The Effect of Ballot Type on Congressional Elections, 1946-2006

Jason M. Roberts
Department of Political Science
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
jroberts@unc.edu

June 16, 2008

¹Paper prepared for delivery at the 2008 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. Thanks to Erik Engstrom, Jamie Carson, and seminar participants at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for comments on earlier versions of this work. Thanks to Kathryn Chylla, Caitlin Dwyer, and Eve Ringsmuth for research assistance and to Gary Jacobson for sharing congressional elections data.
Abstract

Two of the most fundamental changes in post-World War II congressional elections are the rise of candidate-centered campaigns and the growth of the incumbency advantage. The latter has spurred a vibrant theoretical and empirical literature seeking to document the causes and consequences of incumbent success. In this paper I point to an under-appreciated cause of the incumbency advantage—ballot type. My results reveal that more than 25 percent of the growth in the incumbency advantage can be attributed to states’ decisions to adopt the office bloc rather than the party column form of the Australian ballot. The office bloc ballot suppresses the emergence of quality candidates to incumbents and enhances the effect of candidate quality differentials in election outcomes.
1 Introduction

In November of 1949, a year long campaign ended with Ohio citizens voting by more than 250,000 votes to change their ballot from a party column, which listed candidates under a party list to an office bloc ballot, which lists candidates by the office they seek. This campaign was led by supporters of Senator Robert A. Taft (R) with the intent of insulating him from party tides in the 1950 general election. Taft had narrowly won in 1944 by only 17,000 votes out of more than three million cast and was seeking reelection at the same time as popular Democratic Governor Frank J. Lausche.

Taft’s supporters estimated that the change in ballot type would add 100,000 votes to Taft’s total in 1950 out of the more than 3 million cast, as voters would be apt to judge Taft and Lausche independently rather than voting a straight party ticket. Taft’s supporters feared that the keeping the party column ballot would endanger Taft’s reelection chances in 1950, so they spent an estimated $85,000 dollars to get the ballot initiative passed (Key 1952). In the wake of the change in ballot type, Ohio Democrats found it difficult to find a suitable challenger for Taft, and Taft went on to win the election by more than 400,000 votes. Given the number of moving parts involved and our inability to “replay history” it is impossible to tell if the change in ballot type had a discernible effect on Taft’s reelection prospects in 1950, but two things are clear (1) Taft and his supporters believed that the type of ballot used could effect the outcome and (2) they were willing to spend a considerable sum of money to see their proposal enacted.

As I detail below, Taft’s supporters are not the only political actors in the history of ballot reform in the U.S. who have acted on their belief that ballot laws could affect the electoral success of incumbents. In fact, for much of the history of the Australian or secret ballot in the United States, parties and politicians have contested the form of
the ballot employed, with many actors believing that the type of ballot employed can have affect election outcomes. In previous work, with Jamie Carson, on the early decades of Australian ballot in the United States, we discovered a strong relationship between ballot type and the incumbency advantage in U.S. House Elections (Carson and Roberts N.D.). In this paper I provide the first systematic empirical evidence that demonstrates that the type of ballot employed can explain up to 25% of the incumbency advantage in U.S. House Elections in the modern era—1946-2006. States employing a ballot that is organized by office consistently demonstrate a larger incumbency advantage as compared to states with the party column ballot. The past three decades have seen a dramatic increase in the number of states and districts employing the office bloc ballot, while at the same time, the percentage of incumbents winning reelection has grown. The results presented below demonstrate that this two trends are in fact related—the office bloc ballot both enhances the electoral advantage of incumbency and suppresses the emergence of quality challengers to incumbents. My results suggest that one way to enhance the competitiveness of elections to the U.S. House would be to reverse the trend towards the office bloc ballot. While the exact mechanism is unclear, the data I have analyzed to data suggest that the elections held under the party column ballot are characterized by an increase in the number of quality challengers emerging and declining electoral prospects for incumbents.

2 History of Australian Ballot Reform

In nineteenth century America, political parties exercised almost complete control over the balloting process in the United States. When voters when to the polls on Election
Day, they were given “party ballots” that were distributed by the parties rather than printed by the individual states. Each party designed its own ballot, often in a distinctive size and color, to ensure that individuals were voting for the party’s slate of candidates. Moreover, voting during this era was not a private act. During the early part of the century, most decisions were made by voice vote. Beginning in the 1840s, voting occurred by paper ballot in most precincts, but was still performed in the open where the party workers could observe individual voters’ choices. This way, the local party organizations could ensure that voters were selecting the “correct” slate of candidates by carefully monitoring the color of the ballots that were selected (Bensel 2004; Rusk 1970; Ware 2002).

By the mid-1880s the Australian or secret ballot was becoming common in Western European countries. In 1888, Massachusetts became the first American state to adopt a statewide Australian ballot (Ware 2002). Following the lead of Massachusetts, many other states quickly adopted the Australian ballot so that by 1900, most states had move to some variant of the Australian ballot. Why was the parties’ cartel-like control over the ballot so easily dispatched with throughout the country? The answers are numerous, but the historical record suggests that a move away from party printed ballots was favored both by a coalition of anti-party “bolters,” Mugwumps, Populists, and agrarian activists as well as the major political parties themselves (Fredman 1968).

The motives of the anti-party groups and “good government” reformers in seeking ballot reform are relatively clear. The status quo of allowing the major parties to prepare and distribute ballots rendered it extremely difficult for minor parties and factions of larger parties to secure elective office. A state printed and controlled ballot also reduced the possibilities for electoral corruption. Corruption and coercion were regular features of elections under the party ballot, as the combination of party controlled ballots and public
casting of ballots opened the door for party workers to unduly influence the votes of citizens (Bensel 2004; Summers 2004). Parties were free to print ballots of different sizes and colors so as to easily identify the ballot being cast by voters. While electoral fraud was typically concentrated in a few urban areas and not nearly as widespread as the anti-party reformers claimed, it was an issue that resonated with the public, so “agitators” had a relatively easy time convincing state legislatures to enact ballot reform (Fredman 1968).

The more interesting question is why did the major parties not do more to stop reform efforts? Ware (2002) cites several related reasons. The most compelling of which is that parties did not have as much control over election outcomes as many believed. The transformation of the United States population from largely rural to largely urban made it increasingly difficult for party workers and party voters to identify each other. This was problematic for parties, who could no longer be sure they were getting their ballots into the hands of the proper voters, and also for voters, many of whom were illiterate and could not be sure they were voting with the “proper” ballot given the ease of producing similar looking ballots. Additionally, local factions would often use their control over the ballot to extort concessions from the state or national party organizations. If the local factions were not bought off they would engage in “treachery” (Reynolds and McCormick 1986; Reynolds 2006). This took various forms including not placing the proper candidates on the ballot, “knifing” through certain names on the ballot, and encouraging the use of “pasters” that allowed the name of a party nominee to be covered up with a different name. In short, the changing population demographics created large information asymmetries as state party bosses could not be sure if their local subordinates were printing and distributing the proper ballot. Without an effective monitoring system, parties suffered increased agency loss as they tried to corral their various local factions and voters.
Parties experimented with oil based ballots to prevent the use of “pasters,” but that did not prevent other forms of treachery such as simply printing the “wrong” name on the ballot (Bensel 2004; Summers 2004).

For the major parties, the Australian ballot was appealing on a number of levels. With a state printed ballot, a party organization could be sure that its preferred candidates would appear on the ballot with its label properly affixed to the candidates’ names. This effectively reduced the agency loss associated with the ballot to zero, as parties could be sure that the correct candidates’ names were on the ballot. In addition to helping stabilize the electoral process for parties, Australian ballot reform also shifted the considerable cost of ballot printing from the party to the state and local government, hence freeing up more party funds for the mobilization of voters. Thus, Ware (2002) argues that parties quickly chose to try and control the type of Australian ballot adopted rather than standing in the way of reform. As a result, no fewer than five forms of the Australian ballot were adopted in the American states with several states changing the type of ballot more than once. The most basic distinction in ballot type was between the party column ballot, which listed each parties’ candidates for each office in a column on the ballot (see Figure 1) and the office bloc ballot, which listed the candidates for each office on ballot by office (see Figure 2). The two major parties had a strong preference for the party column ballot, as it most closely approximated the form of the party ballot and was more likely to elicit straight-ticket voting.

Parties and politicians continued to contest the form of the Australian ballot throughout the 20th century. Most accounts of changes in ballot type emphasize short term political gain as the primary motivating factor in ballot law changes. In addition to the Ohio episode regarding Senator Taft, states such as Michigan, Connecticut, and North
1. Make all of your selections BEFORE pushing the green "VOTE" button located below the lower right corner of the ballot.

2. Select your choice by pressing the "X" to the right of the person’s name. Once you press the "X," you will see a red light at the upper left corner of that "X." This indicates your choice.

3. If you want to change your choice, press the "X" again and the light will go out. Then, press the "X" to the right of your choice to make a new selection.

4. Make sure that a red light is lit at the upper left corner of the "X" for all of your choices BEFORE pushing the green "VOTE" button to cast your ballot.

---

**Figure 1: Party Column Ballot**

---

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS**

---

**FOR**

- **UNITED STATES SENATOR**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS**
  - [District]
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **ATTORNEY GENERAL**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **STATE TREASURER**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **AUDITOR OF ACCOUNTS**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **SUPERINTENDENT DISTRICT 1**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 1**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **REGISTER OF VOTERS**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **RECEIVER OF SCHOOLS**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT 4**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]
- **SHERIFF**
  - Democratic Party: [Name]
  - Republican Party: [Name]
  - Libertarian Party: [Name]

---

**AFTER MAKING ALL OF YOUR SELECTIONS, CAST YOUR BALLOT BY PUSHING THE GREEN "VOTE" BUTTON LOCATED BELOW THIS NOTICE.**
Figure 2: Office Bloc Ballot
Carolina have made changes in the form of their ballot. In Michigan, the changes have centered around the straight ticket box on the ballot. In the 1930s, the Republican dominated state legislature removed the straight ticket option from the Michigan ballot. Supporters of the changed surmised that by making it more difficult to vote a straight party ticket, Republican candidates would be insulated from popularity of Democratic presidential candidate—Franklin D. Roosevelt. By the early 1950s, however, Republicans in the Michigan legislature decided that voters should be allowed a straight ticket option and it was re-instituted prior to the 1956 landslide presidential victory for Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In Connecticut, the battle centered on whether pulling a straight party lever would remain as a requirement for casting a ballot. Traditionally, Connecticut voters had to pull a party lever then could “cut” individual offices if they wished to vote a split ticket. As the Republican stranglehold on the state began to collapse in the 1960s, Connecticut legislatures sought to make the lever optional in hopes of insulating Republican candidates from national tides.¹ Often these changes can result in unintended consequences. Democrats in the North Carolina legislature—in an effort to insulate themselves from the popularity of Republican President Richard Nixon—changed their ballots laws so that voters who voted a straight party ticket had to then cast a separate ballot for president. One undeniable result of this change has been a massive “undervote” in presidential elections due to the fact that many fail to understand that voting a straight ticket does not register a vote for president.²

3 Theory and Expectations

Despite the numerous episodes that demonstrate that state’s have often changed the ballot laws as a means to potentially affect outcomes, surprisingly little political science literature has addressed the effect of various forms of the Australian ballot on election outcomes. Notable exceptions include Rusk (1970), Walker (1966) and Campbell and Miller (1957) all of whom clearly demonstrate the ballot form can and does affect split-ticket voting, “roll-off,” and ultimately election outcomes. In fact, Campbell and Miller (1957, 299) go so far as to argue that, “Any attempt to explain why the voter marks a straight or split ballot must take account of the physical characteristics of the election ballot.” Their work demonstrates that weak party identifiers are strongly influence by ballot type. These voters are much more likely to vote a straight ticket when presented with a party column ballot and a straight ticket option for voting. Their findings indicate that ballot type can influence how voters make ballot decisions. Campbell and Miller carried on this line of thought along with their co-authors in The American Voter, but with a few exceptions, political behavior scholars have not continued to analyze the effect of the physical form of the ballot on outcomes. Walker (1966), however, persuasively demonstrates that the office bloc ballot has a strong effect on less educated and less partisan voters. These voters tend to be less well-informed about many of the choices on the ballot and hence are much more likely to not vote or “roll-off” in these races. In contrast, the party column ballot organizes the ballot by party and thus encourages voters to weight party identification more heavily in their decision calculus thus producing less ballot roll-off.

In the wake of Walker’s findings, the few scholars studying the ballot form have focused heavily on the effects of ballot order on outcomes rather than the overall design of the ballot (Miller and Krosnick 1998; Krosnick et al. 2004; Darcy 1986). These studies
find that the order in which names are listed on a ballot can affect the election outcome, especially in elections that are not salient and not visible. Darcy (1986) finds no effect of ballot order, however, for party column ballots which restricts the set of ballots with order effects to office bloc ballots.

The mechanism for order effects appears to be that voters search the list of candidates looking for a reason to vote for someone and thus will be more inclined to choose the first acceptable candidate on the list (Krosnick et al. 2004). This type of voter behavior would advantage candidates who appear early on the ballot over those appearing later, candidates who enjoy a name recognition advantage, and those with familiar names. This could potentially affect the incumbency advantage in U.S. House elections in two primary ways: (1) incumbent members of the U.S. House tend to universally enjoy a name recognition advantage over their opponents (Jacobson 2004) and (2) some states list winning parties from the previous elections first in the ballot order. Thus my expectations are clear. I expect to see a larger incumbency advantage in districts with the office bloc ballot, all else equal. These incumbents will enjoy a name recognition advantage, be dis-associated from top of the ticket races, and will in most cases enjoy a “quality advantage” over their opponents (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). It is in office bloc states then, that I expect to see the differences in name recognition, fundraising ability, and differences in candidate quality manifests themselves. In party column states, I expect incumbents and challengers to be affected more by partisan tides in the state and less by differences in name recognition and candidate quality. In the next section I test these expectations on U.S. House elections from 1946-2006.
4 Data and Analysis

To determine the extent to which state ballot laws are related to the incumbency advantage in the U.S. House it was necessary to collect a considerable amount of data on congressional elections and state ballot laws. Data on election outcomes, incumbency, and candidate quality from 1946-2006 were supplied by Gary C. Jacobson. Data on state ballot laws in the post World War II era have proved much more difficult to collect. In the pre-war era many secondary sources contain these data such as Albright (1942), Ludington (1911), and numerous APSR articles detailing changes to state ballot laws. In the post-war era I was able to find data through the early 1950s from various issues of the Book of the States, but from approximately 1955 onward there are apparently no secondary sources that contain data on ballot laws.

This necessitated a turn to primary sources with the following strategy. First, state statute books were consulted. In most instances this was the source for the data reported below. Most states had clear statutes that specified whether or not a straight ticket option was provided on the ballot. In most instances the statute books stated whether the ballot was organized as an office bloc or party column ballot. However, for a number of states this was either not provided or was unclear. In these cases, phone calls were made to the office of each state government unit responsible for conducting elections (typically the Secretary of State). This strategy produced decidedly mixed results. Some state offices were eager to help and even offer to mail or fax sample ballots. For some states, however, it was difficult to find someone with the expertise necessary to explain how ballots are organized. One particular state office stated that they were, “at a loss as to how to answer that question” when asked whether the ballot was organized by office or party. A different

\(^3\)New York has a system whereby districts in New York City use a party column ballot, whereas upstate districts have the office bloc.
individual in the same state office stated that there was “no record of what our ballots used to look like,” and that they “assumed it was an office bloc ballot because parties had never been strong” in the state. Equally unhelpful were individuals who claimed to “remember” what ballots looked like as far back as 1958. The third method of finding ballot data was to consult newspapers to find sample ballots. This has entailed requesting microfilms of newspapers for the days just prior to an election and analyzing sample ballots when they exist. This method has proved quite useful and is still underway.

The results of this data collection process reveal that the past few decades have witnessed a considerable shift away from the party column ballot to the office bloc ballot throughout the United States. As Figure 3 reveals, in the late 1940s more than 225 districts used a party column ballot, while less than 200 used the office bloc variety. The two types of ballots converged in numbers in the mid-to-late 1960s. From the 1960s on, the data reveal an upsurge in office bloc districts and a decline in party column ballots. By 2006, less than 150 districts used the party column ballot, while well over half the seats in the U.S. House were elected on office bloc ballots.

To assess the effect of ballot laws on the incumbency advantage, I estimated models of the incumbency advantage using the two equation approach employed by Cox and Katz (1996) and Carson et al. (2007). The first equation generates an estimate for the “direct” effect of incumbency, which refers to the effects of elements such as resources and the personal vote and the “quality effect” of incumbency, which refers to the advantage that an incumbent receives by simply being an experienced candidate. This equation is

---

4 Thanks to Mike MacKuen for suggesting this.
5 As of this writing, approximately 95% of ballot law data have been collected.
Figure 3: Ballot Type by Year, 1946-2006

The diagram shows the number of districts over election years from 1946 to 2006. The graph compares two categories: Office Bloc and Party Column. The Office Bloc category generally shows a higher number of districts, with fluctuations over the years, while the Party Column category fluctuates more significantly, showing a peak in the early 1970s and another peak in the late 1990s.
estimated via OLS,

\[ DTP_t = \alpha + \beta_1 DQA_t + \beta_2 DTP_{t-1} + \beta_3 DQA_{t-1} + \beta_4 I_t + \beta_5 I_{t-1} + \beta_6 P_t + \beta_7 P_{t-1} + \beta_8 ST_t + \sum_t \beta_Y Year_t + \epsilon_t \]  

(1)

where \( DTP \) refers to the Democratic percentage of the two-party vote in the current election, \( DQA \) refers to the Democratic Quality Advantage, coded 1 if a Democratic incumbent or quality candidate ran against an amateur Republican, 0 if a Democratic quality candidate ran against a quality Republican or if two amateurs faced off, and \(-1\) if a Republican incumbent or quality candidate ran against an amateur Democrat. \( I \) refers to the presence of an incumbent, coded 1 for a Democratic incumbent, 0 for an open seat, and \(-1\) for a Republican incumbent. \( P \) refers to the party defending the seat, coded 1 for Democrat and \(-1\) for Republican, and \( ST \) is an indicator variable for the straight ticket voting option. \( I \) is the estimated direct effect of incumbency and \( DQA \) is the estimated quality effect. This equation was estimated separately for office bloc and party column districts. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.
Table 1: Party Column Ballot and the Incumbency Advantage, 1946-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>(Std. Err.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Quality Advantage</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Two Party Vote</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Quality Advantage</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Running</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>(0.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Incumbent Running</td>
<td>-1.51</td>
<td>(0.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>-1.65</td>
<td>(0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Party Option</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>16.78</td>
<td>(4.33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N | 3080 |
| R² | 0.85 |
Table 2: Office Bloc Ballot and the Incumbency Advantage, 1946-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>(Std. Err.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Quality Advantage</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Two Party Vote</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Quality Advantage</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>(0.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Running</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>(0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Incumbent Running</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>-2.43</td>
<td>(0.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Party Option</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>(3.13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 3575
\( R^2 \): 0.86

The results in Tables 1 and 2 suggest that the type of ballot employed does have a considerable effect on the role that candidate quality and incumbency play in election outcomes. The estimate for the effect of differences in candidate quality (\( DQA \)) on election outcomes is 3.63 in office bloc states, compared to 2.38 in party column states, all else equal. Similarly, the direct effect of incumbency (\( I \)) is also larger office bloc states than in states which employ the party column ballot (5.61 vs. 4.57). Both of these estimates suggest that the office bloc ballot has the effect of focusing voters on the attributes of individual candidates rather than parties.
The second equation measures the “scareoff” effect of incumbency, which refers to the extent to which an incumbent being in the race deters the entry of an outparty quality candidate to challenge the incumbent. This equation is estimated via OLS.

\[
DQA_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 DTP_{it-1} + \beta_2 DQA_{it-1} + \beta_3 I_{it} + \beta_4 I_{it-1} + \beta_5 P_{it} + \beta_6 P_{it-1} + \beta_7 ST_{it} + \sum_t \beta_8 Year_t + \epsilon_{it} \tag{2}
\]

The estimated scareoff effect \( I \) is then used to calculate the total incumbency advantage (IA) according to following formula: \( IA = I + (DQA \ast Scareoff) \)—see Figure 4.

The scareoff equation was estimated separately for party column and office bloc districts. The results, which are presented in Tables 3 and 4, reveal that the scareoff effect is significantly larger in office bloc states than in party column states. This finding confirms findings from my earlier work (Carson and Roberts N.D.) and my expectations about the modern era. Office bloc ballots by design focus voters more on the individual candidates and less on their party affiliations, thus making it easier for incumbent candidates to develop a “personal vote” (Cain et al. 1992) and insulate themselves from national party tides. These results suggest that strategic politicians may well understand that the office bloc ballot enhances the incumbency advantage and respond by having a higher threshold for emergence in elections decided with this ballot method.

Figure 4 presents my estimates of the incumbency advantage across both of the major types of the Australian ballot broken down by decade. In all six decades the incumbency advantage is larger in office bloc states than in party column states, and this difference is statistically significant in all time periods except 1984-1990, which corresponds to the largest incumbency advantage estimate in the data set. Pooling the data across the entire time period, the incumbency advantage is 5.42 percent for elections held with a party column ballot compared to 7.08 percent in elections taking place with an office bloc bal-
lot. This is a substantial difference and confirms my expectation that ballot form is an underappreciated factor in the growth of the incumbency advantage in the latter half of the 20th century.

Table 3: Party Column Ballot and the ‘Scareoff’ Effect, 1946-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>(Std. Err.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Two Party Vote</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Quality Advantage</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Running</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Incumbent Running</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Party Option</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                               | 3080        |
| R²                              | 0.75        |
Table 4: Office Bloc Ballot and the ‘Scareoff’ Effect, 1946-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>(Std. Err.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Two Party Vote</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Democratic Quality Advantage</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent Running</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Incumbent Running</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Party Defending Seat</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Party Option</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>3575</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Conclusion

The results contained above provide strong support for my argument that ballot form plays an important role in determining outcomes in U.S. Congressional elections. The history of ballot reform in the U.S. reveals that strategic political actors have long understood this and acted accordingly. My results—though they are still preliminary—provide the first systematic analysis of how much ballot form affects election outcomes. There is little doubt that the causes and consequences of the growth in the incumbency advantage has been one of the key avenues of research that has occupied the attention of congressional
Figure 4: Ballot Type and the Incumbency Advantage, 1946-2006
elections scholars for more than three decades. While many sources of the incumbency advantage have been identified, my results suggest that a major factor in the growth of the incumbency advantage has been the widespread adoption of the office bloc ballot throughout the country.

As I noted above, these results are all preliminary and much work remains to be done. Future iterations of this paper will include analyses of split-ticket voting and coattail effects and possibly more work on the motives of state legislatures for making changes in ballot laws. Other types of elections, such as senatorial and state-legislative races also will be analyzed to determine if the effects I have found are confined to elections to the U.S. House. If the results presented above hold, they present an interesting quandary for reformers who are interested in increasing the competitiveness and responsiveness of U.S. House elections. One could argue that my results suggest that re-instituting the party column ballot would enhance competitiveness and more quality challengers would likely emerge to challenge incumbents, and the electoral effects of incumbency would be reduced. Yet, if we look back to the survey based data used by Campbell and Miller (1957) one could question whether this is desirable for democracy. Their findings point out that voters are more likely to vote a straight party ticket if the ballot is organized in a way that emphasizes party, but the motivation for voting a straight ticket for many of the voters they studied was fatigue, impatience, and indifference to election outcomes. This suggests that while changing the ballot form can change election outcomes, it does not necessarily lead to more informed voting.
References


