

# Bicameralism, Ballot Type, and Split-Ticket Voting<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

“Institutions Matter” is perhaps the defining mantra of the new institutionalism movement in political science. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the rules and procedures that govern political processes are often as important in determining outcomes as are the preferences of the actors. Previous work on U.S. House elections (Engstrom and Kernell 2005; Roberts 2008) demonstrates that the varying formats of election ballots—public versus secret balloting, the presence or absence of party labels, and the order in which candidates are listed—have demonstrable consequences for the careers of individual politicians and the balance of power in legislatures more generally. In this paper I extend this work to include Senate elections and focus on the micro-level workings of ballot type through a preliminary examination of split-ticket voting in House and Senate elections. I find that the office bloc ballot enhances split-ticket voting in both House and Senate elections.

# 1 Introduction

“Institutions Matter” is perhaps the defining mantra of the new institutionalism movement in political science. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the rules and procedures that govern political processes are often as important in determining outcomes as are the preferences of the actors. As such, the study of institutional change is a growth area in political science. These changes are particularly interesting when they are instigated by political actors themselves. Article I, §4 of the *U.S Constitution* stipulates that “The Times, Places, and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations...”. Although Congress has occasionally stepped in to standardize electoral procedure—such as prescribing that federal elections take place on the First Tuesday after the First Monday in November of even numbered years—for the most part states have been free to establish and change their own election laws. As a result, state election procedures vary widely and change frequently.

These changes are often thought to benefit one party or one party’s candidates at the expense of their political opponents. The case of Ohio is instructive. Ohio initially adopted the Australian ballot in 1891, settling on the party column form. This remained in place for decades. However, in November of 1949, a year long campaign ended with Ohio citizens voting by more than 250,000 votes to amend their constitution, switching the ballot type from from a party column to an office bloc ballot. The amendment also removed party symbols and the straight party ticket from the Ohio ballot. This campaign was explicitly led and supported by Ohio Republicans and supporters of Senator Robert A. Taft (R). The stated intent of the backers of ballot reform was to insulate Taft and other state office holders from straight-ticket voting Democrats in urban areas.

Of particular concern to Ohio Republicans and Taft supporters was the upcoming 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. A defeat of Taft would be seen a blow to Ohio Republicans and Taft's presidential aspirations. Taft's supporters spent an estimated \$85,000 to get the ballot initiative passed (Key 1952)—a sum which translates to \$770,000 in 2008 dollars. Democrats and labor unions strenuously opposed the measure, citing the number of straight ticket votes that the party routinely gained in urban areas such as Cleveland. 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.<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of the ballot change, 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. This was only the beginning of the bad news in Ohio, as Republican won every statewide office other than Governor and Lt. Governor, and swept to huge majorities in the state legislature. 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.

The Ohio case is not unique. 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 affect election

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<sup>1</sup>The ballot measure was paired with the country's first statewide referendum on the color of oleomargarine. Ohio voters also overturned a 26 year old ban on colored margarine in this election.

outcomes (Engstrom and Kernell 2005; Engstrom and Roberts 2009). Historical work on congressional elections has uncovered a strong relationship between ballot type and voter behavior in U.S. House Elections (Campbell and Miller 1957; Walker 1966; Rusk 1970; Carson and Roberts N.D.). In this paper I provide analysis that compares the effect of ballot type on House and Senate elections with respect to split-ticket voting. My results confirm earlier findings with respect to ballot type and split-ticket voting, suggesting that ballot type is an under-appreciated determinate of voting behavior in the U.S. House and Senate elections.

## **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 went 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, color, or smell 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 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 moved 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.

In a careful analysis of New York and New Jersey electoral behavior, Reynolds and McCormick (1986) demonstrate that state party organizations did not have full control of local ballots. Local factions would often use their control over ballot printing 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 and party system 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 Carolina have made changes in the form of their ballot. In Michigan, the changes 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












Figure 1: Party Column Ballot

OFFICIAL BALLOT  
 2006 GENERAL ELECTION  
 STATE, COUNTY AND DISTRICT BALLOT  
 REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 01  
 NOVEMBER 7, 2006 - WILMINGTON MUSIC SCHOOL - 01-01 - 016156





**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS**





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.





						
FOR		DEMOCRATIC PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY	GREEN PARTY	INDEPENDENT PARTY OF DELAWARE	LIBERTARIAN PARTY
UNITED STATES SENATOR VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	THOMAS R. CARPER <input type="checkbox"/>	JAN TING <input type="checkbox"/>			WILLIAM E. MORRIS <input type="checkbox"/>
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	DENNIS SPIWACK <input type="checkbox"/>	MICHAEL N. CASTLE <input type="checkbox"/>	MICHAEL BERG <input type="checkbox"/>	KAREN M. HARTLEY <input type="checkbox"/>	
ATTORNEY GENERAL VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	JOSEPH R. BIEHL III <input type="checkbox"/>	FERRIS WHARTON <input type="checkbox"/>			
STATE TREASURER VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	JACK MARKELL <input type="checkbox"/>	ESTHER D. R. PARKER SELBY <input type="checkbox"/>			
AUDITOR OF ACCOUNTS VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	MICHAEL JOHN DALTO <input type="checkbox"/>	R. THOMAS WAGNER, JR. <input type="checkbox"/>			
STATE SENATOR DISTRICT 1 VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	HARRIS B. MCDOWELL III <input type="checkbox"/>	GREGORY T. CHAMBERS <input type="checkbox"/>		TYLER PATRICK NIXON <input type="checkbox"/>	
STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 1 VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	DENNIS P. WILLIAMS <input type="checkbox"/>				
REGISTER OF WILLS VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	DIANE CLARKE STREETT <input type="checkbox"/>	JAMES ANTHONY <input type="checkbox"/>			
RECORDER OF DEEDS VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	MICHAEL E. KOZKOWSKI, SR. <input type="checkbox"/>	JASON J. HORTIZ <input type="checkbox"/>			
COUNTY COUNCIL DISTRICT 4 VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	PENROSE HOLLINS <input type="checkbox"/>				
SHERIFF VOTE FOR ONE (1)	Write in <input type="checkbox"/>	MICHAEL P. WALSH <input type="checkbox"/>	ALAN RHODES <input type="checkbox"/>			





  
  
  


**AFTER MAKING ALL OF YOUR SELECTIONS, CAST YOUR BALLOT BY PUSHING THE GREEN "VOTE" BUTTON LOCATED BELOW THIS NOTICE.**






  
  
  


Figure 2: Office Bloc Ballot



**STATE OF ALASKA  
OFFICIAL BALLOT  
GENERAL ELECTION - NOVEMBER 7, 2006**

Completely fill in the oval ☐ opposite the name of each candidate or question for whom you wish to vote.

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE (vote for one)	
<input type="radio"/> BENSON, DIANE E.	Democrat
<input type="radio"/> CRAWFORD, ALEXANDER	Libertarian
<input type="radio"/> INCE, EVA L.	Green
<input type="radio"/> RATIGAN, WILLIAM W. "BILL"	Impeach Now!
<input type="radio"/> YOUNG, DON E.	Republican
<input type="radio"/> Write-in	

GOVERNOR/LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (vote for one)	
<input type="radio"/> HALCRO, ANDREW J. VON GEMMINGEN, FAY	Independent
<input type="radio"/> KNOWLES, TONY BERKOWITZ, ETHAN A.	Democrat
<input type="radio"/> MASSIE, DAVID M.	Green
<input type="radio"/> PALIN, SARAH H. PARNELL, SEAN R.	Republican
<input type="radio"/> TOJEN, WILLIAM S. "BILLY" MIRABAL, ROBERT D.	Libertarian
<input type="radio"/> WRIGHT, DON R. WELTON, DOUGLAS L.	Alaskan Independence
<input type="radio"/> Write-in	

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 1 (vote for one)	
<input type="radio"/> JOHANSEN, KYLE	Republican
<input type="radio"/> Write-in	

**VOTE BOTH SIDES**

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.<sup>2</sup> 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 ballot 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.<sup>3</sup>

### 3 Data and Expectations

Despite the numerous episodes that demonstrate that states 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), Campbell and Miller (1957), and Engstrom and Kernell (2005) all of whom clearly demonstrate the ballot form can and does affect split-ticket voting, presidential coattails, “roll-off,” and ultimately election outcomes. In fact, Campbell and Miller (1957, 299) go so far as to argue that, “Any

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<sup>2</sup> “Vote-Lever Issue Splits Hartford.” *New York Times*, April 11, 1965, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> In 2000 alone, more than 77,000 North Carolina voters failed to register a vote for president. See “Problems abound with N.C. Ballot,” *News and Observer*, December 15, 2000, p. A20.

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 most heavily influenced by ballot type. These weak identifiers 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 on ballot form and roll-off, the few scholars studying the ballot 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 of low salience and visibility. Candidates who find their names closer to the top of a list of candidates receive more votes, all else equal, than do candidates lower on the list. These ballot order effects have led to calls for randomizing ballot order, but have not generally focused on the overall ballot structure. It is important to note, however, that Darcy (1986) finds no effect of ballot order for party

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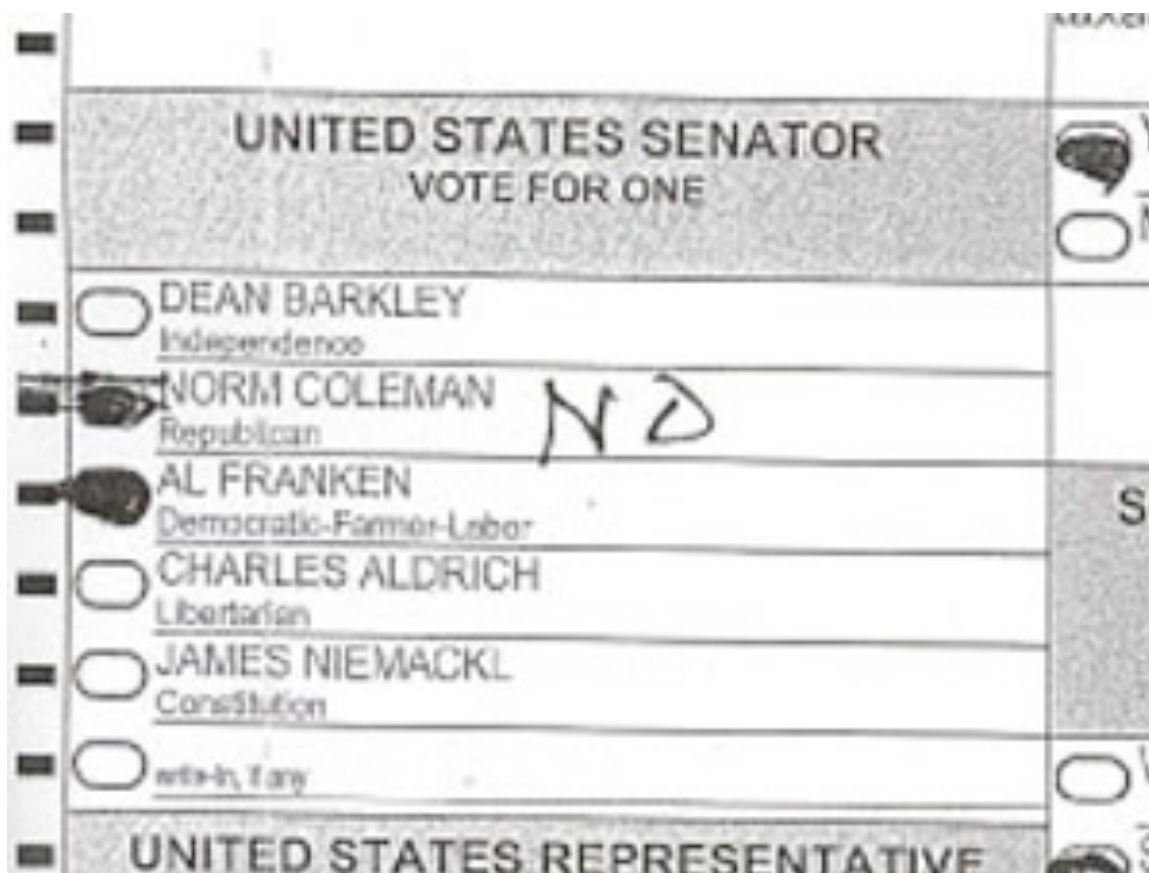
<sup>4</sup>In fact, the recently published *The American Voter Revisited* (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008) makes no mention of ballot type.

column ballots. This is not surprising, as most of these ballots are designed to focus the attention of the voter on party labels and symbols.

How does order affect outcomes? 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 or common names. This could affect the incumbency advantage 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. For example, Massachusetts list incumbent candidates first in the ballot order. Therefore, one might expect to see a larger incumbency advantage in districts with the office bloc ballot, all else equal. These incumbents enjoy a name recognition advantage, be disassociated from top of the ticket races, and will in most cases enjoy a “quality advantage” over their opponents (Jacobson and Kernell 1983).

The importance of ballot form highlights the difficulty that many Americans have in filling out forms and paper work in general. Ballot form received a great deal of attention in the wake of the disputed 2000 presidential election, but 2000 was not unique. In each election year, millions of ballots are “spoiled” by voters incorrectly marking choices or otherwise damaging the ballot. Voters often fail to fill in the circles correctly or as Figure 3 demonstrates vote for more than one candidate for the same office. In many ways this is disturbing, as proponents of democracy and election winners themselves often proclaim that the “will of the people” has endorsed a particular candidate or bundle of policy

Figure 3: Ballot Difficulty in 2008 Minnesota Senate Race



options. This may or may not be true in the aggregate, but at the individual level the organization of a form can have considerable effects on how one completes it. For example, a study by the Center for Hospitality Research at Cornell University found that how the price of a meal was listed on the menu had a significant effect on how much diners were willing to spend.<sup>5</sup> Seemingly trivial differences in the format of the price information (i.e. \$32.00 vs. 32 vs. thirty-two dollars) affected how much a diner was willing to spend.<sup>6</sup>

The lack of scholarly work on the relationship between ballot type and voting behavior

<sup>5</sup>See “\$ or Dollars?: Effects of Menu-price Formats on Restaurant Checks,” Cornell Hospitality Review. Vol. 9, No. 8, May 2009.

<sup>6</sup>Surprisingly, the numeric representation without the \$ sign was the “winner.” Diners receiving this menu format (32) spent an average of \$3.70 more on a meal than those receiving it as scripted (thirty-two dollars) or in dollar signs with a decimal (\$32.00).

is unfortunate, as recent decades have witnessed a drastic increase in the number of states switching from the party column to the office bloc form of the Australian ballot. As Figure 4 reveals, for the first time in U.S. history, most House members and senators are now elected on office bloc ballots.<sup>7</sup> My previous work on ballot type and U.S. House elections demonstrates that the form of the ballot employed is directly related to the extent of the incumbency advantage and the probability of high quality challengers emerging to face incumbents (Roberts 2008). More specifically, the office bloc form of the ballot produces a larger incumbency advantage and depresses the emergence of quality candidates. Figure 5 summarizes these findings for the 1946-2008 time period. These findings have lead me to consider how these findings translate to Senate election outcomes and to consider if ballot form can be linked to individual level voting behavior in House and Senate elections.

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<sup>7</sup>These data on state ballot laws in the post World War II era have proved quite 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 a office bloc or party column ballot (New York has a system whereby districts in New York City use a party column ballot, whereas outstate districts have the office bloc). 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 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 proved quite fruitful, but painstaking. As of this writing, approximately 97% of ballot law data have been collected.

Figure 4: Ballot Type by Year, 1888-2008

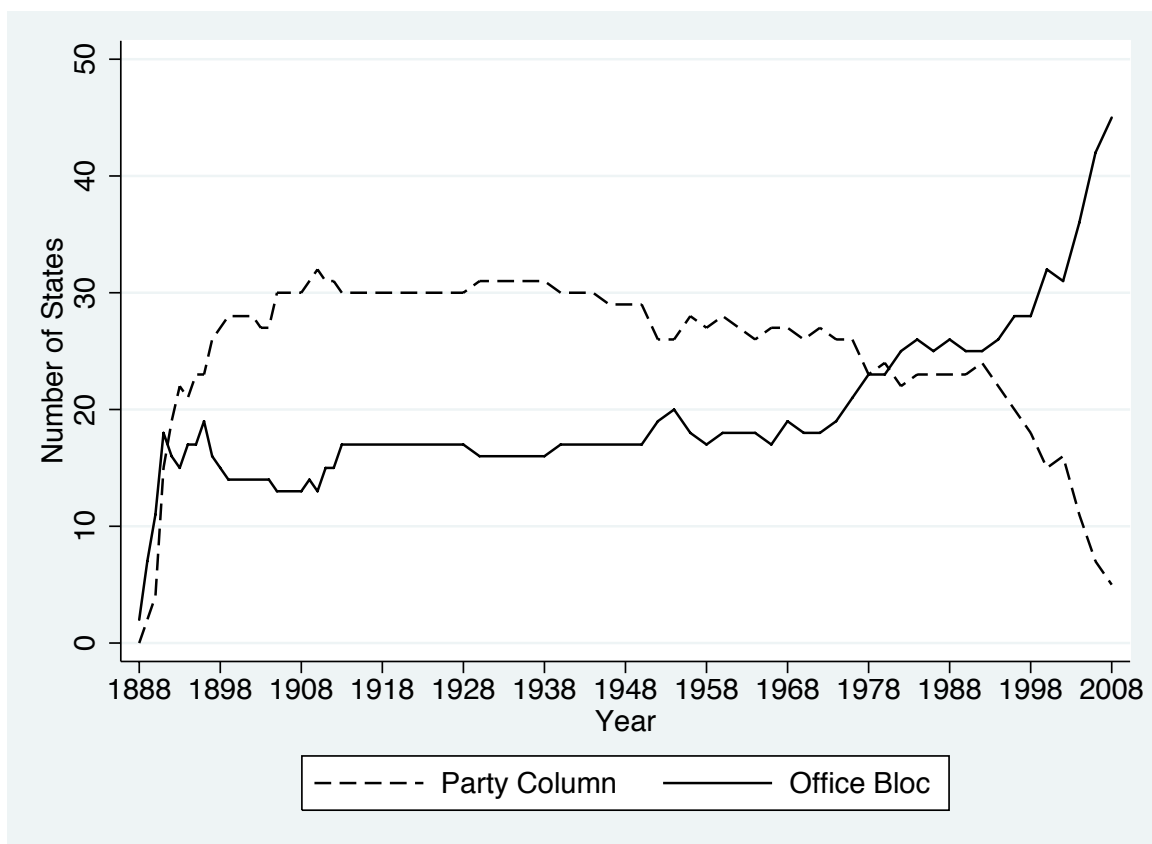
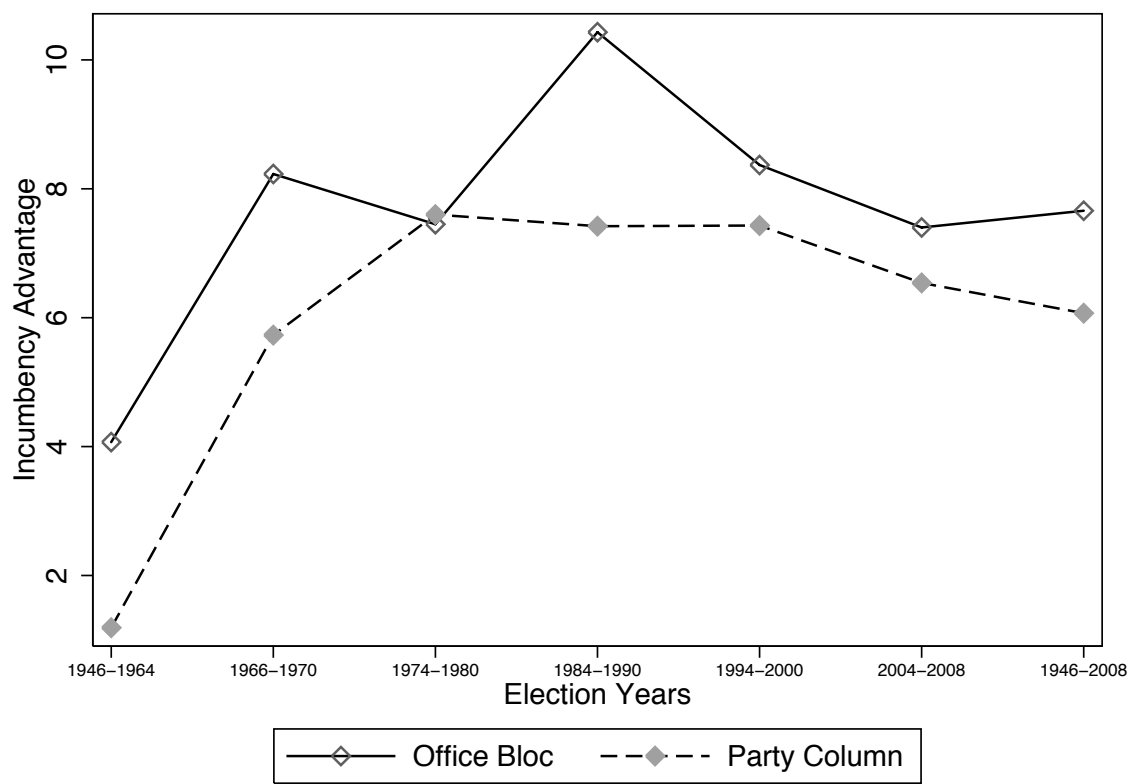




Figure 5: Ballot Type and the Incumbency Advantage in House Elections, 1946-2008



## 4 Senate Election Outcomes

As noted above, my previous work on House elections suggest that ballot type places a large role in determining outcomes. House elections held under the office bloc ballot demonstrate a much larger “quality effect” than do those held under the party column ballot. This means that differentials in candidate quality are less important when the ballot is organized by party rather than by office. The office bloc ballot appears to enhance the name recognition advantage enjoyed by House incumbents. Senate elections differ from House elections in several ways that may mitigate the effect of ballot type. First, the average Senate challenger is better funded and more widely known than the average House challenger, negating the name recognition advantage. Second, the six-year term insures that senators will face the electorate less often than their House counterparts, thus depressing the extent to which voters become accustomed to voting for them and the extent to which senators become acclimated to electioneering. Finally, Senate elections are typically higher on the ballot than House elections, and can be “top of the ticket” in non-presidential years that do not subsequently include a Gubernatorial race. The few studies that link ballot type and election outcomes suggest that races lower on the ballot are more affected by ballot form (Walker 1966).

In Table 1 below, I report regression results that compare Senate election outcomes across ballot types. The percentage of the vote received by a Senate incumbent is regressed on his/her previous vote, the vote percentage of the presidential candidate of the senator’s party, the natural log of incumbent and challenger spending, the presence of a quality challenger, and an indicator variable for whether or not the senator is facing a formal ethics inquiry. The results suggest that previous support for the incumbent and votes for the presidential candidate of the senator’s party are positively associated with incumbent

Table 1: Senate Election Outcomes, 1976-2008

Variable	Office Bloc	Party Column
Previous Inc. Vote	0.20* (0.06)	0.39* (0.12)
Presidential Vote	0.16* (0.07)	0.21* (0.08)
Challenger Spending	-2.87* (0.38)	-2.50* (0.66)
Incumbent Spending	1.20* (0.60)	0.61 (0.68)
Quality Challenger	-2.03 (1.34)	-2.13 (1.85)
Ethics Investigation	-3.30 (3.04)	-6.04* (3.17)
Constant	62.78* (10.21)	50.39* (14.26)
N	132	82
R <sup>2</sup>	0.54	0.55

\* =  $p \leq 0.05$  Presidential years only. Dependent variable is the incumbent's share of the two-party vote. Year fixed effects estimated, but not reported.

vote share and challenger spending, the presence of a quality challenger, and a formal ethics inquiry are all negatively associated with incumbent vote share. There are some apparent differences in previous incumbent vote and presidential vote across ballot type, but given the small number of elections—I am analyzing presidential years only—there are no statistically significant differences in the parameter estimates across equations. It is possible that including more election years would reveal significant differences with respect to the influence of presidential vote across ballot types.

## 5 Split-Ticket Voting

While aggregate analyses of the relationship between electoral institutions and election outcomes are worthwhile in their own right it is also important to understand how they shape the behavior of individuals. The aggregate findings are, after all, simply a tally of individual voter decisions. Though some many studies have analyzed split-ticket voting though the use of aggregate data (Rusk 1970; Burden and Kimball 2002), my focus here is at that individual level. Based on the work of Campbell and Miller (1957) and Walker (1966) I expect to find that ticket splitting is much more common under the office bloc ballot than under the party column form, even when controlling for the strength of party identification.

To assess the effect of ballot type on split-ticket voting I utilized the American National Election Studies cumulative file for the presidential election years 1956-2004. These were merged with information on ballot type employed in each state/district and whether or not an incumbent was seeking the House or Senate seat under consideration. Given that there is no theoretical reason to expect partisan difference in how ballot type affects voters, I collapsed the variables for ticket splitting into dichotomous variables that measure whether the voter cast a ballot for candidates of different parties for President and U.S. House and President and U.S. Senate. I then fit a separate models (see Table 2) for the House/President split and the Senate/President split. For both House and Senate races I fit a logit model of ticket splitting behavior as a function of reported strength of party identification, and indicator variables for an incumbent running in the race, ballot type, and whether the person residing in a state outside the South.<sup>8</sup> The results

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<sup>8</sup>Election year fixed effects estimated but not reported. Estimating models with strength of party identification as a series of dummy variables instead of scale has no effect on the substantive results reported below.

presented in Table 2 confirm my expectations regarding split-ticket voting and largely conform to what Campbell and Miller (1957) found. As would be expected, respondents who report stronger attachments to their political party are less likely to cast either a split House/President ballot or a split Senate/President ballot. Also as expected, the results in Table 2 reveal that the presence of an incumbent is strongly associated with split-ticket voting in House races. This relationship is much weaker for Senate elections, which reflects the limited “incumbency advantage” that senators enjoy. Most interesting for the purposes of this paper, the indicator variable for office bloc ballot is positively associated with split-ticket voting in both House and Senate contests.

Table 3 presents the logit results in terms of the probability of casting a split ballot. The cell entries are the probability that a voter reports casting a split-ticket by chamber, ballot type, and strength of party identification.<sup>9</sup> Several noteworthy findings emerge from Table 3. First, split-ticket voting is much more prominent among voters who report being independents or independents who “lean” towards one party or the other than it is among strong and weak identifiers. This holds true for both House and Senate contests. Second, the probability that a voter casts a split ballot is consistently higher in office bloc states than party column states across all levels of strength of party identification and in both House and Senate contests. Keeping with Campbell and Miller (1957) this result is weaker among those with stronger party attachments than those who are less attached to their party, but the results hold nonetheless. Ballot type does not produce as large an effect as does strength of party identification, but the fact that it has *any* effect raises interesting questions about how voters make decisions and about how often elections results turn on the institutions employed rather than the characteristics of the

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<sup>9</sup>For the purposes of these calculations I assume an incumbent is present in the race and that it occurs outside the South. Changing this values does not affect the inferences than can be drawn from these data.

candidates and parties competing.

Table 2: Ballot Type and Split-Ticket Voting, 1956-2004

<b>Variable</b>	<b>House</b>	<b>Senate</b>
Party ID Strength	-0.41* (0.02)	-0.45* (0.03)
Incumbent Running	0.37* (0.08)	0.08 (0.07)
Office Bloc	0.12* (0.05)	0.11* (0.05)
Non-South	-0.49* (0.06)	-0.49* (0.07)
Constant	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.65* (0.16)
<hr/>		
N	11763	9466
Log-likelihood	-5842.68	-4383.42
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.04	0.05

\* =  $p \leq 0.05$  Presidential years only. Dependent variable is whether or not the respondent reported casting a split-ticket. Year fixed effects estimated, but not reported.

## 6 Conclusion

The results contained above provide considerable evidence 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—provides systematic analysis of how much ballot form affects election outcomes and individual voting behavior. The work of Abramowitz (2009) suggests that overall ticket splitting has declined due to increased partisanship among elites and the electorate, thus the rapid change to the office bloc ballot is likely having less of an impact on overall election outcomes than

Table 3: Split-Ticket Voting by Chamber and Ballot Type

	House		Senate	
	Office Bloc	Party Column	Office Bloc	Party Column
<b>Party ID</b>				
Strong Identifier	.148	.133	.122	.110
Weak Identifier	.207	.188	.178	.163
Ind. Leaner	.282	.258	.254	.233
Independent	.371	.344	.348	.322

Cell entries are the probability that a voter casts a split-ticket, assuming a non-southern state of residence and an incumbent in the race. All differences across ballot type are statistically significant at the .05 level.

otherwise would be true. However, if the country reenters an era of decreased partisan attachment and polarization without a subsequent change in ballot laws, we may see a sharp increase in the incumbency advantage, split-ticket voting, and ultimately divided government, along with a decline in electoral competitiveness.

As I noted above, these results are all preliminary and much work remains to be done. Future iterations of this paper will include more rich models of split-ticket voting, extend the data series on Senate elections, and focus more on the motives of state legislatures for making changes in ballot laws. If the results presented above hold in future iterations, they present an interesting quandary for reformers who are interested in increasing the competitiveness and responsiveness of U.S. congressional elections. One could argue that the 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.



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