

Ideological Ambiguity and Split Ticket Voting

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Recent research on congressional elections suggests that voters are more likely to split their votes in ideologically extreme districts. The authors suggest that in this type of context, uncertainty about candidate position rather than clarity explains the occurrence of ticket splitting. Using data from a rolling cross-section campaign survey where two incumbents competed in an overwhelmingly conservative district, the authors find that a substantial proportion of voters are likely to have difficulty identifying which congressional candidate was more conservative. Moreover, media exposure contributed to ambiguity over candidate position, which increases the likelihood of ticket splitting.

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Political context is now recognized as an important factor in explaining the frequency of split ticket voting. Although early studies of ticket splitting in the United States placed an emphasis on individual-level characteristics such as declining partisan loyalties, political attitudes, and policy preferences (Jacobson 1990; Wattenberg 1994), their reliance on national surveys meant that context was often overlooked. More recent studies have adopted an alternative strategy by examining voting patterns across congressional districts to understand why voters might choose to split their votes between congressional and presidential candidates representing competing parties. For example, both Burden and Kimball (2002) and Grofman et al. (2000) suggest that ticket splitting is driven partly by the ideological make-up of the districts and the positions taken by congressional incumbents. Grofman et al. suggest that the ideological makeup of a district may lead candidates to offer a choice of policy positions that may be quite different than what is offered at the national level (see also Frymer 1994). Their so-called “comparative midpoints” (CM) model assumes that candidates will locate themselves on opposite sides of the median voter *within a particular constituency* and voters will choose the candidate that is closest to them. Voters are more likely to split their votes in ideologically extreme districts, where the differences between local and national candidates will be greatest.

One important condition of the model is that it assumes that voters can discern the ideological positions of the respective candidates. Although Grofman

et al. (2000) are not explicit about the role of information, their theory assumes that candidate positions are clear and unambiguous. Knowledge about the policy positions of local candidates leads voters to choose the candidate to whom they are closest on the issues. If the district’s median voter bloc is staunchly ideological—be it liberal or conservative—candidates from both parties will adjust their platform and messages accordingly. Ticket splitting occurs, then, when conservative districts vote Republican for president but also elect a Democrat whose platform is positioned near the district’s median voter. Thus, the presidential vote represents the “sincere” choice; that is, it provides an ideal representation of the underlying partisanship and ideological leanings of the district. As Grofman et al. predict, “in a conservative district, if there is a split, it will tend to occur . . . with a Democrat winning the congressional election and a Republican presidential candidate carrying the district, and not conversely” (p. 38).

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In ideologically extreme districts, information about a candidate's policy position may be especially important, because a candidate that represents a party that is ideological unrepresentative of the district must make more of an effort to distinguish oneself from his or her national counterpart. At the same time, voters may find it more difficult to distinguish among candidates who are converging in a narrow issue space that is on one side of the ideological spectrum. The role of uncertainty, and the variations across electoral contexts in the content and consequences of campaign information flows, occupies a more prominent position in Burden and Kimball's (2002, 162) theory of ticket splitting. For instance, they suggest that ticket splitting is more common when candidates converge to the center of the ideological spectrum. Not only are moderate candidates likely to distance themselves from their national party, but they also increase the chances of attracting votes from the opposite party. Moreover, candidate convergence is likely to mean that party affiliation is less useful as a voting heuristic. Both Grofman et al. (2000) and Burden and Kimball, however, rely on aggregate voting data merged with incumbent roll call data to draw inferences about voter choice. In doing so, they raise fundamental questions about how voters decide in a given context.

If ticket splitting is more likely to occur in districts where candidates compete in a narrow issue space, how do voters tell the difference between two candidates who are either very conservative or very liberal? This raises the question of whether split voting results from confusion over policy positions or clarity and, in doing so, exposes a fundamental difference between Grofman et al.'s and Burden and Kimball's (2002) theoretical models. Although Grofman et al. assume that voters are likely to face reasonably clear choices even in a confined issue space, Burden and Kimball expect the "blurring boundaries between the parties" (p. 15) to increase the likelihood of split ticket outcomes.¹

That the visibility and salience of electoral contests may create ambiguity contrasts sharply with research portraying electoral campaigns as vehicles of information where voters become progressively more "enlightened" over the course of the campaign (Alvarez and Brehm 2002; Gelman and King 1993). Indeed, candidates may have a strong incentive to make their positions known. When voters are uncertain about a candidate, they tend to avoid them (Alvarez 1997).² That is, according to this view, voters should be able to more accurately identify the

candidates, their positions, and their respective ideological placements near the end of a political campaign (albeit one that is salient). Similarly, Fiorina (1996) assumes that knowledge of candidate's ideological positions leads some voters to split their votes to balance extremist tendencies in one branch by electing moderates in another. This leads us to pose the following question: Are voters more likely to split their votes when they are unable to discern the differences between congressional candidates?

Although Grofman et al. rely on aggregate data to investigate patterns of split ticket voting across districts, their theory rests on assumptions about voter choice that may be more directly tested using individual-level data in a particular context. To date, such an analysis has not been possible because the survey data on congressional elections are based on national samples, with too few cases within each district.³ As a result, researchers who wish to examine these theories have had to rely on sophisticated methods of ecological inference (see, e.g., Burden and Kimball 1998). Such an approach has generated its share of critics (Cho and Gaines 2004) as well as defenders (Johnston and Pattie 2002). Our approach is to use a large scale survey to examine the question within a specific congressional district where the dynamics of the race are hypothesized to elicit split ticket voting. We have selected a context that featured two candidates in an ideologically skewed district competing at the time of the 2004 presidential election. The district, located in West Texas, is overwhelmingly conservative, precisely the context that is believed to elicit the most common form of split ticket voting, where voters are likely to support Republican presidential candidates and conservative Democratic congressional hopefuls (Burden and Kimball 2002, 77; Grofman et al. 2000). In addition, the campaign was also highly salient and competitive. In this case, both candidates were incumbents who faced one another in a newly redrawn district. As a result, the case serves as a "natural experiment" where the inequalities between challengers and incumbents that usually dominate House races are set aside. The race featured a senior Democrat with a conservative voting record running against a one-term Republican. Although the district leans Republican, both candidates were well funded and experienced making the contest exceptionally competitive (see Karp et al. 2005).

Our case permits us to explore several questions that have heretofore gone largely unaddressed in the literature. First, literature investigating how incumbency advantage affects the likelihood of split ticket

outcomes overlooks other unique circumstances that may emerge, such as open seat elections or elections with dueling incumbents. These types of races are not just more evenly matched but are also likely to be more salient to voters given their competitiveness. Voters are thus likely to have more information about both of the candidates and their positions than in other contexts. This is a key assumption made by the Grofman et al. model.

Second, in selecting this distinctive case, we are able to explore why, within the context of a competitive congressional campaign, voters split their tickets. As discussed earlier, prior research has—justifiably, perhaps, given the lack of competitive House races—paid less attention to how voters behave when congressional elections are hotly contested. Finally, in terms of campaign strategies and media effects, our research design allows us to assess how perceptions of the candidates change as the election approaches.

We have organized the articles as follows: We begin with a brief description of the race for the nineteenth congressional district in Texas. We then summarize our theoretical expectations and test the theory using data collected from a survey conducted during the course of the campaign.

The Context: Two Incumbents Compete in Texas' Nineteenth Congressional District

The race for the nineteenth district was one of five in the state of Texas where incumbents faced one another in 2004, a consequence of a controversial strategy by Republicans to redraw the state's congressional districts after winning control of the state legislature in 2002. The newly created Nineteenth Congressional District, stretching across the Texas panhandle, incorporated an overwhelmingly conservative area. In 2004, 77.5 percent of the vote is estimated to have gone to Bush (Polidata 2005). Survey responses suggest that a majority of the voting age population consider themselves to be conservative and almost 30 percent consider themselves to be moderate. This is in stark contrast to the national average, where, on average, just more than 30 percent identify themselves as conservative. Similarly, only 20 percent of respondents identify themselves as Democrats, which is again well below the national average. Republicans have more than a two-to-one advantage over Democrats, while 22 percent do not identify with either party. The district is predominately white, though 12 percent consider themselves to be Hispanic and 4 percent are African American (see Table 1).

Table 1
Profile of the Texas Nineteenth Congressional District (%)

	Nineteenth District	U.S.
Liberal	12.3	19.9
Moderate	28.5	24.5
Conservative	51.7	31.5
Do not think in these terms/Don't know	7.5	24.0
Democrat	19.8	31.8
Independent	22.2	33.2
Republican	47.9	28.9
Other	2.9	1.2
Do not think in these terms/Don't know	7.2	5.0
White	81.3	72.8
Hispanic	12.0	6.7
African American	3.6	15.0
Other	3.1	5.5
n	1,397	1,212

Source: Banducci and Mitchell 2004; American National Election Survey 2004

Charlie Stenholm was forced to run for reelection in the newly drawn nineteenth district after his political base was split into two separate congressional districts. Stenholm was one of several conservative Democrats from Texas elected in 1978. He ran unopposed in general elections from 1980 to 1990 but later encountered tough opposition (Barone and Cohen 2003). In 1996, Stenholm received 52 percent of the vote, having raised and spent far more than his opponent (Barone and Ujifusa 1999). In 2000, Stenholm received 51 percent of the vote in a district that went 71 to 28 percent for President Bush (Toobin 2003). His perseverance in a conservative district can be attributed to his moderate-conservative issue positions, his House voting record, and his efforts to publicly align himself with national Republican leaders. In doing so, Stenholm publicly touted his ardent anti-abortionist sentiments, his opposition to stringent gun control legislation, and his commitment to fiscal conservatism. Moreover, Stenholm's lifetime American Democrats for Action (ADA) score, which is based on key roll call votes and ranges from 0 to 100—0 being conservative and 100 being liberal—is 50, although this has fluctuated wildly. For instance, his pre-1990 ADA score was 11; however, the score jumped sharply during the 1990s to a high of 60 in 2003 (Barone and Cohen 2003). Stenholm's adjusted ADA score, which takes into account fluctuations from 1993 to 1999, is 36.1 (Groseclose and Milyo 2005, 1203). In contrast, his opponent, Randy Neugebauer, a one-term congressman, had an ADA

score that was a conservative-friendly 10 (Barone and Cohen 2003).

As expected, the 2004 race was competitive and was one of the most expensive in the country. Each candidate spent well more than \$2 million in the general election. The Republican incumbent spent more than a half a million more, assuming about \$220,000 of debt. Most of the money spent during the campaign was used to pay for television advertisements that were aired on a continuous basis throughout the course of the campaign.

Although he was a long-time Democrat, Stenholm portrayed himself as an “Independent voice for West Texas.” Throughout the congressional campaign, Stenholm’s advertisements featured stark images of bipartisanship, with Stenholm embracing Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush in an effort to signal to his new constituents both his “independence”—that is, from the Democratic leadership—and his close ties to the Republican Party. Neugebauer countered with advertisements portraying Stenholm as ideologically out of step with the overwhelmingly conservative predispositions of constituents within the newly redrawn district.

The high-information campaign in a contest featuring two ideologically similar candidates presents an excellent case to test the CM model. The model leads us to expect that, within the newly formed district, ticket splitting will generally entail a vote for President Bush and a vote for Charlie Stenholm (a so-called Republican-Democrat [RD] split). Conversely, we expect to find few instances of Democrat-Republican (DR) ticket splitting: that is, a respondent casting a vote for John Kerry and Randy Neugebauer. Aside from the pattern of split voting, we are also interested in examining how ambiguity or uncertainty over the position of the candidates influences the likelihood of casting a split ticket vote. Although the CM model assumes voter knowledge of policy positions, it is also reasonable to expect that split voting will occur among those who have difficulty discerning a difference between the candidates. We assume that the ability to discern a difference will depend on media exposure and political awareness. In the next section, we describe the data and these expectations in more detail.

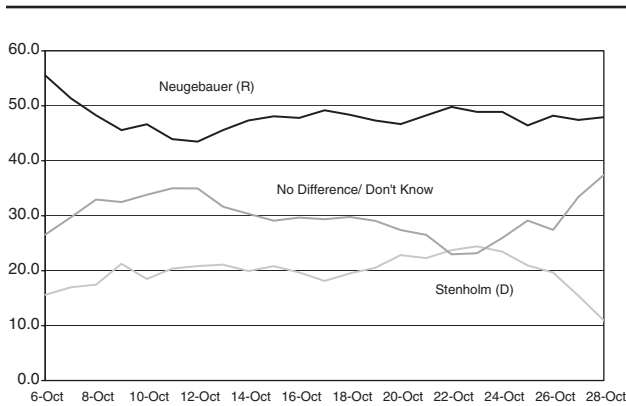
Data

To test these hypotheses, we rely on a pre-election survey of eligible voters in the nineteenth congressional district conducted by the Earl Survey Research Laboratory based in the Department of Political Science

at Texas Tech University. The survey employed a rolling cross-sectional (RCS) design where daily replicates of forty to fifty respondents were selected at random to complete a telephone interview during a twenty-nine-day period beginning on October 4, 2004, and ending on November 1, 2004, the day before the general election (Banducci and Mitchell 2004). Its essence is to take a one-shot cross-section and distribute interviewing on a daily basis during the course of the campaign. Properly done, the date on which a respondent is interviewed is as much a product of random selection as the initial selection of that respondent in the sample. Because observations are temporally distributed yet closely spaced, the design moves survey research close to true causal inference (Johnston and Brady 2002, 283). The RCS design is particularly well suited for examining campaign effects and was used in 2000 as the basis for the 2000 National Annenberg Election Study, a massive survey of more than 37,000 respondents interviewed between July and November 2000 (see Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004; Romer et al. 2004). It has also been used in other national election studies, in countries such as Britain, Canada, and New Zealand, but has not (to our knowledge) been applied in the context of a specific U.S. congressional election.

The RCS design allows us to test hypotheses associated with changes that occur over time. Following Gelman and King (1993), we hypothesize that citizens will gain more information about the candidates during the course of the campaign. More specifically, citizens near the end of the campaign should be more likely to recall the names of the candidates and discern ideological differences between the candidates than in the early stages of the campaign. If, as we hypothesize, ambiguity leads to ticket splitting, then the propensity to split one’s vote should decline as the election progresses and voters become more “enlightened.” Reflecting the saliency of the race, about 50 percent of the respondents correctly recalled both of the names of the candidates in the early stages of the campaign. By the end of the campaign, more than two-thirds of the respondents knew the names of the candidates, whereas about 20 percent could not recall the name of either candidate. As a measure of ambiguity, we rely on a question that asked which congressional candidate was more conservative.⁴ Uncertainty about candidate position is measured by those who respond that they fail to perceive a difference between the two candidates.⁵ Ambiguity about candidate position may also lead some to identify the Democrat as the more conservative candidate.⁶

Figure 1
Which Candidate is More Conservative?



Note: Five-day moving averages.

Overall, about half of the respondents identified Neugebauer as the most conservative candidate, whereas about 20 percent identified Stenholm as more conservative and 10 percent saw little difference between the candidates. As Figure 1 reveals, responses remained relatively stable during the course of the campaign. However, in the last week, the proportion identifying Stenholm as the most conservative candidate is reduced by half. However, this does not result in an increase in the proportion that sees the Republican as the more conservative candidate. Instead, in the final week of the campaign, the proportion that either could not tell a difference between the two candidates or simply did not know which candidate was more conservative increases from 25 to 40 percent. Such a trend illustrates that in the days before the election, when the campaign's salience peaks, voters were more likely to be uncertain about the relative differences between the two candidates than at any other time during the campaign.

Results

As Table 2 shows, virtually all of the voters who intended to split their votes were Bush voters who intended to vote for Charlie Stenholm. Overall, they compose 14 percent of the sample, compared to just 2 percent who intended to vote for Kerry and Neugebauer. Although the pattern of split ticket voting is consistent with expectations, the overall level of split voting is not substantially higher than the national average, as Grofman et al. would predict. When one considers just those voters who express a clear preference for both major party candidates, the estimated level of split voting in the district is about

20 percent. This figure compares to a nationwide estimate of 17 percent who report splitting their votes between House and Presidential candidates representing the two major parties (National Election Studies 2004).

Although the results presented earlier suggest that Bush voters are more likely than Kerry voters to engage in split voting, it is not clear what leads some of them to vote for the Democratic candidate. Our theory suggests that uncertainty is a key factor. As discussed earlier, both candidates had an incentive to emphasize their conservative voting records, given the conservative nature of the district. But each candidate's emphasis on distinguishing themselves from their opponent was likely to differ. If Stenholm was to increase his base of support, he had to do so by persuading a substantial number of Bush voters to split their votes. One strategy would be to attract support from those who failed to discern a difference between the candidates. Therefore, as the Democratic candidate, Charlie Stenholm's likely strategy was to minimize the perceived ideological differences between himself and his opponent. Such a strategy was reflected by the campaign's slogan of portraying Stenholm as an "Independent voice for West Texas" or by the photographs in many of the television advertisements showing Stenholm posing with current and former Republican presidents. On the other hand, Neugebauer was likely to adopt a different strategy. While emphasizing his conservative voting record, he also had a clear incentive to remind voters of Stenholm's ties with the Democratic Party. Shrewdly, however, the Stenholm campaign's efforts to disassociate him from the Democratic Party were met by retaliatory advertisements sponsored by the Neugebauer campaign that sought to neutralize this message.

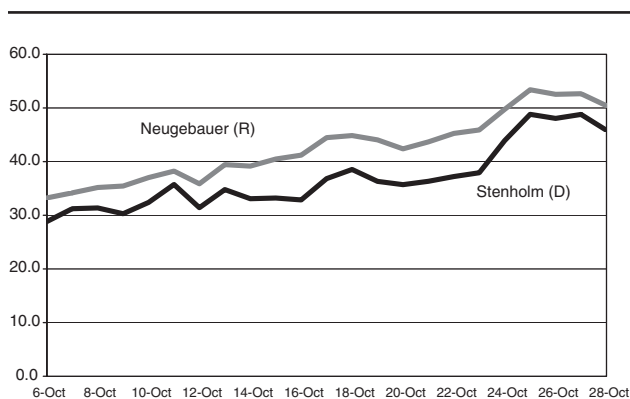
The extent to which such strategies were successful depends not just on the saliency of the campaign but also on one's exposure to the media. Although the campaign was intense, as both candidates' advertisements saturated the airwaves, a person who watched little television would still have a low level of exposure. Thus, it is important to take into account the extent to which citizens were exposed to the information carried in campaign advertisements. Given the opposing strategies of the two candidates, we hypothesize that citizens who recall seeing more Neugebauer advertisements will be less likely to be uncertain about the ideological differences between the candidates. In contrast, those who recall seeing more Stenholm advertisements are more likely to be uncertain about the candidate's position or perhaps may even identify Stenholm as the more conservative candidate.

Table 2
Split Voting Patterns

		House Vote Intention				
		Neugebauer	Stenholm	Other	Undecided	Abstain
Presidential Vote Intention	Bush	44.0 (592)	14.0 (188)	2.7 (36)	8.7 (117)	2.2 (30)
	Kerry	2.3 (31)	14.1 (190)	1.8 (24)	2.0 (27)	0.4 (5)
	Other	0.2 (3)	1.0 (13)	0.7 (10)	0.1 (2)	0.7 (9)
	Undecided	0.3 (4)	1.6 (21)	0.1 (2)	1.6 (21)	0.3 (4)
	Abstain	0.2 (3)	0.1 (1)	0.1 (1)	0.1 (1)	0.8 (11)

Note: Sample size in parenthesis; $n = 1,346$.

Figure 2
Television Exposure to Candidate Advertisements



Note: Figures represent percentage who report seeing “a lot” of television advertisements from the candidate in the past few days. Five-day centered moving averages.

We rely on a measure of self-reported exposure to campaign advertisements. The measure takes into account the frequency of exposure, measured by whether a respondent recalled seeing “a lot,” “several,” “just one or two,” or “no” advertisements. Reflecting the competitiveness of the campaign, 41 percent reported seeing a lot of Neugebauer advertisements, whereas 35 percent reported seeing a lot of Stenholm ads. Between 16 to 18 percent reported not seeing any ads. During the course of the campaign, as Figure 2 reveals, the proportion of respondents reporting seeing a lot of advertisements increases from about 30 percent to about 50 percent.

Aside from media exposure, there are other factors that have the potential to influence whether individuals

are able to discern a difference between the candidates. The fact that both candidates were incumbents suggests that voters from their respective districts are more likely to be aware of their own representative’s position. To control for these incumbency effects, we use a dummy variable that represents whether a respondent is located in a candidate’s prior congressional district. Respondents were classified by their reported zip code to determine which candidate had previously represented the respondent. Consistent with the nature of the newly drawn district, Neugebauer had a distinct advantage over his opponent. Of our respondents, 47 percent were located in Neugebauer’s old district, compared to 32 percent who were in Stenholm’s district. The remaining respondents either overlapped or were situated outside either incumbent’s previous district. Neugebauer’s old district was more likely to be Republican than Stenholm’s. Specifically, 53 percent of the respondents in Neugebauer’s district identified with the Republican Party compared to 44 percent in Stenholm’s old district.

Individual characteristics may also lead citizens to discern ideological differences between the candidates. These include levels of formal education and political interest. Those who have the ability to recall the names of the candidates should be more likely to be aware of the differences between the candidates. We use an ordinal measure based on whether the respondent could correctly recall both names of the candidates, one name, or neither of the names. Dummy variables are included for party identification (leaving Democrats as the reference category) to control for possible projection effects. Finally, we include a count variable that measures

Table 3
Uncertainty about Ideological Difference between Candidates

Multinomial Logit Coefficients	Uncertain about Candidates				Stenholm More Conservative			
	Coefficient	SE	Min→	Max	Coefficient	SE	Min→	Max
Interest in campaign	-0.12**	(.06)	-.10		-0.03	(.07)	.01	
Recall names of candidates	-0.26**	(.09)	-.11		-0.02	(.11)	.02	
Stenholm advertisements	-0.01	(.11)	-.07		0.39**	(.14)	.17	
Neugebauer advertisements	-0.17	(.11)	-.04		-0.38**	(.13)	-.15	
Education	-0.21**	(.07)	-.13		-0.20	(.08)	-.07	
Female	0.40**	(.16)	.09		-0.16**	(.18)	-.05	
Age	0.01*	(.00)	.14		0.02	(.01)	.08	
Republican	-1.08**	(.22)	.21		-1.79**	(.23)	-.13	
Independent	-0.08	(.22)	.08		-0.86**	(.24)	.12	
Stenholm's constituents	0.67**	(.17)	.03		1.06**	(.19)	.09	
District overlap	0.37	(.24)	.08		0.70**	(.29)	.03	
Week	0.13	(.07)	.05		0.06	(.09)	.08	
Constant	0.42	(.43)			-0.36	(.50)		
Nagelkerke R^2	0.11							
n	1,054							

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Note: Reference category is Neugebauer more conservative.

the length of the campaign on a weekly basis to capture any unobserved temporal trend.⁷

Table 3 reports the results of a model predicting whether respondents had difficulty discerning a difference between the two candidates. The dependent variable is based on the item illustrated in Figure 1 assessing which candidate citizens viewed as being more conservative. Uncertainty is measured by those who see little difference between the candidates. Because the dependent variable has three categories, we use a multinomial logit model (MNL) to estimate the model, leaving those identifying the Republican candidate (Neugebauer) as the more conservative candidate as the reference category.

The results suggest that exposure to campaign advertisements made a difference. Those who recalled seeing a lot of Stenholm advertisements are significantly more likely to identify Stenholm as the more conservative candidate. Specifically, the probability of viewing Stenholm as the more conservative candidate increases by 17 percent for those who reported seeing a lot of Stenholm advertisements. Similarly, exposure to Neugebauer advertisements decreases the probability of identifying Stenholm as the more conservative candidate. Moreover, although exposure to advertisements increases the likelihood of perceiving a difference between the candidates, it does not appear to contribute to uncertainty over the candidate's ideological position. This suggests that rather than creating uncertainty, the advertisements helped viewers distinguish the candidates from one another.

Both Republicans and Independents are less likely than Democrats to identify Stenholm as the more conservative candidate, and Republicans are less likely to be uncertain. Stenholm's constituents, on the other hand, are more likely to be uncertain or perceive Stenholm as the more conservative candidate. Those who could recall the names of the candidates as well as those with higher levels of education are also less likely to be uncertain. Together, these results suggest that voters responded to information carried by the campaign. Potential supporters as well as those exposed to information from the Democratic candidate are more likely to be uncertain, whereas those identifying with the Republican candidate and exposed to the Republican candidate's ads are less likely to perceive the Democrat as the more conservative candidate. Respondents surveyed later in the campaign do not appear to be significantly more (or less) likely to be uncertain or to have placed Stenholm as the more conservative candidate.⁸

To assess how uncertainty influences split voting, we estimate another model that predicts ticket splitting. Following Burden and Kimball, we assume that the blurring of ideological differences will contribute to uncertainty, which will increase the likelihood of ticket splitting. Furthermore, Alvarez (1997, 36) suggests that uncertainty about a candidate's position may also alter the probability of support depending on one's ideological predisposition. In situations of ideological uncertainty, voters may rely more heavily on nonpolicy characteristics of the candidates. We

Table 4
Ticket Splitting

Logit Coefficients	Model 1				Model 2			
	Coefficient	SE	Min→	Max	Coefficient	SE	Min→	Max
Uncertain about ideological difference	1.32**	(.24)	.25		-1.26	(.99)	-.16	
Stenholm more conservative	2.09**	(.25)	.43		-0.92	(.93)	-.12	
Republican	0.43	(.29)	.07		0.55	(.29)	.09	
Independent	1.27**	(.28)	.24		1.32**	(.28)	.24	
Ideology	0.11	(.12)	.07		-0.39*	(.18)	-.27	
Uncertainty x ideology					0.74**	(.28)	.72	
Stenholm more conservative x ideology					0.89**	(.27)	.80	
Strength of Ideology	0.07	(.13)	.02		0.04	(.13)	.01	
Education	0.02	(.09)	.01		0.01	(.09)	.00	
Age	-0.01	(.01)	-.09		-0.01	(.01)	-.09	
Female	-0.08	(.19)	-.01		-0.07	(.20)	-.01	
Recall names of candidates	-0.02	(.12)	-.01		-0.01	(.12)	.00	
Stenholm's constituents	0.37	(.21)	.06		0.40	(.21)	.06	
District overlap	0.31	(.31)	.05		0.32	(.32)	.05	
Week	-0.05	(.09)	-.02		-0.05	(.10)	-.02	
Constant	-2.82**	(.68)			-1.09	(.78)		
Nagelkerke R^2	0.16				0.17			
n	756				756			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

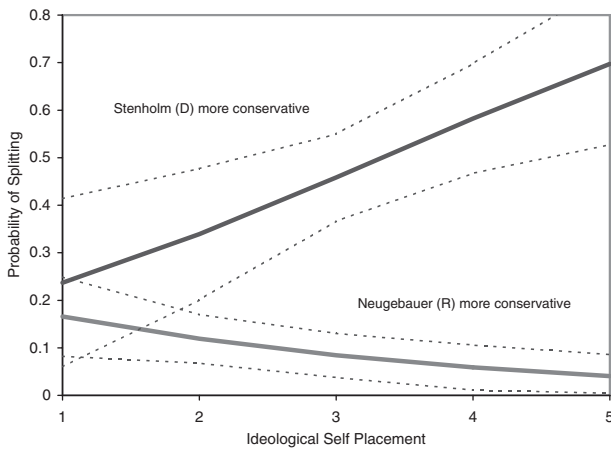
Note: Undecided voters and nonvoters have been dropped from the analysis.

might anticipate that under these circumstances, Stenholm might attract votes disproportionately from Republicans. Indeed, this assumption was the basis for his campaign strategy. Therefore, we hypothesize that conservatives who either perceived Stenholm as being more conservative or failed to distinguish a difference between the two candidates will be more likely to split their votes. To test this hypothesis, we estimate a second model that includes an interaction term between ideology and whether a respondent perceived Stenholm as the more conservative candidate. A second interaction term is used to test for the effects of uncertainty. As control variables, we include a measure of strength of ideology based on the assumption that moderates are more likely to split their votes than those at either end of the ideological spectrum.⁹ Independents may also be more likely to split their votes, so a dummy variable is included to control for these effects. We also include a control for incumbency and a trend variable representing the week of the campaign that respondents were interviewed. Undecided voters and nonvoters have been dropped from the analysis.

As can be seen in Table 4, those who perceived Stenholm as the more conservative candidate are 43 percent more likely to split their vote. Uncertainty about the candidate's position is also an influential

variable. Specifically, those who are uncertain about the candidates' position are 25 percent more likely to split their votes than those who are certain. However, when the interaction terms are included in the model, the main effects of uncertainty and perceived candidate position are no longer significant. The positive interaction terms indicates that conservatives who are either uncertain or who believe Stenholm is the more conservative candidate are more likely to split their votes. To help illustrate these effects, Figure 3 shows the estimated probability of splitting by ideology, holding all other variables at their mean values. The probability of splitting decreases for conservatives who are certain that the Republican candidate is more conservative (the reference category). However, the effect of ideology is reversed for those who believe that Stenholm is the more conservative candidate. The gap between the confidence intervals on the right side of the ideological spectrum indicates that the estimated differences in perceptions of the candidates' position are large enough to be substantive. Finally, Independents are more likely to split their votes than Democrats. Factors that do not appear to have an influence include name recollection, education, and age. There also does not appear to be a significant trend over the course of the campaign.

Figure 3
Estimated Probabilities of Ticket Splitting by
Candidate Position and Ideology



Note: Estimates are derived from Table 4, holding all other variables constant at the mean values. Broken lines indicate 95% confidence interval.

Discussion

The CM model suggests that split ticket voting is more likely to occur in ideologically skewed districts, where congressional candidates are likely to adopt more extreme positions to appeal to the median voter. Policy positions are thus assumed to play an important role in leading voters to support candidates whose party voters might not otherwise support. Although the model finds empirical support when tested with aggregate data, questions remain about how information leads voters to split their votes. Given the assumption that candidates must adopt policy positions that represent a departure from the norm, it seems equally plausible that such convergence leads to ambiguity, particularly in a more homogenous context, where the issue space is narrowed. Such ambiguity may in fact be an asset for those candidates who must compete in a context where their party is not competitive. This may explain why voters are more likely to split their votes in districts that are ideologically skewed.

We have focused on a single congressional race where the two candidates presented themselves as conservatives to examine the circumstances that lead voters to split their tickets. In a typical congressional election where information is low, the ideological positions of the candidates are likely to matter less than other factors, such as incumbency or name recognition. This in itself raises some questions about

the parsimony of the CM model. It may simply demand too much on the part of the voter in a typical election. Our analysis is based on an election that was hotly contested in which voters were likely to be exposed to a great deal of information about the candidates and their positions. As a result, the case provides an ideal setting for testing the model. Even in this relatively extreme case, voters did not necessarily have a clear idea of how the candidates differed on various issues. Indeed, there was sufficient ambiguity over their relative position, caused in part by the Democrat's incentive to appeal to a conservative base of voters. Such uncertainty appears to have been a factor that led some conservative voters who cast votes for George W. Bush to split their ticket and vote for the Democratic candidate.

We believe this example provides a more thorough explanation of what occurs in voter's minds in a context where candidates have an incentive to adopt similar positions on one side of the ideological spectrum. The CM model advanced by Grofman et al. suggests that voters who may otherwise support a party's candidate will defect and choose an alternative if that candidate positions himself or herself in line with the district. Our analysis suggests that such behavior may lead to uncertainty, which is more consistent with Burden and Kimball's theory. Such a view also calls into question "balancing theory," which assumes that voters know the positions of the candidates and cast split tickets to promote moderate policy outcomes (Fiorina 1996).

Voters may not necessarily be choosing the candidate for ideological reasons but rather because of the uncertainty of their position. Such a finding not only provides an explanation for the occurrence of split voting in certain contexts but also is relevant to wider debates about voting behavior.

Appendix

Interest in Campaign

How much thought have you given to the upcoming congressional election in this district? Would you say a lot, some, a little or none?

Recall Names of Candidates

Can you recall the names of the candidates in this congressional district race? DO NOT READ NAMES

Exposure to Ads (questions were rotated)

In the past few days, would you say you have seen a lot, several, just one or two, or no television ads from Randy Neugebauer?

In the past few days, would you say you have seen a lot, several, just one or two, or no television ads from Charlie Stenholm?

Uncertainty about Ideological Difference

In your opinion, is Charlie Stenholm or Randy Neugebauer (rotate) the more conservative candidate? 1 = no difference, don't know, Charlie Stenholm; 0 = Randy Neugebauer.

Notes

1. In addition, according to Grofman et al., candidates' platforms will not cross. As a result, Republican candidates will be to the right of the median voter and Democratic candidates will be to the left. For Burden and Kimball (2002), however, this modeling simplification may be unnecessarily stringent. That is, particularly in moderate districts, the convergence of rivals toward the median voter, and the rhetorical equivocation that ensues, may confuse voters' subjective assessments of candidates' ideological placements.

2. Alvarez (1997), for instance, estimates that the probability that a voter will support a candidate who lies closely to their sincere policy preference diminishes by 50 percent if the voter is unable to discern the candidate's true ideological position.

3. For example, Frymer, Kim, and Bimes (1997) use National Election Studies data to investigate how respondents' perceptions of House candidates' ideological positions influence split ticket voting. However, their analysis is based on a sample size of just eighty-eight respondents distributed across an unreported number of Southern congressional districts (see p. 209). Burden and Kimball (2002) also use NES data to examine whether voters who fail to perceive a difference between the parties are more likely to split their votes. Because the measure is based on assessments of the national parties, it cannot capture perceptions of congressional candidates within a specific context.

4. The question was first asked on October 6, 2004.

5. Those who respond "don't know" are included in this category.

6. Although both candidates have a conservative voting record and take similar positions on social issues, Neugebauer's is more consistently conservative whereas Stenholm's record on average is moderate. Party labels also provide a useful cue for voters' placement of candidates' ideological position vis-à-vis their opponents (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991) and each candidate's competency in numerous issue areas (Petrocik 1996).

7. Ideally, contextual variables such as campaign spending on a daily basis could be used to model campaign dynamics. Unfortunately, these data are incomplete.

8. Substituting the week count variable for dummy variables for each week indicates that respondents surveyed in the second and fourth weeks are more likely to be uncertain than those surveyed in the first week.

9. This is analogous to controlling for the strength of partisanship, which unfortunately is not available.

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