates against district conservatism. The three functions that are plotted in the figure show the estimated size of the gap for races with two "good" candidates (smallest gap), a "tough primary" (medium gap), and all remaining races (largest gap).

These findings are contrary to the Huntington-Fiorina hypothesis that heavy electoral competition leads to candidate divergence. Our findings differ from those reported in Fiorina (1973, 1974), who was only able to examine the relative positioning of losing incumbents and winning challengers. Our analysis of candidate positioning in 1996 succeeds in examining the positioning of winning and losing challengers running against incumbents, plus the locations of open seat candidates. While it is true that winning challengers were ideologically distinct from the incumbents they replace, in 1996, at least, the losers were even more distinct.

Electoral consequences in 1996

The importance of district responsiveness in 1996 can be gauged in terms of the vote. To test the effect of candidate positioning on the vote, we regress the two-party vote share of the Democratic candidate on district conservatism, the estimated "midpoint" between the two

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[13]Because the identical NPAT survey instrument was filled out by Senate candidates, we can incorporate the responses of the Senate candidates into this analysis. To save space, we do not report the full analysis here. In general, the strategic positioning patterns in Senate races as a whole in 1996 resembled House races with strong candidates on both sides.

candidates, and a series of controls for incumbency, candidate quality, and scandal. The midpoint estimate is an indicator of the location of the "cutpoint" that divides the set of voters into distinct subsets who support different candidates. As we show in Appendix B, as the midpoint between the candidates' positions moves to the right (left), the vote share of the Democrat (Republican) increases.

This regression specification differs from that commonly used to measure the effects of candidate positions on the vote. Instead of including each candidates' positions we include the gap and midpoint between the candidates. There are two reasons for preferring this specification. First, the predicted vote from the spatial theory is derived from the cutpoint between the candidates. Our specification includes that cutpoint explicitly, through the midpoint variable. Other specifications use either only one candidate's position, in which case the cutpoint is not identified in the regression, or both candidates' positions, in which case the cutpoint is measured implicitly. Second, the cutpoint specification rests on more general assumptions about the position of the median voter. As we show in Appendix B, the cutpoint specification assumes only that the presidential vote, which is used to capture the district's preferences, is a monotonic function of the district median. The alternative specification, which specifies each candidates' positions separately, assumes additionally that in each race the district median lies in-between the candidates' announced positions. This condition might be readily violated. For example, in a very liberal district, the Democrat and the Republican might both be to the right of the median voter. Without a measure of district preferences in the same metric as candidate preferences one cannot tell whether this assumption is violated. As a result we prefer the cutpoint specification.

In 1996, ideological responsiveness by candidates to voters mattered, but not dramatically. Table 3 shows that, controlling for incumbency, candidate quality, and scandals, as the midpoint between the candidates moved to the right, the Democrat received more votes.[14] Moving the midpoint to the right by 0.2 (approximately two standard deviations) increases the Democratic vote share in the House by about three percentage points. This is not an enormous change, but when put in the proper context it is not trivial either. It is comparable in magnitude, for example, to the effects that have been estimated for such factors as campaign spending (Levitt 1994; Gerber 1998; Ansolabehere and Snyder 1997b), federal spending in the district (Levitt and Snyder 1997),

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[14]If we add a measure of ideological gap between the two candidates to the regressions reported in Table 3, the results reported there do not change, and the effect of the gap on predicted vote share is statistically insignificant.

and facing a "quality challenger" (Jacobson 1989). Furthermore, it is about one-third to one-half the size recently estimated for the "incumbency advantage" (Gelman and King 1990; Levitt and Wolfram 1998) and nearly as large as the "personal vote" (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2000).[15]

Hence, issue positioning to respond to local conditions did affect the vote received by House candidates in 1996. If one of the parties had been able to moderate its candidates even further, that party would have been helped. However, such a one-sided strategy would have been difficult to maintain in equilibrium, and it would have come at a serious cost to that party in any case, as it would have required the party to divert the resources it would normally use to elect its nominees to an attempt to influence the outcome of party primaries.

5. Candidate Positioning and Responsiveness, 1874 to 1996

The Vote Smart data provide a unique glimpse at the ideological stances of competing congressional candidates in the United States in 1996. This is just one slice of time, and a time when many observers see both a growing schism between the parties and a sorting out of candidates at the local level, as conservative Democrats in the South and liberal Republicans in the north vanish. Is party divergence at the local level an enduring feature of the American political system, or is it unique to today's politics? Historically, do candidates converge or do the parties resemble two pools of ideologically-distinct politicians?

Candidate convergence, 1874 to 1996

We can answer these questions, in a limited way, using congressional roll call voting data. As mentioned earlier, these data typically tell us little about the ideological positions of competing candidates, because they reveal the behavior of the winners only. Roll call votes do, however, provide information about the ideological positions of a subset of competing candidates: Freshmen members of Congress and the incumbents they replace. For these races, the ideological ratings of the freshman in his or her first Congress measures the position of the winning candidate; the ideological rating in the previous Congress of the incumbent measures the position of the

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[15]We ran the usual specification and found, like Erikson and Wright (1997), that the coefficient on incumbent position was statistically significant but that the coefficient on challenger position was not in 1996. We attempted to estimate this model solely on the open seat races but could not with much precision, because we had only 17 open seat cases in our data set.

losing candidate. The difference between these candidates' ratings gauges the degree of candidate convergence in these districts.

We discussed three potential problems with this approach in Section 3. Nonetheless, we believe the results show clearly that candidate positioning over the past century largely reflects the ideological terrain staked out by the two parties. Candidates have adapted their stances only slightly in response to local conditions.

We begin by examining the ideological location of House candidates from 1874 to 1996. Using the technique described in Section 3, we constructed voting scores for all candidates in our data set during this period. We normalized the scores each year, so that the average score of all Republicans in each Congress was set to 1.0 and the average score of all Democrats was set to 0.0

Figure 4 shows just how completely candidates diverge locally, displaying the distribution of competing candidates' ideological positions. The horizontal axis corresponds to the position of the Republican candidates and the vertical axis corresponds to the positions of the Democrats. As with Figure 1 before, the diagonal line is the array of positions that we would expect competing candidates to take if they converged to the same positions within their individual races.

Democrats and Republicans locally have represented very distinct ideologies since the 1870s. In only two cases, out of the 1,814 races involving distinct opponents since 1874,[16] is there strong evidence of local convergence.[17] In all other cases, the Democratic House candidates have always represented a position to the "left" of Republican House candidates. The most distinctive pattern in the figure is that the ideological stances of congressional candidates are highly concentrated around their own parties' averages.

Another way to judge the divergence of local congressional candidates is to measure the

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[16]We found 2,520 total races where a roll-call score was available for both candidates. Of these, 1,814 involved distinct pairs of candidates. The rest involved repeat contests between the same candidates. Analysis reported in this section is confined to distinct candidate pairs.

[17]These two cases are (1) Marcantonio vs. Lanzetta, New York 20th District, 1934 and (2) Stratton vs. Button, New York 29th District, 1970. Both cases illustrate the perils of doing this type of analysis when parties are allowed by state law to run fusion tickets or otherwise endorse each other's candidates. Marcantonio managed to garner the nomination of virtually every New York party at some point in his career, and the Republican Button also ran under the Liberal Party line in 1970. In the course of conducting this analysis we have become interested in the strategic electoral effects of party fusion, and intend to pursue this topic in a future paper.

Even though these are the only two clear cases of candidate convergence in our data set, inspection of Figure 4 reveals many cases of "near" convergence. Given measurement error, there may be even more "real" cases of convergence than we can document using this data set.

change in ideology of a district's member of Congress that occurs when partisan control of the seat changes hands. If candidates take ideological positions that are, on average, those of the national parties, then the ideological change that results when a Democrat replaces a Republican in the House should equal the ideological distance between the two parties, averaged across all districts. If candidates moderate to conform to local ideological tastes, then the ideological shift resulting from such replacement should be *less* than the average ideological distance between the parties.

Figure 5 shows the average change in ideology due to partisan replacement in each decade the 1870s to the 1990s.[18] The dark line in the picture displays the ideological change at the district level due to partisan replacement for the entire nation. The lighter lines display the changes at the regional level.

It appears that the parties locally reflected the parties nationally for the first half of the 20th Century. Party replacement locally exactly mirrored the national differences between the parties. The 1940s through the 1970s exhibit a pattern of "local extremism," with the average party replacement at the district-level producing a bigger ideological change than the difference between the national parties. In the last two decades of the twentieth century congressional politics returned to the pattern of the first half of the century. Today, ideological changes at the district level reflect national differences between the parties.

The mid-century period of local extremism arose because the U.S. in this period essentially had three congressional parties: Republicans, Democrats, and Southern Democrats. The national Democratic mean averages non-Southern Democrats, who were on the whole liberal, and Southern Democrats, who were a mix of conservatives and liberals. Outside of the South, there is no evidence of local extremism. The ideological difference between candidates in races where partisan replacement occurs reflects the difference between the national Republicans and the average non-Southern Democratic member of Congress, regardless of whether those Democrats come from the West, Mid-West, or East. The South in the 1960s and again in the 1990s shows a similar pattern. The difference between Southern Democrats and Southern Republicans now

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[18]Change scores were calculated as follows. For each election year we calculated the Heckman-Snyder scores of all Democrats and Republicans. We, then, normalized the scores, setting the average Democrat to 0 and the average Republican to 1. Thus, a change (in absolute value) of less than 1 indicates an ideological shift within districts that is smaller than the overall distance between the parties; a change greater than 1 indicates a local ideological shift that exceeds the overall national party difference.

reflects the difference between the national parties.

In the 1970s and 1980s, southern congressional elections exhibited an unusually high degree of local extremism. The changes in the southern congressional delegation do not, however, fit the usual story, which states that turnover in the South replaced conservative Southern Democrats with conservative Southern Republicans. The changes were, in fact, much more dramatic. Liberal Southern Democrats, such as James MacKay, who represented suburban Atlanta, were replaced by conservative Republicans—in MacKay's case, Ben Blackburn. The changes, moreover, went in the other direction as well. Conservative Republicans, like Fletcher Thompson of Atlanta, were replaced by liberal Democrats, in this case Andrew Young. By the 1990s, southern politics seemed to have settled back into a pattern more common historically, of changes at the local level reflecting differences between the parties at the national level. These changes were the vehicles through which the southern congressional delegation changed in this period. Most of the seats went to conservative Republicans, some went to liberal Democrats. The end result was the undoing of the "three party" system in the U.S. In the 1990s, within all of the regions in the country, partisan replacement locally reflects the differences nationally between the parties.

Responsiveness, 1874 to 1996

In the early 1970s a literature developed in political science analyzing the strong district-responsiveness of members of Congress. Most prominent among these works were Fiorina (1973) and Mayhew (1974a). Our historical findings help to place this district-responsiveness literature in context, suggesting that some of its emphases may be more particular to the era in which it was written than generally applicable to long stretches of American politics.

Parallel to the analysis of responsiveness in 1996, we examine how the candidates' positions have depended on the presidential vote in the district from 1874 to 1996. For this historical analysis, we regress the ideological positions of each party's House candidates on the Republican share of the presidential two-party vote, each year from 1874 to 1996.[19] Rather than report dozens of regression coefficients, we graph the value of each year's regression coefficients in Figure 6. (For the 1950s onward, we graph the two sets of results obtained by using the two different measures of district-level presidential vote that we discussed in Section 2.)

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[19]Recall that in this section we measure each party's candidate's ideologication position using the method of dyadic matching described in Section 3.

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Until the 1930s, neither party's nominees were ideologically responsive to the districts they ran in. The coefficients for both sets of regressions hover around zero. Beginning in 1934, Republican nominees became ideologically responsive to the districts they ran in—those running in districts with considerable Democratic strength took more "liberal" stances than those running in staunchly Republican districts.

Democratic nominees, on the other hand, did not become responsive to the ideological positions of their districts until the mid-1960s. While this finding may seem at odds with the received wisdom about differences between Northern and Southern Democrats, a closer examination of the literature suggests otherwise. Although the Northern and Southern wings of the Democratic party were divided about racial issues, all scaling analyses of congressional roll call votes placed this division along a second issue dimension. On the first dimension (which we are analyzing here), there has always been a healthy collection of "liberal" Democrats in the South and "conservatives" in the North. What is telling about the North-South divide is that the responsiveness of Democratic nominees to their districts began occurring in the late 1960s, when movements in national politics began to reallocate racial politics to the primary ideological axis that organized partisan differences.

The responsiveness of Democratic nominees to their districts' ideological positioning peaked around the elections of 1970 to 1974, corresponding with the peak in Republican responsiveness. Since then, Democratic responsiveness has trended downward, but not as precipitously as the Republicans.

Earlier, in our analysis of the 1996 congressional election using the NPAT survey data to measure candidate ideology, we found that Democrats were slightly more ideologically responsive to their districts than were Republicans. The coefficients summarized in Figure 6 are consistent with this finding for 1996, even though it uses a different method to calculate candidate positions. What we find most interesting, however, is that we can use the results reported in Figure 6 to place in context the findings previously reported in Table 1 and Figure 1. Read together, these findings suggest that the ideological responsiveness we observed in 1996 was on the low end of Republican responsiveness for the past half-century, but about par for the course for Democrats.[20]

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[20]In two essays separated in time by a decade, Erikson and Wright estimate candidate ideological responsiveness as a function of district ideology for the 1982 and 1994 congressional races (Erikson and Wright 1985, 1997). Unfortunately, data limitations required them to conduct these analysis using different data. Further, their statistical techniques varied across the two essays. However, our interpretation of their results is also consistent with out

Ideological reponsiveness and election outcomes

Finally, to what degree has ideological positioning affected election outcomes over the past century and a quarter? To answer this question, we regressed the Democratic vote in the congressional district on the presidential vote and on the midpoint between the two candidates.

The estimates reported in Table 4 suggest that candidates since the mid-1960s have benefitted modestly, by distinguishing themselves from their national parties.[21] In the earliest periods, however, candidates gained little or nothing by jockeying for ideological position locally. They did not gain at all in the 1874–94 and 1932–62 periods and the effect in the 1896–1930 period is substantively smaller than in the most recent periods.

We treat the results in Table 4 very tentatively, because there is likely bias in these estimates due to the non-random sampling that produced these observations. Because we are mostly examining incumbents who lost to challengers, for instance, we do not trust the estimates of "incumbency advantage" contained in the analysis. Because sample-selection problems attend the entire analysis, we are most confident in using these estimates to understand *changes* in the effects of ideological positioning on vote outcomes.

6. Conclusions

Political pundits are fond of saying that all politics is local. This may be true of many sorts of campaign activities, such as electioneering and voter registration, but the opposite appears more apt in describing the broad policy positions that candidates take. We have uncovered an enduring pattern of candidate divergence in the United States. The choices voters face locally mainly reflect national positions of the parties.

The details of our results help to clarify further the politics of candidate positioning in congressional elections. Much of the scholarly writing on congressional politics over the past three decades emphasizes the responsiveness of elected officials to their districts. Position-taking is viewed as one of the many means that incumbents use to appeal to their constituents and win reelection. All candidates, the thinking goes, pursue centrist strategies within their districts, so

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findings. In 1982, Erikson and Wright found that Republican candidates were much more responsive to district ideology than Democrats. Partisan differences in 1994 were nearly impossible to discern.

[21] As with the analysis reported in Table 3, the results in Table 4 are unchanged if we include our measure of the ideological gap of the candidates in the regressions, and the effect of the ideological gap on the vote is statistically insignificant.

the winners should accurately reflect the desires of the greatest number of voters. Evidence for this belief is the strong correlation between the winners' (incumbents) roll call voting records and the ideological leanings of the districts. Our analysis suggests this pattern is much weaker than commonly believed. While there is a statistically significant amount of responsiveness, it is not the main story. Competing candidates in congressional elections almost never converge. Instead, the strong correlation between incumbents' and districts' ideologies arises almost entirely because voters are presented with largely partisan choices and select the candidate whose party more closely resembles them.

A more refined view of responsiveness holds that politicians represent specific subconstituencies. Perhaps the most important of these are primary electorates. Huntington, Fiorina, Aldrich, and others suggest that serving two masters—a primary and a general electorate—will pull the candidates away from the center. Critiques of party reform in presidential elections also emphasize the polarizing effects of primaries (Polsby, 1980). Several important patterns cast doubt on these arguments. (1) In 1996, candidates who won a primary battle in order to get to the general election took more moderate stances than candidates who got to the general election without a primary battle. (2) In both the historical and contemporary data, the patterns of responsiveness contradict the pattern predicted by the two-constituency accounts of Huntington and Fiorina. Incumbents are more responsive to their districts the more heterogeneous the district is. (3) The rise and fall of responsiveness are out of sync with the rise of primary elections. Responsiveness has indeed dropped since the 1960s, when most states adopted the primary as a nomination method. However, it has fallen to a level of responsiveness that resembles that of the pre-1940s, when very few states had primaries. The rise and fall of responsiveness from the 1950s through 1970s is a phenomenon that begs explanation.

A final feature of congressional elections that deserves comment is the role of open seat elections. Open seats are widely conjectured to exert a moderating influence on Congress. When a legislator is out of step with his or her district, turnover is thought to be the cure. Our results suggest that the opposite is typically true. Open seat contestants are on average more extreme than incumbents, although they are less extreme than other challengers. This is true even controlling for district partisanship. In other words, if an incumbent in a given district were removed from office *deus ex machina* and replaced with a typical open seat candidate from that district, the district would end up with a slightly more extreme representative. This finding, we believe,

has an important lesson for states that have imposed term limits on their state legislators. If these national patterns hold at the state level, then term limits will not improve the ideological representativeness of legislatures.

The fallacy committed by advocates of term limits and similar reforms is that they confound the consequences of electoral competition and the consequences of turnover. Turnover itself does not improve the ideological representativeness of Congress. Competition, on the other hand, does have a moderating influence and produces higher levels of responsiveness.

The most fundamental lessons of our analysis, though, go beyond the interpretation of U.S. congressional elections. The patterns of party divergence locally that we have uncovered pose a challenge to the reigning theory of legislative representation. The Downsian model presents the median voter, either in the nation as a whole or in each district, as both an empirical prediction and a normative standard. As an empirical prediction it fails. The two American parties diverge, nationally and locally. As a normative standard, the median voter theorem and centrism more generally remain important principles for understanding representation (see Achen 1978). The American system deviates considerably from that ideal.

We do not, however, take our analysis to imply that political scientists should abandon the spatial model as an empirical or positive view of representation. One reaction to findings such as those presented here is that political scientists should scrap the spatial analogy as a way of understanding representation. U.S. House elections, historical and contemporary, show that ideology strongly affects the behavior of politicians and voters. We find clear evidence at the aggregate level that electorates do respond to ideological cues and that elected officials respond, at least to a modest degree, to the preferences of the median voter within their districts. This is certainly true when one looks at the differences between the parties; it is even true within the parties.

The failure of the Downsian model, we believe, reflects not the failings of the spatial framework, but the simplicity of the model that is typically employed in the study of elections and representation. Most congressional research tacitly makes two assumptions about electoral competition. First, the median voter within each district is the pivotal voter. Second, strategies and choices in each district are uncoordinated with or unconstrained by decisions by candidates and voters in other districts. Under these conditions, the center is the segment of the electorate to which candidates are most responsive, and if candidates know the preferences of voters they will

converge exactly to the median voter. Failures of either of these assumptions could lead candidates in a district to take divergent positions. Our results offer empirical guidance for further theoretical inquiries.

Most of the theoretical work on legislative competition aimed at identifying the conditions when candidates diverge has emphasized multiple constituencies, especially primary and general electorates. Our results suggest that primary elections are not a very fruitful avenue for understanding the patterns observed here. More generally, our results suggest that many of the multiple constituency stories, such as appealing to local interest groups for endorsements or campaign contributions, may not account for the main features of position-taking in the U.S. The reason is that the main empirical phenomenon discovered here is a fairly stable *national* pattern of divergence that is reflected in almost every race in every district. Multiple constituency stories emphasize *local* forces, which likely vary considerably from district to district.

A more fruitful approach is to relax the second assumption. The question is, why does coordination or cross-district constraint exist in a system in which the parties are most definitely not teams? An intriguing possibility, considered elsewhere (Snyder, 1994; Ansolabehere and Snyder, 1997a), is the link between party organizations within Congress and the policies that candidates promise.

Rohde (1991), Aldrich (1995), Cox and McCubbins (1993), and Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) characterize congressional policymaking today as dominated by the parties, as opposed, say, to powerful committees. No research to date has provided much empirical support for the electoral side of the "conditional party government" (Rohde 1991) picture. Our analysis is perfectly congruent with this argument. The period where we find the greatest degree of local ideological responsiveness, the 1960s and 1970s, is also the prime period of ideological indistinctiveness of the two parties in Congress. The current period, in which we discover muted ideological responsiveness to localities, is also a period when the parties are distinct within Congress and the power of the congressional parties is said to be ascendant.

Indeed, our analysis suggests a more specific mechanism that causes the ebbs and flows of the strength of party government in the U.S. Congress. When a party is ideologically responsive to the districts in which it fields candidates, the infection of the party congressional caucus by ideological heterodoxy becomes more likely, as some of the party's members win in the "wrong" districts. When a party takes a "damn the torpedoes" attitude toward the ideologies its candidates

espouse in marginal and ideologically unfriendly districts, it wins less often (holding the strategy of the other party fixed), but its caucus is more cohesive. The party caucus consists of the candidates who won election last time, and they will push the policies that will help them win their own seats in the future. As a result, individual legislators will choose policy positions for their own party that differentiate them from the opposition.

The American parties are not teams, but neither are they simply umbrella organizations for candidates marching to their own drummers. Whatever theories emerge for these phenomena, the challenge is to account for patterns of partisan divergence in the United States that are sustained in the absence of strong centralized mechanisms of partisan control over candidates. The set of results discovered here suggest that the story is ultimately a national one.

Appendix A

NPAT Survey

The National Political Awareness Test (NPAT) was sent to all congressional candidates in 1996. Elsewhere (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart, forthcoming) we discuss the 1996 NPAT survey and our use of it to construct measures of candidate preferences. Here, we discuss more specific issues that apply to this paper.

The overall response rate to the NPAT among major party candidates was 64% (532 of 830). The response rate was approximately equal across parties—265 out of 430 Democrats and 267 out of 439 Republicans completed a survey. Incumbents were less likely to respond than non-incumbents—173 out of 381 (45%) incumbents completed the survey, compared to 359 out of 488 (74%) non-incumbents. Thus, our primary sampling worry is due to the lower response rate among incumbents, reducing our ability to construct incumbent-challenger pairs for our analysis. However, because the positions that were reported among the incumbents who *did* fill out a survey could be nearly perfectly predicted from their roll call voting records in the 104th Congress, we could use this information to inpute 1996 campaign positions among the non-responding incumbents. Details about the inputation procedure are found below. Without inputation, there are 152 candidate pairs who both filled out a survey. With inputation, we are able to analyze 301 candidate pairs.

Scaling the NPAT Survey

Following Heckman and Snyder (1997), we scaled this data using principal components factor analysis applied to the double-centered, candidate-by-candidate covariance matrix. When normalized to sum to one, the three largest eigenvalues are .30, .04, and .03—after these comes a long list of values slowly declining from .03 to around 0. Thus, one factor is clearly dominant. The first dimension factor scalings from the 1996 NPAT responses correlated very highly (r=.94) with the analogous scores constructed among the incumbents using their roll call records from the 104th Congress. Among candidates who responded to the NPAT surveys in 1996 and 1998, the correlation on the first dimension of the scaling is .95 across the two years. See Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (forthcoming) for a more general discussion of the validity and reliability of the scale we constructed.

Imputation of NPAT Scores

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We imputed first dimension NPAT scores for incumbents who failed to respond to the 1996 NPAT survey. First we constructed an ideological scaling of all members of the 104th Congress, from their roll call votes, using the Snyder/Heckman (1997) method. Following Snyder and Groseclose (2000), we performed this scaling only on "lopsided" roll call votes. Snyder and Groseclose provide a defense for confining this sort of analysis to lopsided roll call votes, that is, to roll call votes in which the prevailing side received more than 65% of the votes cast. Briefly stated, their argument is that such lopsided votes are less likely to be contaminated by party influence than closer roll calls. This conjecture is supported by the findings of Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (forthcoming). We then regressed the first-dimension NPAT scores on the first twenty-five factors obtained from scaling the lopsided roll-calls of the 104th congress, for the 152 incumbents with both a roll-call record and an NPAT score. (Including other variables, such as party and a dummy for the south, added nothing in terms of predictive power.) We then use the regression coefficients to estimate NPAT scores for the 149 incumbents with roll-call voting records but not NPAT scores, bringing the total number of usable races to 301.

We are quite confident about the imputed positions because the relationship between the estimated positions based on the survey data and estimated positions based on the roll call data is tight. The correlation between the first factor from the roll call data and the first factor from the NPAT data is .94. Overall, we explain over 95 percent of the variance of the first factor in the survey data using the first 25 factors extracted from the roll call data.

Presidential vote via the county aggregation method

As mentioned in the text, we were able to construct the district-level presidential vote for a surprising number of congressional districts stretching back to 1874. All districts that were composed completely of whole counties were, of course, included. Furthermore, we included cases where the percentage of the district's population that was contained in whole counties was at least 50%. Thus, the excluded districts tended to be from just a few large cities.

Appendix B

This appendix provides a formal justification for the superiority of the midpoint specification used to measure the effect of candidate positions on the vote. A number of prior studies have examined the relationship between candidate positioning and the vote using estimates of the issue positions of both candidates as regressors. These studies have reached mixed conclusions about the effect of candidate politions on the votes they receive.

A problem these studies may encounter is methodological. The conventional linear specification is to regress the Democratic share of the two party vote on a measure of the Democrat's ideological position, a measure of the Republican's position, and the Presidential vote in each district. (Alternately, the two candidates might be described as incumbents and challengers.) It is assumed that the presidential vote is a monotonic function of the district median. We treat this as a maintained hypothesis. The interpretation of the coefficients on the candidate positions as the response of the vote to ideological competition in this *linear* regression rests on a further assumption. Specifically, it is assumed that the vote share won by a candidate is a monotonic function of changes in that candidate's position, holding constant the position of the other candidate and the presidential vote in the district. This assumption can fail. Non-monotonicity arises when both candidates are on one side of the median voter in some districts but not in other districts.

Consider the following, rather standard, voting model. Two candidates, X and Y, adopt positions x and y in a one-dimensional issue space. Each voter i has an ideal point z_i, and a random utility function of the form $U_i = u_i(z - z_i) + e_{ij}$, where z is the issue position of the winning candidate; u_i is a strictly concave and twice differentiable function with $u'(0) = 0$; and e_{ij} is a candidate-specific benefit that voter i receives if candidate j wins. Thus, for example, if candidate X wins then voter i's payoff is $U_i = u_i(x - z_i) + e_{iX}$. The e_{ij} term may pick up "valence" issues, such candidate j's integrity or skill at performing casework. It might also include candidate-specific characteristics that are viewed as "good" by some voters, and "bad" by others, such as j's ethnicity, race or religion.

Voters vote sincerely, after observing x, y, e_{iX} and e_{iY}. Let $e_i = e_{iX} - e_{iY}$ be candidate X's net advantage on the "valence" issue, let F be the cumulative distribution function of e_i, and suppose e_i has a strictly positive density function f. Then, viewed as a function only of x, y and z_i, the probability voter i votes for candidate Y is $P_{iY} = F(u_i(y - z_i) - u_i(x - z_i))$.

Claim 1. The sign of the effect of moving one candidate's location on voting probabilities is ambiguous.

Differentiating P_{iY} with respect to y yields $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial y} = f(u_i(y - z_i) - u_i(x - z_i))\ u_i'(y - z_i)$. Since u_i is strictly concave and reaches a maximum at z_i, $u_i'(d_i) > 0$ for $d_i < 0$ and $u_i'(d_i) < 0$ for $d_i > 0$. Thus, the sign of $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial y}$ depends on $d_i = y - z_i$. For $y < z_i$, $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial x} > 0$, and for $y > z_i$, $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial y} < 0$. This means that in order to know whether an increase in y will increase or decrease the probability that voter i will vote for Y, we must know the sign of $y - z_i$. And, to do that we must clearly have y and z_i measured on the same scale. An analogous argument holds for changes in candidate X's position.

Clearly the problem persists when we aggregate to the district level. Since we cannot sign $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial y}$ for any particular voter without putting that voter's ideal point on the same scale with the candidates, we cannot say much in general about the expected vote for party Y either, since that is simply the sum of the $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial y}$'s across all voters in a district.

The exact nature of the problem identified in Claim 1 can be seen by contrasting two cases.

Case One. Suppose that all Democratic candidates are to the left of their districts' medians and all Republicans are to the right of their districts' medians. In analyzing this case, consider a "liberal" district, measured as returning a strongly Democratic presidential vote share, p. Fix the Republican candidate's ideological position at a point, R, to the right of the district's median. Suppose that the Democrat initially takes a position D, far to the left of the district's median, but then moves to a point D', which is closer to the median than D but still to the left. Under a probabilistic voting model (as distinct from a deterministic model), all voters to the "left" of D become less likely to vote for the Democrat while all voters to the "right" of D are more likely to vote Democratic. Because the Democratic candidate is to the left of the median in this district, a movement in the Republican direction will attract more votes than it repels. And, because all Democrats are to the left of the median in all districts and all Republicans are to the right of all the medians, rightward movements by Democratic candidates and leftward movements by Republican candidates increase their vote shares.

Case Two. The candidates now are not necessarily on opposite sides of the median. As before, consider a "liberal" district, as indexed by the presidential vote, a fixed Republican position, R, and the starting point for the Democrat, D. Suppose, however, that D is to the right of the median

in this district, not to the left. (One might imagine an extremely liberal district represented by a fairly liberal Democrat who is challenged by a moderate Republican.) Move the Democrat to D', in the direction of R and away from the median. Now, the Democratic vote falls. Like before, all voters to the "left" of D become less likely to vote for the Democrat, while all voters to the right of D become more likely to vote for him. However, because D was to the right of the district median, a movement in the direction of the Republican is actually a move away from most voters. In a probablistic voting model, such a move lowers the likelihood that most voters will choose the Democrat.

Therefore, when regressing vote share on the ideological location of candidates, it is necessary to know whether candidates generally straddle their districts' medians. Without a measure of district medians that is on the same scale as candidates, it is impossible to know which type of electoral system we are performing a regression on—Case One or Case Two. As a consequence, the standard regression specifications might yield regression coefficients that are attenuated or, even worse, have the wrong signs.

Our results suggest that "Case One" districts were more numerous than "Case Two" districts in 1996. This can be seen by performing the more common regression, where the dependent variable is the Democratic vote share in a district and the two independent variables of interest are the preferences of the Democratic and Republican candidates, measured separately. The results of this alternative regression specification are reported in Table A1; which is directly comparable to Table 3. The coefficients on Democratic Preferences and Republican Preferences are both positive, which should occur if, *on average*, Democratic candidates are to the left of their district medians and Republicans are to the right.

Claim 2. The sign of the effect of moving the midpoint between the candidates' locations on voting probabilities is unambiguous.

Now reparameterize the problem by letting m be the midpoint between and x and y, and letting $\delta > 0$ be the gap between x and y. Thus, if $x < y$ then $x = m - \delta$ and $y = m + \delta$. Then $P_{iY} = F(u_i(m + \delta - z_i) - u_i(m - \delta - z_i))$. Differentiating with respect to m yields $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial m} = f(u_i(m + \delta - z_i) - u_i(m - \delta - z_i)) \left[u_i'(m + \delta - z_i) - u_i'(m - \delta - z_i) \right]$. Now, $m + \delta - z_i > m - \delta - z_i$, and u_i' is strictly decreasing (since u_i is strictly concave by assumption), so $u_i'(m + \delta - z_i) - u_i'(m - \delta - z_i) < 0$. Thus, $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial m} < 0$ for *any* z_i, m, and δ. Aggregating to the

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district level, this means that when $x < y$ the expected vote for Y falls as m increases (holding the gap between the candidates fixed).

Thus, assuming that the presidential vote in a district is a monotonically increasing function of the median voter ideal point in the district, we therefore expect that as the midpoint between the candidate positions moves in a more liberal direction (holding the gap fixed), the Democratic candidate's vote-share will fall.

Consider again the two hypothetical electoral systems discussed earlier. Under the "midpoint specification," when D moves to D' all voters to the "right" of D become more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate. Therefore, the distance between M and M', $|M - M'|$, is a measure of how many voters, on net, are more likely to support the Democrat. This is true whether the candidates straddle the median (Case One above) or are on the same side of the median (Case Two above).

As an aside, note that we cannot unambiguously sign the effect of changing the size of the gap, δ. Differentiating with respect to δ yields $\frac{\partial P_{iY}}{\partial \delta} = f(u_i(m+\delta-z_i) - u_i(m-\delta-z_i)) \left[u_i'(m+\delta-z_i) + u_i'(m-\delta-z_i) \right]$. The term in brackets may be positive or negative, depending on z_i, m, and δ. For example, if u_i is symmetric about 0, so $u_i'(d) = -u_i'(-d)$ for all d, then the term in brackets is positive when $m < z_i$, negative with $m > z_i$, and zero with $m = z_i$.

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Figure 1
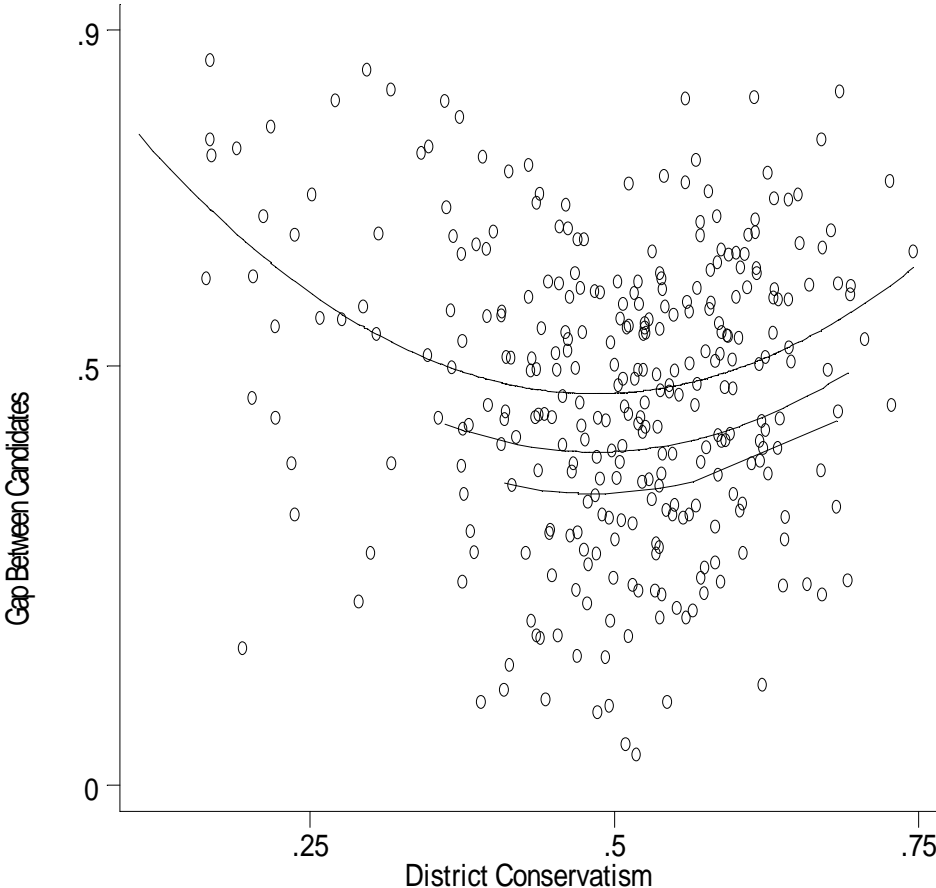## Candidate Positioning in 1996 by District Conservatism
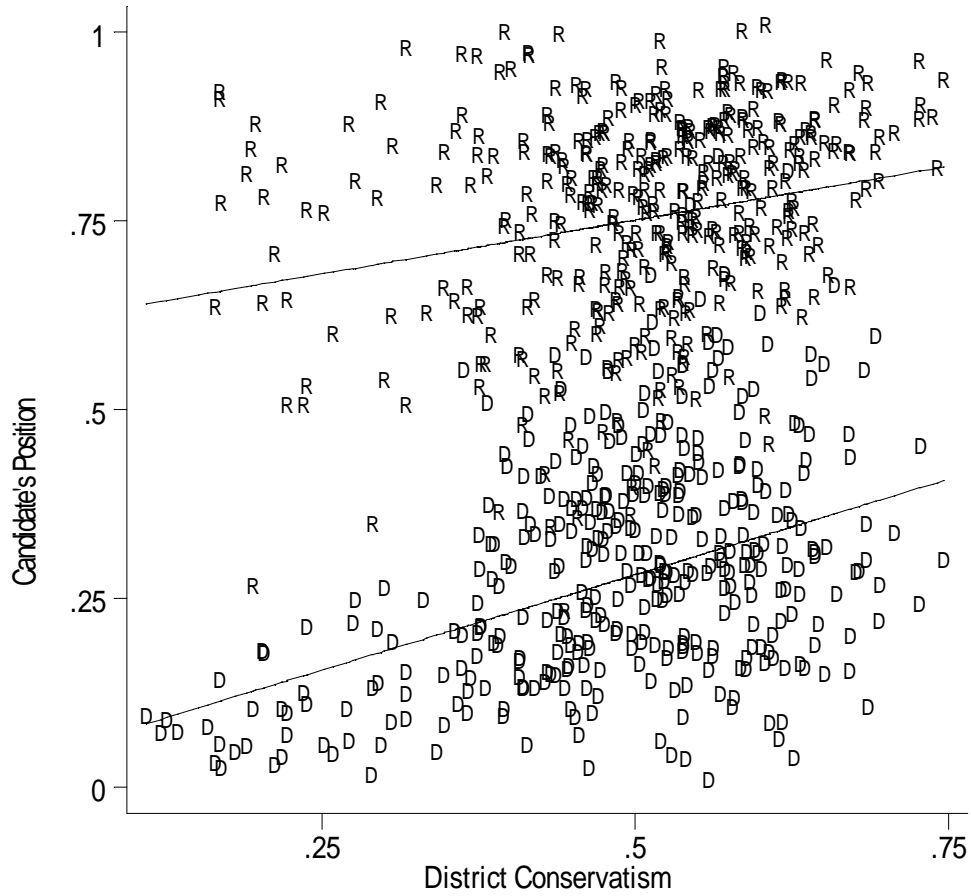
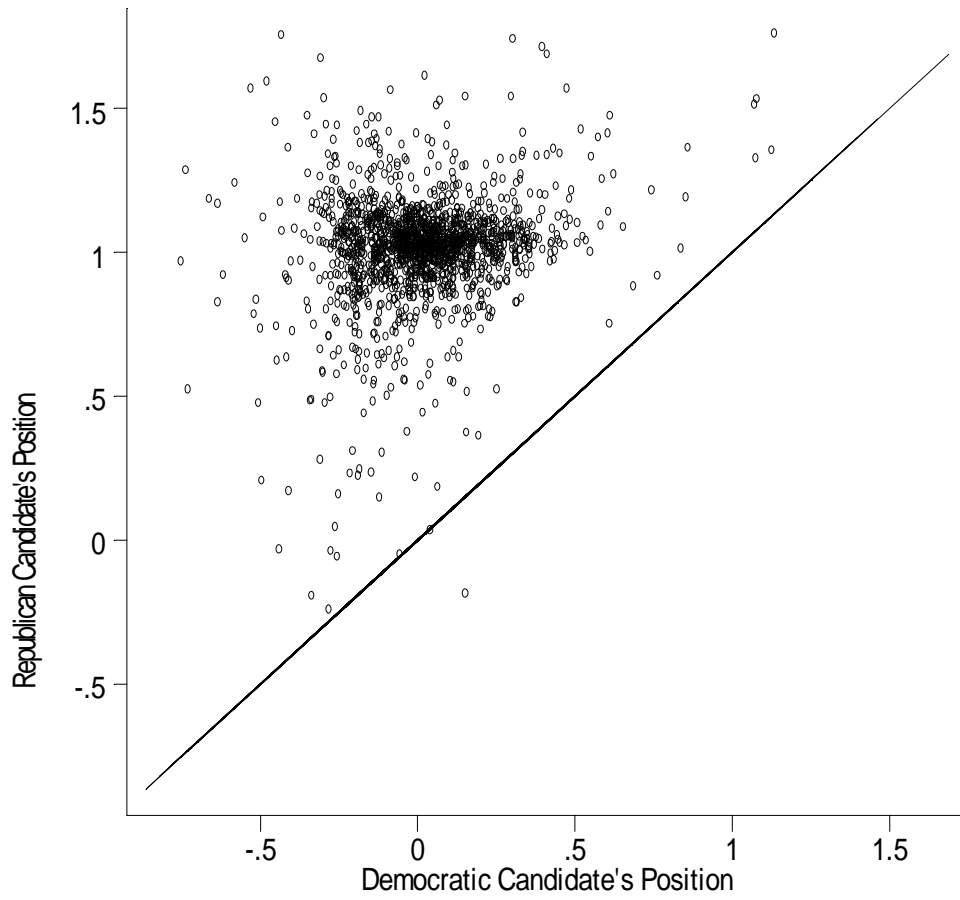
R = Republican candidates
D = Democratic candidates

Figure 2
Candidate Positioning in 1996: Republicans *vs.* Democrats
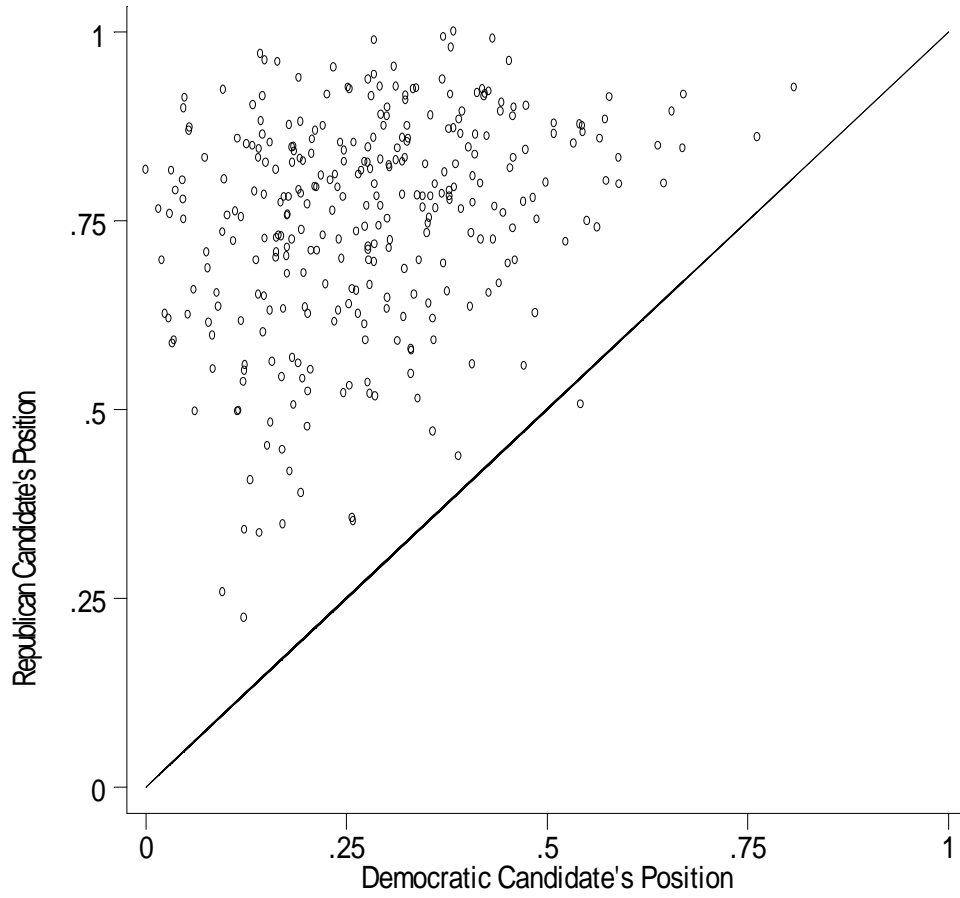
Figure 3
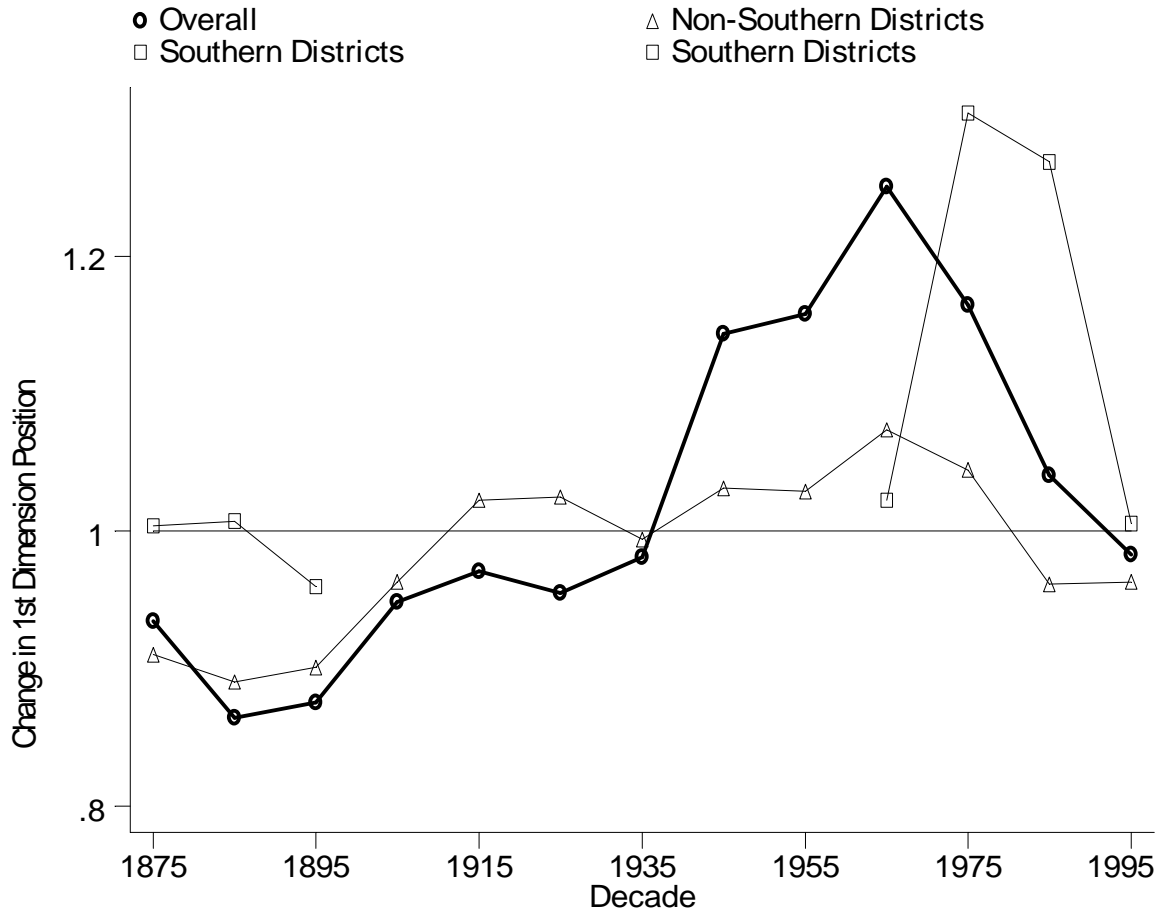**Ideological Gap: Effects of Candidate Quality and Primary Competition**

Figure 4
Candidate Positioning, 1874–1996: Republicans *vs.* Democrats

Figure 5
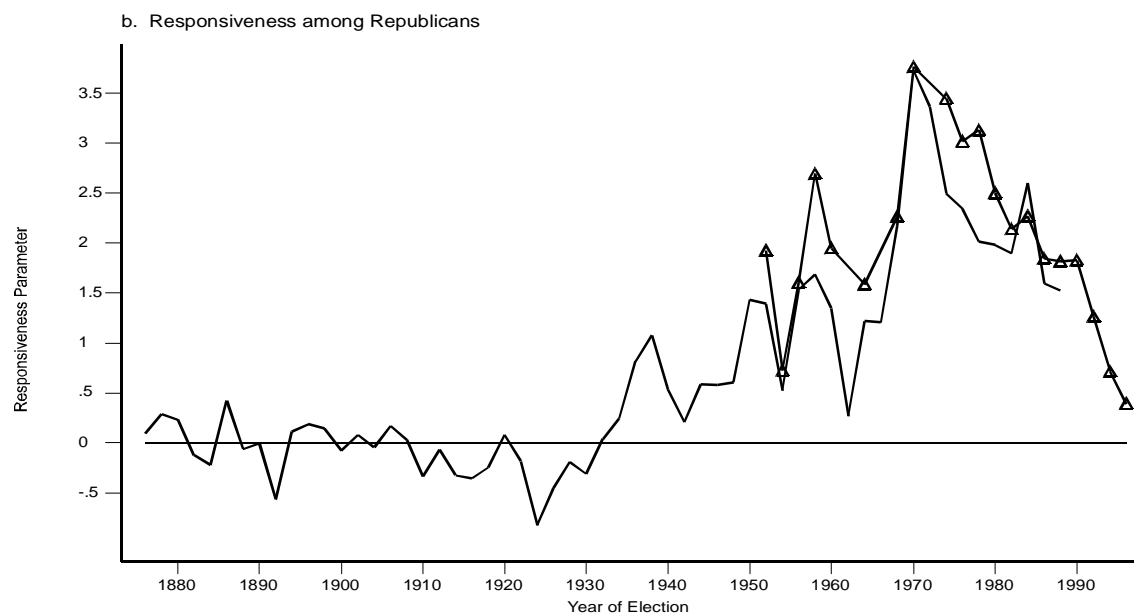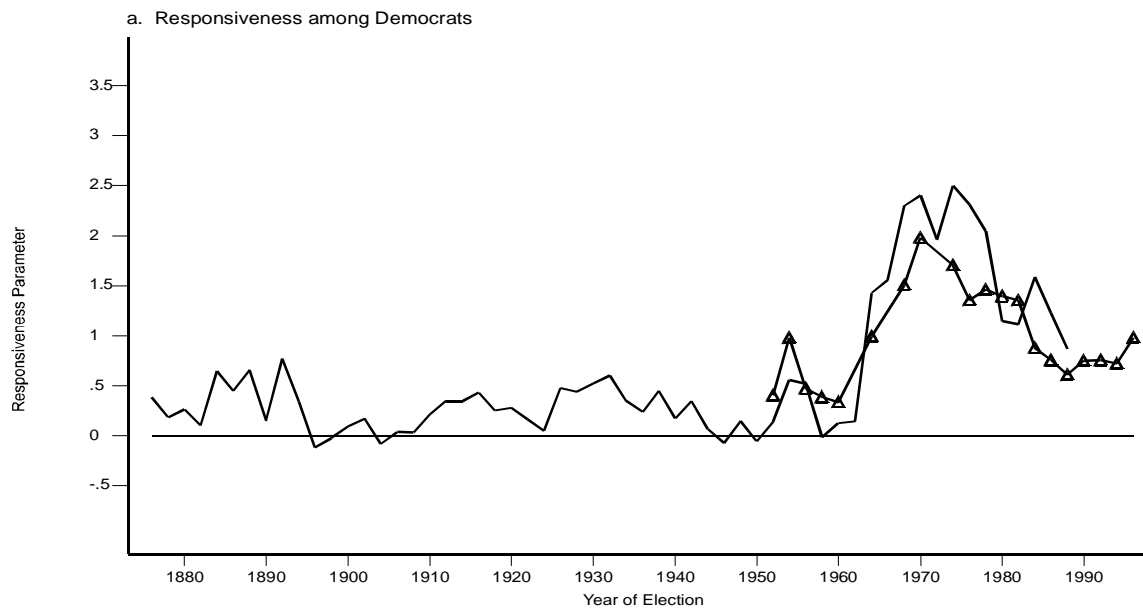**Ideological Change Due to Partisan Replacement, 1874–1996**

Figure 6
Responsiveness by Party, 1874–1996

a. Responsiveness among Democrats

b. Responsiveness among Republicans

Legend:
— County-District Method
—△— Straight District Method

Table 1. Predicting the Ideological Location of Democratic and Republican House Candidates in 1996

Dep. var. = Candidate's position on the first dimension

	Democrats		Republicans	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Republican Presidential Pct.	0.812	0.853	0.571	0.630
	(0.072)	(0.070)	(0.076)	(0.078)
Incumbent	0.132	0.159	-0.115	-0.137
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.020)
Open Seat Candidate	0.107	0.080	-0.060	0.034
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.029)
High Quality Candidate	—	0.100	—	-.080
		(0.022)		(0.027)
Intercept	-0.191	-0.234	0.537	0.525
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Adjusted R^2	.274	.312	.143	.153
Observations	356	356	368	368
Root MSE	.129	.125	.129	.128

Standard errors in parentheses.

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Table 2. Predicting the Ideological Gap Between Democratic and Republican House Candidates in 1996

Dep. var. = Difference between Republican and Democratic candidates' positions on the first dimension

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Republican Presidential Pct. (RP)	-2.46	-2.13	-2.11
	(0.466)	(0.470)	(0.473)
RP^2	2.54	2.19	2.16
	(0.501)	(0.504)	(0.507)
Both Good Candidates	—	-0.070	—
		(0.024)	
Dem. Good Candidate	—	—	-0.072
			(0.026)
Rep. Good Candidate	—	—	-0.063
			(0.029)
Tough Primary	—	-0.050	-0.051
		(0.026)	(0.026)
Intercept	1.035	0.981	1.048
	(0.106)	(0.105)	(0.108)
Adjusted R^2	.081	.109	.107
Observations	301	301	301
Root MSE	.164	.162	.162
RP* = Value of RP that minimizes Gap	.484	.484	.489

Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 3. Predicting the Vote share of Democratic House candidates in 1996

Dep. var. = Democratic candidate's share of two-party vote

	(1)	(2)	(3)
District Conservatism (Republican Presidential Pct.)	-0.711 (0.043)	-0.827 (0.051)	-0.826 (0.051)
Democrat Incumbent	0.134 (0.018)	0.122 (0.018)	—
Republican Incumbent	-0.083 (0.019)	-0.070 (0.019)	—
Incumbent	—	—	0.097 (0.006)
Democrat Good Candidate	0.038 (0.012)	0.030 (0.012)	—
Republican Good Candidate	-0.037 (0.014)	-0.031 (0.014)	—
Good Candidate	—	—	0.032 (0.009)
Democrat in Scandal	-0.059 (0.037)	-0.062 (0.036)	—
Republican in Scandal	0.152 (0.063)	0.140 (0.061)	—
Scandal	—	—	-0.081 (0.031)
Midpoint	—	0.147 (0.038)	0.147 (0.038)
Intercept	0.845 (0.027)	0.826 (0.027)	0.850 (0.021)
Adjusted R^2	.875	.881	.880
Observations	297	297	297
Root MSE	.063	.061	.061

Standard errors in parentheses.

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Table 4. Predicting the Vote share of Democratic House candidates from 1874-1996

Dep. var. = Democratic candidate's share of two-party vote

	1874-94[a]	1896-1930[a]	1932-62[a]	1952-74[b]	1976-96[b]
Republican	0.84	0.26	0.36	.28	.22
Pres. Pct.	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Midpoint	0.18	0.44	0.25	0.67	0.52
	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.23)
Democratic	-0.005	-0.002	0.000	0.021	-0.015
Incumbent	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.011)
Republican	0.008	0.001	-0.002	-0.004	-0.030
Incumbent	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.012)
South	0.013	-0.004	-0.017	0.007	-0.003
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.014)	(0.010)	(0.008)
Intercept	0.32	0.38	0.31	0.50	0.52
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Adjusted R^2	.21	.13	.15	.14	.49
Observations	350	593	464	404	272

Separate election-year dummies suppressed. Standard errors in parentheses.
[a]Using the county aggregation method to calculate presidential vote in the district.
[b]Using the Congressional District Data Book for presidential vote in the district.

Table A1. Predicting the Vote share of Democratic House candidates in 1996 (Alternative Regression Specification)

Dep. var. = Democratic candidate's share of two-party vote

District Conservatism (Republican Presidential Pct.)	-0.828 (0.052)
Democrat Incumbent	0.121 (0.018)
Republican Incumbent	-0.072 (0.019)
Democrat Good Candidate	0.029 (0.012)
Republican Good Candidate	-0.035 (0.014)
Democrat in Scandal	-0.058 (0.036)
Republican in Scandal	0.143 (0.062)
Democrat Preferences	0.084 (0.029)
Republican Preferences	0.060 (0.028)
Intercept	0.836 (0.030)
Adjusted R^2	.881
Observations	296
Root MSE	.061

Standard errors in parentheses.