

Downsian Voting and the Separation of Powers in the 1998 Ohio and Texas Gubernatorial Elections

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Abstract

Voters, we hypothesize, base their choice of candidates in gubernatorial elections on the policy outcomes they expect from each candidate in government rather than on the personal policy positions of the candidates. Furthermore, voters' expectations about the relative influence of the governor in policymaking and the possibility of divided government affect voters' decisions to assess candidates based on their personal positions or on the policies they are likely to produce in government. We test these hypotheses using data from the 1998 Ohio and Texas gubernatorial elections. Survey respondents perceive clear differences between the candidates' positions and the position of the a government led by each candidate. Voters' relative proximity to the expected position of the government under each candidate outperforms the voters' relative proximity to the candidates' personal positions in a model of vote choice. The effect is government position is increased when voters expect an influential governor to face an opposition legislature or a less influential governor to face unified government.

1 Introduction

In a previous paper (Lacy and Paolino 1998), we showed that voters in presidential elections appear to take the separation of powers in government into consideration when casting their votes. Voters recognize that in a government characterized by a separation of powers and checks and balances among competing branches, candidates for the executive branch may not be able to implement their preferred policies. Instead, government policy is a function not only of who occupies the executive branch, but also who controls the legislature. Our previous work supports a *policy expectations* theory of voting in which voters evaluate the likely policy position of the government under each of the competing candidates in an election. The origins of the policy expectations theory of voting go back at least as far as (Downs 1957, 39), who writes:

When a man votes . . . he makes his decision by comparing future performances he expects from the competing parties. But if he is rational, he knows that no party will be able to do everything that it says it will do. Hence he cannot merely compare platforms; instead he must estimate in his own mind what the parties would actually do were they in power.

Hence, we refer to voting based on policy expectations as Downsian voting. Fiorina's (1988) theory of divided government is based on a policy expectations model of voting in which voters choose an executive of one party and a legislator of a different party in order to derive moderate government policies. Other policy expectations models of voting include Austen-Smith and Banks (1991) and Lacy and Niou (1998).

The policy expectations theory of voting differs considerably from traditional *candidate position* theories in which voters evaluate the platforms or personal policy positions of the competing candidates without regard for whether the candidates can or will implement their preferred policies. Candidate position theories include *proximity voting* (Enelow and Hinich 1984) in which voters choose the candidate closest to them in a policy space, and *directional voting* (Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989) in which voters choose the candidate whose position is on the same side of a neutral point as the voter's position.

In this paper, we replicate our previous study using gubernatorial elections in two states where the executive and legislative influence over policy is very different: Ohio and Texas. In particular, we examine the 1998 gubernatorial elections in both states using election surveys that asked respondents similar questions about the policy positions of the competing candidates and the likely policy position of the government with each candidate as governor. We also extend our previous work by examining how voters' perceptions of different institutional arrangements affect the degree to which they use policy expectations or candidate positions when casting their vote.

Using data from a pre- and post-election panel survey in Ohio and a pre-election survey in Texas, we test several models of policy expectations voting. Our results support our previous finding that expected policy outcomes are an important predictor of vote choice, usually superior to candidate proximities. The extension of the model to incorporate voters' beliefs about governmental arrangements indicates that when voters expect divided

government combined with a powerful governor or a unified government, but with a weak governor, they are more likely to cast their votes based on the anticipated policy position of the government given each candidate's election. But when voters expect a unified government led by a strong executive, or when they expect divided government with a weak executive, they cast their votes based on the personal positions of the candidates. We argue that directional voting with may be a special case of Downsian voting under a "sticky" status quo or under a separation of powers . Before presenting the models and results, we first examine the different contexts of our unique dual 1998 gubernatorial election studies.

2 Policy Expectations and the Separation of Powers in State Government

State elections provide a more difficult test of our previous findings for several reasons. First, gubernatorial candidates' personal ideological positions are rarely as salient to most voters as the presidential candidates' positions. Among Texas respondents to a September 1996 survey about the candidates for U.S. president, 88% and 84% could place Clinton and Dole, respectively, on a seven-point ideological scale, and 80% could place each with respect to the expected ideological outcomes of the government given each candidate's election. By contrast, in an October 1998 Texas survey over 88% of respondents could place incumbent Gov. George Bush on an ideological scale, but only 57% could place his challenger, Garry Mauro, who had been elected statewide four times as Commissioner of the General Land Office. In an Ohio survey conducted immediately *after* the 1998 gubernatorial election, 75% of respondents could place Republican Bob Taft on an ideology scale, and 74% could place Democrat Lee Fisher. Thus, information about gubernatorial candidates is not as readily available to voters as information about presidential candidates.

Second, people are probably less familiar with the operation of their state governments than with the national government. While many people probably understood that the President had the power to block an opposition Congress in 1995 and force a "shutdown" of the federal government, a governor's influence over policy, as we will illustrate, is less transparent to most voters. As a result, people may have a more difficult time predicting how a given allocation of government offices to members of each party will produce different policy outcomes.

In Texas, for example, one can reasonably argue that influence over policy is split among three central actors: the governor, the state legislature, and the lieutenant governor.¹ Further complicating the picture for Texas voters is the unusual allocation of power that makes the Lieutenant Governor really a member of the legislative branch and, arguably, the most

¹It would not be too much of a stretch to allocate some significant control over policy to other elected state officials, such as the Commissioners of Agriculture and of the General Land Office, as well as heads of various other independent agencies. To keep our survey as simple as possible, we restrict our respondents' choices to the three actors mentioned above. This could introduce some measurement error, but we believe this is a small price to pay for an easily comprehensible survey. Our results lead us to believe that relatively few people would assign much influence to these other officers.

powerful official in state government (Hill and Mladenka 1996, 112), while the governor is relatively weak. Our survey shows that many more voters, in fact, attribute greater policy influence to the governor than to the lieutenant governor. Thirty-six percent believe that the governor has the most influence over policy, while nine percent perceive the lieutenant governor as having the most influence over policy.² And among people naming the legislature as most influential, most believe the governor has the second most influence over policy.

In Ohio, by contrast, the lieutenant governor is chosen by and runs on a ticket with the gubernatorial candidate. Few voters know who the lieutenant governor is, and the lieutenant governor's only tangible responsibility in government is to chair the Ohio Commission on State and Local Government. The governor and state legislature are roughly equal in formal power, though a 1998 post-election survey that asked respondents which has more influence over state policy, the governor or legislature, 32% picked the state legislature, 24% picked the governor, and 34% answered that the two are equally influential.³ Since citizens' perceptions of the relative power of the actors in government clearly vary within each state and across states, we intend to pay particular attention to voters' beliefs about which branch of government has the most influence over government policy.

While voters' information about the relative power relationships may be more obscure, the information that voters have about the ideological positions of the governor's competitors for policy influence may also be smaller than voters' information about the United States Congress. The Texas legislature meets for only 140 days every other year. With the state legislature in session only a quarter of the time that the US Congress meets, it is far less likely that individuals can identify which parties control each branch, let alone have some sense about the average ideological preferences of the legislature. Furthermore, the Texas legislature can be regarded as relatively bipartisan; committee chairs, for example, are distributed to members of both parties. Ohio, by contrast, has an active, deeply partisan, and hotly contested state legislature. Given such differences in governmental structure, the role of the executive in determining government policy may be more relevant to voters' decisions in some states than others.

While the relative influence of the offices of government is important to voter expectations about policy outcomes, it is also important which party controls these branches. A large literature on divided government makes this point (e.g. Fiorina 1988; Fiorina 1992). In order to capture voters' beliefs about the prospects of divided government, we also asked respondents which candidate for the lieutenant governor's office they thought would win (Texas) or who would control the state legislature after the election (Ohio).⁴

²Forty-four percent named the legislature as the most influential, and others gave no response or provided some combination of branches.

³The remaining 9 percent answered "Don't Know."

⁴We were not able to ask similar questions for each house of the legislature in Texas. This might present some difficulties for the Texas analysis if voters' behavior is, as we argue, dependent upon their beliefs about control of the legislature. This, however, might pose less of a problem in Texas because of the relatively bipartisan nature of the legislature and because the lieutenant governor is the effective leader of the Texas Senate. For these reasons, it is possible that information about voters' perceptions of party control of the

Our survey data allow us to measure in each state a respondent's beliefs about the governor's institutional power and whether or not the governor is likely to be working with unified partisan control of government or divided control. The various combinations of institutional structure provide several competing hypotheses about voter behavior. The first is that none of the institutional considerations matter, and voters cast their vote based either upon candidates' platforms or expected policy outcomes given each candidate's election. In this case, the compelling question is whether or not expected policy outcomes have a greater effect upon vote choice than candidate positions — as predicted by our earlier paper.

A second hypothesis is that voters' perceptions of the executive's influence over policy affect whether or not they vote based upon candidate positions or upon expected outcomes. Here, there are two rival hypotheses. One is that voters will use the gubernatorial candidates' personal positions relatively more than expected outcomes when the executive is seen as more powerful. The rationale behind this is that, with more power, the governor will be better able to implement policies closer to her ideal point. Alternatively, voters who perceive the governor as less influential may rely more upon the candidates' personal positions because they view their vote as expressive rather than instrumental. Since the outcomes of government policy will be shaped by actors other than the governor, the vote is more an expression of a preference for policies, but without the belief that the governor will be able to implement those policies. If there is support for the influence hypothesis, it is our belief that the latter of these two rival hypotheses is more compelling because a voter who believes that the governor is more influential may still recognize limits on her ability to enact her preferred program and can, therefore, take these limits into account in beliefs about expected policy outcomes. As the governor is seen as a weaker actor, voters may receive more utility from casting votes that reflect their preferred policy positions. The extreme example of this is the case in nations where a largely symbolic president is elected. Recognizing that such a president will have little influence over policy, candidates who are relatively more extreme — or even simply different from the Prime Minister — may be favored as voters find such options to be a “safe” way of expressing their underlying preferences on particularly salient issues.⁵

Counter to the hypothesis that the governor's influence over policymaking matters to voters, voters may reason that the checks and balances in the structure of governments in the United States make the relative influence of each branch less relevant. Especially where no one branch is disproportionately influential, unified versus divided partisan control of the government may be the critical variable to voters' decision-making.⁶ Again, there

legislature might not contribute greatly to our analysis if voters, consciously or otherwise, do not use such information to influence their voting behavior. Obviously, we would like to test such hypotheses in the future.

⁵Of course, the personal preferences of any executive who could exercise unlimited control over government policies would be extremely relevant for government policy. We cannot, however, think of any case of a democratic government where this is true.

⁶In 1996, North Carolina became the last state to give the governor veto power over legislation. Of course, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) report that some respondents in their study believed that the President was little more than a figurehead.

are two rival hypotheses. The first is that divided control of government favors voters' use of expected policy outcomes because of the recognition that the executive will have to compromise personal preferences with an opposition legislature. Certainly, the extreme example of this is a parliamentary system where the personal preferences of the Prime Minister should have great weight because she will not have to confront an opposition legislature to get her program passed. On the other hand, voters may reason that the personal positions of an executive under divided government may provide a very important bargaining chip in negotiating with the legislature which can produce satisfactory outcomes. In this case, we think, however, it would be much more rational for voters to incorporate these considerations into their estimates of expected government outcomes. For this reason, we believe that the former of the two hypotheses is more plausible.

Because the previous two hypotheses yield ambiguous predictions, we feel that a third hypothesis, that both institutional and partisan competition interact to influence the relative strength of platforms versus expected outcomes in voters' choices, provides much clearer expectations. Under this hypothesis, voters can figure out whether or not a powerful executive will have to use that power with a sympathetic institutional competitor or a (potentially) hostile competitor. For this hypothesis, we propose that personal positions will have a relatively greater effect in one of two cases: when an influential executive is expected to be working with a weaker legislature or when a weak executive is expected to face an opposition majority in the legislature. Alternatively, when a strong governor faces an opposition legislature or a weak governor can count upon support from a sympathetic legislature, expected policy outcomes should have a relatively greater influence upon the vote.

The rationale behind this hypothesis is that a relatively strong governor with a sympathetic (and relatively weaker) legislature should have a reasonably good chance of getting her programs through the legislature. As a consequence, the governor's preferred policies should matter greatly. This case very closely represents the situation in majority parliamentary government. Conversely, when a weak governor faces a strong opposition legislature, the governor's views might matter very little in what policies are ultimately adopted. As a result, one's vote in the governor's race may be strictly a matter of expressing a preference for a set of policies that have been elaborated by the voter's preferred gubernatorial candidate. This case closely represents the case when a symbolic executive has little more than moral persuasion over an opposition legislature.

Alternatively, when a strong governor has to work with an opposition legislature or a weak governor can count upon support from a sympathetic legislature, expected outcomes may be relatively more influential in voters' decisions because, rather than expressing strict policy preferences, they are voting for the candidate who can best deliver the policy outcomes for which a voter can hope given such a combination of executive's power and the composition of the legislature. The former case of this is simply the familiar case of divided government in the United States or France. The latter case, however, is one where voters cannot count upon the executive to push her personally preferred policies through a legislature with its own preferences, but where the legislature may have incentives to cooperate

with the legislature on some matters. This is a case that we have seen in the United States, often with Democratic presidents against the conservative coalition in Congress, and in minority or coalition parliamentary governments.⁷ With both combinations, voters are more concerned with the outcomes of the compromises that are likely to occur and not simply the preferred positions of the candidates.

While the earlier hypotheses have some appeal, we believe that the third hypothesis is the most appealing theoretically for several reasons. First, the third hypothesis allows for voters to consider both static, institutional (influence) and dynamic, situational (support) factors in their decision. For this reason, it provides an explanation for why a given voter may weigh different kinds of policy considerations differently from one election to the next. Extended further, we can also imagine how a voter could incorporate evaluations of candidates' traits into this mix, based upon how the perception of a candidate's leadership qualities affect the candidate's ability to influence the legislature. Second, it yields predictions that allow for heterogeneity across different kinds of governmental arrangements. It seems silly to us to that voters in a parliamentary system would always behave the same regardless of the likely composition of the parliament or that voters would see a unified parliamentary government as operating similarly to a unified presidential system. Taking into consideration voters' perceptions of the institutional and situational context of a given election provides greater flexibility on the part of how we model voters' behavior.

3 Differences Between Candidates' Positions and Policy Expectations

As in our earlier paper, our first question is the extent to which voters perceive differences between the candidates, between the policies of the government given the election of different candidates, and between the personal ideological positions and the expected policy outcomes given the election of each candidate. In all cases, there is evidence that voters see clear differences between the candidates and their policies.

In an October, 1998, pre-election survey in Ohio, 441 respondents were first asked to place themselves on a nine-point ideological scale and then asked to place Republican gubernatorial candidate Robert Taft and Democratic candidate Lee Fisher.⁸ Following these questions, respondents were asked to place on the scale the government of Ohio with Bob Taft or Lee Fisher as governor. Immediately after the November election, 305 respondents were re-interviewed and asked the same questions. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for responses to the questions. Over 95% of respondents in the October survey and 92% of respondents in the November survey saw differences between the positions of Taft and

⁷It is also likely that the case of a split bicameral legislature fits into this pattern.

⁸All questions were in branching format. Respondents were first asked if they (or Bob Taft or Lee Fisher) were liberal, moderate, or conservative. A liberal (conservative) response was further probed with "would that be extremely liberal (conservative), somewhat liberal (conservative), or slightly liberal (conservative)." An initial response of "moderate" was further probed with "are you (Taft, Fisher) slightly liberal, slightly conservative, or strictly moderate?"

Fisher. In both waves of the survey, 88% of respondents expected a difference between the position of the government of Ohio with Taft and Fisher as governor. Respondents also saw clear differences between each candidate's personal position and the likely position of the government under his leadership. In both waves, 57% of respondents placed Bob Taft and Taft-led government at different positions. In the October survey, 52% of respondents expected a difference between Lee Fisher and a government led by him, while in the November survey 57% saw a difference.

[Table 1 about here]

The descriptive statistics for these questions indicate a clearly discernible pattern. Respondents believe that the government under each candidate will be more moderate than the candidate's own platform. Also, the placements of the respondents, the candidates, and their governments are statistically identical between the October and November surveys with the sole exception of perceptions of Lee Fisher's personal position. As the campaign progressed, respondents saw Fisher personally as more liberal even though they saw little change in the expected policy position of the government with him as governor.

These results are similar to those in Texas, where over 88% of the respondents saw ideological differences between the two gubernatorial candidates, George Bush and Garry Mauro.⁹ Similarly, over 79% expected differences in the general ideological tone of policies if one candidate were elected instead of the other.¹⁰ Finally, 52% of our respondents saw differences between each candidate's personal policies and the expected policies of the Texas state government given that candidate's election.

As with the Ohio results, respondents in Texas saw the expected policies of each administration as more moderate than the policies personally favored by each candidate. The Republican governor, George W. Bush, was seen as solidly conservative, with a mean placement of 4.98, while the mean expected policy outcome was still conservative, at 4.87. His challenger, Garry Mauro, was perceived to be slightly liberal, with an average placement of 3.52, but the mean placement for the policies of his government was 3.69. These results are consistent with what we found in the 1996 election. We will discuss some possible implications of this later in the paper.

Given that respondents in both states were able to distinguish each candidate's personal positions from the expected policy outcomes given each candidate's election, a more interesting comparison is between the personal positions and the expected policy outcomes given respondents' perception of the relative influence of the governor over policy making. For this, we look at the mean perceived positions for each candidate by asking the standard ideological placement question. The Ohio survey asked respondents, "Who has more

⁹The ideological placement question on the Texas survey was: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Please think of a seven-point scale in which the political views that people might hold range from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. On this scale, a score of one means extremely liberal, a score of seven means extremely conservative, and a score of four means exactly in the middle."

¹⁰"Generally speaking, where on this scale would you place the policies that you think the Texas state government will enact if George Bush (Garry Mauro) wins the gubernatorial election?"

influence over public policy, the governor or the state legislature?"¹¹ Among respondents who believe the governor is more influential, the mean placement of Lee Fisher was 3.45; of his government, 3.81. But among respondents who believe the legislature is more influential, Lee Fisher's mean placement was 3.71 with his government at 4.34. In other words, respondents see a smaller difference between the candidate and a government under him if they believe the governor is more influential in policymaking. The differences in personal position and government position for Bob Taft are much smaller since most respondents believed that Taft's party would also control the legislature.

The specter of divided government also weighs heavily in respondents' estimates of a gubernatorial candidate's ability to enact his preferred policies. For respondents who expected that the Republicans would control the state legislature after the election, the mean placement of Democrat Lee Fisher was 3.6, while his government was at 4.1. But respondents who expected a Democratic state legislature saw a much smaller difference: Fisher's mean personal position was 4.85 with his government at 4.52, suggesting that a Democratic state legislature would pull Fisher to the left. A similar pattern emerges for placement of Republican Bob Taft. People who expect a Republican assembly see a .14 difference between Taft's personal position and the position of a government led by him. For people who expect a Democratic assembly, the difference between Taft and his government is .43.

Similar, albeit weaker, patterns emerge in Texas when we examine the effects of the perceptions of the governor's influence and the chances of divided government separately.¹² For Bush, the difference between the mean personal position and the mean expected policy for people who believe that the governor is the most influential policy actor is .13 (4.99 – 4.86), while the difference who believe that some other actor is more influential is .10 (4.97 – 4.87). For Mauro, the respective differences are –.06 (3.53 – 3.59) and –.24 (3.51 – 3.75). Perceptions of the governor's influence appear to affect respondents' relative positioning of Mauro, but not Bush.

The results for divided government are much more consistent with the Ohio results. Among respondents who expected a Republican lieutenant governor, there was only a .02 point difference between mean placements of Bush's personal ideological position and the expected ideological positions of the policies of a Bush government (4.99 – 4.97), but that difference increased to .23 points (5.07 – 4.84) among respondents who expected John Sharp, the Democrat, to become lieutenant governor. A similar pattern holds for perceptions of Garry Mauro's ideological positions. There was a -.12 point (3.67 – 3.79) difference between

¹¹In the post-election survey, we added "... or are they equally influential?" In the pre-election survey, 20 percent of respondents volunteered such a response.

¹²For influence, we asked respondents, "In Texas state government, whom do you think has the most influence over public policy, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, or the state legislature?" Respondents were given the options of equal influence for the three combinations of two of the three actors and all having equal influence. Most respondents chose only one of these actors as most influential. To ascertain expectations about the likelihood of divided government after the election, we were not able to ask about the state legislature, but instead asked, "Who do you think will win the Lieutenant Governor's election?" Rick Perry, the Republican or John Sharp, the Democrat.

Mauro’s mean personal ideological placement and the mean placement of government policies under a Mauro administration, among respondents who believed that Sharp would be lieutenant governor, but for respondents who expected Rick Perry, the Republican, to become lieutenant governor, that difference increases to -.22 points (3.39 – 3.61).

These results suggest that voters do perceive the relative ideological positions and expected policies of the candidates in reasonable ways, given their beliefs about the influence of actors within government and their expectations about unified or divided control of government. These findings are only the preliminary to the main event: whether and how these factors influence voters’ behavior on election day.

4 A Policy Expectations Model of Vote Choice

The real test of the impact of policy expectations in elections comes in a multivariate model of vote choice. In each state, we construct a binary model of vote choice.¹³ The dependent variable is coded 1 if the voter voted for the Republican candidate and 0 if she voted Democratic. Independent variables include party identification, race, evaluation of the incumbent governor (in Ohio, Republican George Voinovich), and terms to capture the candidate distance and policy expectations. The candidate distance measure is the difference in the squared distances between the voter and each candidate. The government distance measure is the difference in the squared distances between the voter and the expected position of the government of each candidate. As each variable increases in value, the voter is relatively closer to Republican Bob Taft.

The first column of Table 2 reports the results from the basic model of vote choice. The candidate distance and government distance variables are both statistically significant, but the coefficient on the government distance variable is nearly twice that of candidate distance. This finding replicates our results for the 1996 presidential election: both candidate distance and government distance predict vote choice, but government distance outperforms candidate distance.

[Table 2 about here]

The results of the models testing the second set of hypotheses provided some support for those arguments, but there were also some odd results. The variable “governor influential” is coded as 1 if the respondent perceives the governor as more influential than the state legislature in policymaking, -1 if the reverse is true, and 0 if the respondent believes both branches or equally influential or does not have an opinion. Looking just at results for the interaction between influence and voters’ proximities to the candidates’ personal ideological positions and expected policy outcomes (column 2 of Table 2), there are significant main effects for proximity to expected policies and interactive effects for expected policy and the

¹³We also estimated the model using multinomial logit with abstention as a choice to determine if any of our substantive conclusions would be affected by selecting only voters. None of the results differed when we included abstention. We report only the binary probit results to save space in the tables.

governor’s influence. In this case, policy expectations have a greater effect upon voting behavior when the governor is seen as more influential than the legislature.

When we turn to a similar model, but with the interaction between ideological proximities and expectations about divided/unified government (column 3 of Table 2), we again see significant main and interaction effects for proximity to expected policy outcomes, but in this case, the interaction, contrary to our expectations, is actually *stronger* when the respondent expects unified control.¹⁴ “Opposition legislature” is coded as 1 if the respondent expects the Democrats to control the state house, -1 if she expects the Republicans to control the state house, and 0 if the respondent does not know which party will control the legislature. In this model, candidate distance is not significant while government distance is, but the effect of government distance on the vote is reduced rather than raised when a voter expects an opposition legislature. The main effect for opposition legislature is significant and indicates that voters who expected a Democratic legislature in the pre-election survey are more likely to have voted Republican for governor, and vice-versa. These results provide some compelling support for the argument that voters’ use of ideological positions is contingent upon the beliefs about the division of powers in government, but the counter-intuitive result for divided government leaves us with some questions as we move to our third hypothesis of interest. Neither set of interactions is an improvement over the baseline model as measured by a likelihood ratio test.

To assess out hypotheses about the relationship between these variables and the vote, we construct a three-way interaction. The variable “governor influential*opposition legislature” assumes a value of 1 when the governor is influential and the legislature is held by the opposition (Democrats) or when the governor is not influential and the legislature is copartisan. The variable assumes a value of -1 if the legislature is more influential and the Democrats hold it or if the Republicans hold a weak legislature. We interact this variable with both candidate distance and government distance.

The results of the model for the third hypothesis strongly support our expectations (column 4 of Table 2). In this model, the main effects of both candidate and government distance are statistically significant, with expected policy outcomes having a greater effect upon vote than proximity to the candidates’ ideological positions. In this case, the interaction on policy expectations is not significant, while the interaction with candidate distance is — but in the wrong direction. Because untangling the effects of the interactions is not straightforward from the table, we present the full effects in Table 3. Here we see that the basic candidate and government distance measures (the main effects from the previous table) are both significant, with government distance again carrying greater weight than candidate distance. The interaction of candidate distance is significant when an influential governor presides over a unified government or when a relatively weaker governor presides over divided government. In the first case, a governor is likely to be able to enact his will, thus his personal position matters most. In the second case, voters appear to cast expressive votes since the governor’s position is either largely irrelevant or since voters may have great

¹⁴We were so surprised by this result, that we went back to our 1996 data, ran a similar model, and found a similar result. The result is also supported, though not as conclusively, in the Texas data.

uncertainty about expected policy outcomes. Government distance is significant when a strong governor sits over a divided government or when a weaker governor presides over a unified government. In the first case, the likely conflict between a strong governor and an opposition legislature leads voters to care about casting an instrumental vote based on policy expectations. In the second case, a weak governor sitting with a friendly legislature compels voters to act on policy expectations since the governor may be pulled away from his preferred policies by his own party in the legislature.

[Table 3 about here]

One concern that may arise from the model is the possibility that our results are due to projection rather than to a real effect of policy expectations on vote choice. Projection bias occurs when a voter places her favorite candidate closest to her, thereby appearing as though she is voting for the closest candidate when in fact she is simply placing closest to her the candidate she voted for due to other considerations. Previous research has shown a projection bias in measures of issue proximity that use a voter's placement of the candidates instead of an objective measure such as the mean placement of the candidate (Page and Jones 1972). We cannot include in the model objective measures for both the candidate positions and government positions since the measures are perfectly collinear: a voter's distance from one fixed point on a scale predetermines her distance from another fixed point on the same scale. We did, however, use an objective placement of either the candidates or the governments. Regardless of whether government distance is measured subjectively or objectively, it outperforms candidate distance in every model and is always statistically significant. Projection is not driving the results.

Furthermore, we do not expect that projection is biasing the placements of the government under each candidate since these questions are asked *after* the questions about the candidates' personal positions. We expect that the first question about each candidate — the candidates' own position — will pick up projection while the second question — the government under the candidate — will be a more forthright response. If true, then our model will actually be biased in favor of supporting the candidate distance measure over the government distance measure.

We also tested the government distance measure for projection bias by regressing the respondent's feeling thermometer ratings of each candidate on the respondent's distance from the candidate and distance from the government under each candidate, along with control variables for party identification and race. While candidate distance is statistically significant as a predictor of feeling thermometer rating, government distance is not. If government distance were a result of projection, we would expect it to predict feeling thermometer rating. Apparently, a voter's distance from a candidate in ideological space is closely related to the voter's thermometer rating of the candidate. Yet a voter's policy expectations of the candidate does not predict the voter's feeling thermometer evaluation.

The election in Texas provides a more difficult test of the Ohio results. As noted before, the relationships between the primary actors in Texas politics is not transparent. For this reason, it may be difficult for voters to use expectations about the institutional structure to

cast a vote because a single actor’s effect upon policy is not obvious. A second difficulty for the 1998 election is that, with the popular Gov. Bush an all-but-certain winner — Bush won the election with 69% of the vote, and held a two-party split of 75-25 among respondents in our survey — both lieutenant governor candidates were emphasizing how well they would work with Bush. While such statements would normally be very credible coming from the Republican candidate, in this case Rick Perry, voters could also attach some credibility to John Sharp’s, the Democratic candidate, statements on this, as Sharp was not even willing to endorse Mauro.

The results from the voting model in Texas are not as strongly supportive of our hypothesis as the Ohio results. Using just the baseline model without any interactions for policy influence or government control, we see that proximity to candidates’ positions is significantly related to vote, while expected policy outcomes do not have any significant effect upon vote choice (Table 4). We also examine two models that include these interactions: one where heteroskedasticity is controlled for using White’s heteroskedastic standard errors (column 2) and one where the heteroskedastic component is modeled directly (column 3).¹⁵ Substantively, the results of both models are similar. Proximity to the expected outcome of government policy given each candidates’ election is not statistically significant, but candidate distance is. The interaction for the voters’ proximity to candidates’ personal positions has a very small effect upon vote choice, while the effect of the interaction of institutional features and expected outcomes depends upon how the heteroskedasticity is addressed.

[Table 4 about here]

Because of the significant increase in model fit for the third model above the second, our interpretation of the results comes from this model. In Table 5, we display the coefficients and standard errors for the total effects of candidate and governmental outcome variables for respondents with different beliefs about the institutional power relations and expectations for who will win the lieutenant governor’s race. As we can see, candidate proximities had significant effects for voters who did not have any firm beliefs about the interaction of power and occupant or who believed that an influential governor would have a sympathetic lieutenant governor or that a non-influential governor would have to share power with an opposition lieutenant governor. By contrast, voters who believed that an influential governor would face an opposition lieutenant governor or a non-influential governor would be able to work with a sympathetic, if more powerful, lieutenant governor were more concerned with expected policy outcomes in their vote choice.

While none of the policy variables had a truly large effect upon the probability of voting for Bush — over two-thirds of the respondents had predicted probabilities of voting for Bush greater than .75 — the effect of proximities to expected policies for these voters is somewhat substantial, a .13 difference in the probability of voting for Bush. Even the highly significant effect of retrospective evaluations led to a difference of just .24 (.99 – .75) in the probability of voting for Bush among voters with these same beliefs about likely institutional arrangements.

¹⁵The heteroskedastic component is specified $\exp(Z, \cdot)$. See Greene (1993) for more details.

[Table 5 about here]

There are a few reasons that might explain why the results from Texas, while in the hypothesized direction, are not as strong as those from Ohio. First, the greater complexity of the governmental structure in Texas may make it more difficult for voters to determine how well actors are able to influence public policy. To the extent that this difficulty manifests itself only through inaccuracy, this might not be too much of a problem. To the extent, however, that this difficulty leads to greater uncertainty, then we should expect weaker effects. Second, the 1998 Texas governor's race provides a very difficult test of our hypothesis because, as mentioned above, both lieutenant governor candidates made a point of saying how well they could work with the popular incumbent governor. Sharp did not even endorse his own party's gubernatorial candidate. Under these circumstances, the modal beliefs that the governor is more influential than the lieutenant governor are not as likely to produce a sense of great competition between the governor and an opposition lieutenant governor. Third, the bipartisan nature of the legislature might it difficult for voters to have much sense of how the legislature, sympathetic or opposed, will work with the governor — or they may simply believe that policy will remain fairly stable no matter which candidate is elected. As a consequence, it might make sense for voters to give greater consideration to the gubernatorial candidates' relative policy positions than expected policy outcomes. Finally, Bush's overwhelming job approval rating among most voters may have led retrospective evaluations to dominate any marginal effects of issues in this campaign, such that any differences were more a matter of having a high or higher probability of voting for Bush than of voting for Bush or Mauro.

5 Implications of the Results

Our results from the 1998 Ohio and Texas gubernatorial elections replicate our results from the 1996 U.S. presidential election. Taken together, these results strongly suggest that policy expectations are an important component of individual voter choice. Our results also have important implications for studies directional voting and the origins of divided government.

5.1 Policy Expectations and Directional Voting

Much controversy has appeared in the political science literature over the directional theory of voting and its explanatory power in vote choice models relative to that of the standard candidate proximity model (Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989). The controversy focuses on an illustration such as the following. Suppose a voter is located at 3 on a seven-point ideology scale, that a liberal candidate is located at 1 and a moderate candidate at 4. According to a candidate proximity model, the voter should vote for the moderate candidate since she is closer. According to directional theory, the voter should vote for the liberal candidate since they are on the same side of a neutral point. Further revisions of the theory hold that a voter follows this logic until a candidate falls outside of a “region of acceptability.”

One problem with the directional theory of voting has been the rather arbitrary nature of the neutral point and the region of acceptability. The neutral point may be the center of a policy or ideological scale. In most U.S. elections, the status quo is rather moderate, so the neutral point may be the current status quo. Often issue questions in the American National Election Study will make explicit that the midpoint of the scale is the status quo, such as with questions about whether certain spending programs should be increased a lot (7) or decreased a lot (1) relative to a midpoint of “stay the same.”

If the neutral point in directional voting is somewhere close to the status quo, then directional voting is observationally equivalent to voting based on policy expectations. Suppose we take the status quo or the position of the legislature as roughly equal to the midpoint of the policy scale, at, in the previous example, 4 on a seven-point scale. Then a voter at 3 may choose a candidate at 1 rather than a candidate at 4 since the voter believes that the candidate at 1 will be able to move policy only to 3 and no further, which is the voters ideal point. The candidate at 4, however, will keep policy at 4, thus representing a policy expectation that is farther from the voter than the policy expectation associated with the candidate at 1. The voter may appear to be voting directionally, but she is actually voting based on policy expectations. A voter may prefer an extremist on her side of an issue not for directional reasons, but because she believes the extremist can move policy, but only so far. Directional voting is then a variant of proximity-based policy expectations voting when the status quo is “sticky.”

In the policy expectations voting model in Ohio, we also included a directional voting term according to two specifications. In the first specification, we included the directional distance from the respondent to each candidate, $(\text{voter's position} - \text{midpoint}) * (\text{candidate's position} - \text{midpoint})$. Neither directional term appeared statistically significant when we controlled for policy expectations distance. We also constructed a single directional term by subtracting the directional distance to Fisher from the directional distance to Taft. This term also did not reach statistical significance when we controlled for policy expectations.

5.2 The Origins of Divided Government

That voters cast their votes based on policy expectations rather than candidate positions is one of the cornerstones of Fiorina’s theory of divided government. This conception of voters as hyper-rational engineers who attempt to create optimal policy outcomes using the separation of powers has been a common criticism of Fiorina’s model. Our results in one presidential election and two gubernatorial elections suggest that voters do recognize that policy outcomes and the personal positions of the candidates are likely to differ. In a gubernatorial election, a voter may prefer a governor of one party and a legislature of another if the policy output of such a government is closest to what the voter wants.

Divided government may also become institutionalized even if such an outcome is not an intentional act of voters. When a slightly conservative legislature is elected, a moderate voter may favor the policy outcome produced by a liberal governor over that produced by a slightly conservative governor. This voter does not prefer divided government; in fact, her ideal government is a government that is unified with both branches advocating her

ideal point. But given the policy position of the legislature, she chooses an executive who is not necessarily the candidate closest to her ideal point. Instead, she chooses the candidate whose policy position, combined with that of the legislature, will produce optimal outcomes.

Previous studies of the origins of divided government have constructed the policy outcomes voters should expect from each combination of partisan control of the presidency and Congress (Alvarez and Schousen 1993) (Born 1994). As we have shown, voters' expectations about government policy vary. Constructing policy expectations using the midpoints of the positions of the Republican and Democratic parties in a national election may mis-represent the expectations of voters. We take a more direct approach to estimating the impact of policy expectations on vote choice by asking voters to form their own expectations, which we then show to have a significant effect on voter choice in elections in two very different states.

6 Conclusion

For decades political scientists have tested models of issue-oriented voting that are based on candidate positions. In theory, the expected policy outcomes from each candidate should matter more to rational voters than the personal positions of the candidates. Our research on the 1996 U.S. presidential election replicated in two gubernatorial elections in 1998 may be the first to test a true Downsian model of voting, and the policy expectations theory performs remarkably well. Voters cast instrumental rather than expressive votes in most cases. But in some cases where voters perceive the executive as weak and confronted by an opposition legislature or lieutenant, voters appear to cast expressive votes.

Overall, we believe that there are several conclusions to draw from our results. First, across all specifications, there is strong support for the importance of expected policies in voters' decision-making. Second, we think that the evidence for our third hypothesis provides strong support for our third hypothesis over the other two hypotheses. The results of the model taking both influence and control into consideration are consistent with our expectations and provide a theoretically "cleaner" interpretation of voter behavior than the other two. Also, the model using the three-way interactions is the only one of the interaction models that provides a statistically significant improvement in fit over the baseline model. Obviously, this model will require further replication of the findings, part of which will occur below, but the results do indicate that we need to take voters' information and beliefs about governmental arrangements into consideration when examining their decision-making. These beliefs comprise both evaluations of the influence of the governor in policymaking *and* the likelihood that the governor will face an opposition legislature.

The relative importance of expressive and instrumental voting can be thought of in relationship to a continuum of executive influence over policy combined with unified or divided government. The weakest executive – at the far left of the scale – is one whose office has little influence over policy and who faces an opposition legislature. In this case voters cast expressive votes for governor. A slightly stronger executive is one whose office is weak but who faces a copartisan legislature. In this case voters may believe the governor can accom-

plish some things, thus they vote based on policy expectations. Stronger still is a governor whose office is perceived as important for state policy but who faces an opposition legislature. This the classic case for instrumental voting where policy expectations more than candidate distance determine the vote. Finally, the strongest governor is one whose office is perceived to have influence over policy and who faces a copartisan legislature. In this case the governor is most likely to be able to enact most of his policies, and voters therefore evaluate the candidates' positions more than policy expectations since the candidates' positions are likely to become policy. The interaction of voters' perceptions of the strength of the governorship and their beliefs about the partisan composition of the legislature determine in part how they vote.

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Table 1: Voter and Candidate Placements

	Ohio		Texas
	October Survey	November Survey	
Self-Placement	5.52 (2.25) 380	5.48 (2.30) 283	4.53 (1.41) 956
Bob Taft (Rep.)/ George Bush	6.45 (2.02) 181	6.46 (2.00) 230	4.98 (1.51) 895
Gov't with Taft/ Gov't with Bush	6.22* (1.93) 223	6.31* (1.85) 228	4.87* (1.30) 797
Lee Fisher (Dem.)/ Garry Mauro	3.99 (2.14) 218	3.65 (2.15) 226	3.52 (1.55) 574
Gov't with Fisher Gov't with Mauro	4.23* (2.02) 233	4.20* (2.19) 223	3.69* (1.43) 599

Source: 1998 Ohio Political Survey and October 1998 Texas Poll. Entries are means with standard deviations in parentheses and number of cases below. Ohio placements based upon a nine-point scale. Texas placements based upon a seven-point scale. See text for more information about the questions. * indicates difference between candidate personal position and government of candidate statistically significant, $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Table 2: A Downsian Model of the 1998 Gubernatorial Vote in Ohio

Independent Variables	Coefficient (S. E.)	Coefficient (S. E.)	Coefficient (S. E.)	Coefficient (S. E.)
Constant	-2.328*	-2.516*	-2.475*	-2.068*
	(.993)	(1.035)	(1.143)	(1.122)
Party ID (7-point)	.234*	.280*	.282*	.185*
	(.096)	(.109)	(.089)	(.094)
Evaluation of Voinovich	.013*	.013*	.011	.013*
	(.008)	(.008)	(.008)	(.008)
White	.744	.598	.986	.727
	(.776)	(.785)	(.862)	(.906)
Candidate Distance	.022*	.005	.017	.036*
	(.012)	(.014)	(.014)	(.015)
Government Distance	.039*	.075*	.035*	.048*
	(.018)	(.020)	(.015)	(.018)
Governor Influential	–	-.277	–	–
		(.186)		
Candidate Dist.*Gov. Inf.	–	-.022	–	–
		(.014)		
Government Dist.*Gov. Inf.	–	.054*	–	–
		(.019)		
Expect Opposition Legislature	–	–	.386*	–
			(.199)	
Candidate Dist.*Oppos. Leg.	–	–	.018	–
			(.016)	
Government Dist.*Oppos. Leg.	–	–	-.046*	–
			(.018)	
Gov. Infl.*Opposition Leg.	–	–	–	-.398*
				(.195)
Candidate Dist.*Inf*Oppos.	–	–	–	-.050*
				(.017)
Government Dist.*Inf*Oppos.	–	–	–	.023
				(.020)
Number of Cases	134	134	134	134
χ^2	97.48	103.44	104.56	108.24
Pseudo- R^2	.53	.57	.57	.59

Note: Dependent variable is 1=Taft (Rep), 0=Fisher(Dem).

Source: The Ohio Political Survey, 1998. Entries are maximum likelihood (probit) estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * indicates $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Table 3: Effects of Ideological Distance by Perceived Influence of Governor and Predicted Control of Legislature

Independent Variables	Coeff. (S. E.)	Pr(Taft) $\mu - \sigma$	Pr(Taft) $\mu + \sigma$
Candidate Distance	.0357* (.0146)	.57	.94
Government Distance	.0484* (.0184)	.32	.96
Candidate Distance with strong gov. + opposition leg. or weak gov. + copartisan leg.	-.0138 (.0263)	.78	.57
Government Distance with strong gov. + opposition leg. or weak gov. + copartisan leg.	.0715* (.0260)	.13	.98
Candidate Distance weak gov. + opposition leg. or strong gov. + copartisan leg.	.0852* (.0263)	.07	1.00
Government Distance weak gov. + opposition leg. or strong gov. + copartisan leg.	.0253 (.0260)	.58	.91

Source: The Ohio Political Survey, 1998, pre- and post-election survey. Entries in the first column are maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors in parentheses for the effects of policy distance. Entries in the second and third columns are predicted probabilities given a 1 standard deviation change from the mean in the independent variable. * indicates $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Table 4: A Downsian Model of the 1998 Gubernatorial Vote in Texas

Independent Variables	Coefficient (S. E.)	Coefficient (S. E.)	Coefficient (S. E.)
Expected Value			
Constant	-2.88* (0.72)	-2.77* (0.70)	-3.29* (0.91)
Democrat	-1.25* (0.24)	-1.41* (0.25)	-1.67* (0.28)
Republican	1.13* (0.36)	1.03* (0.37)	1.22* (0.51)
Bush Job Approval	1.39* (0.23)	1.41* (0.23)	1.63* (0.31)
Black	0.15 (0.24)	0.17 (0.26)	0.23 (0.31)
Hispanic	-0.95* (0.43)	-1.19* (0.42)	-1.70* (0.50)
Candidate Distance	0.043* (0.024)	0.038* (0.020)	0.062* (0.032)
Government Distance	-0.005 (0.025)	0.039 (0.027)	0.053 (0.036)
Control*Influence	-	-0.010 (0.13)	-0.126 (0.151)
Candidate Dist.*Cont*Inf	-	-0.004 (0.021)	-0.026 (0.035)
Government Dist.*Cont*Inf	-	0.078* (0.029)	0.062* (0.037)
Variance			
Candidate Distance	-	-	-0.046* (0.016)
Number of Cases	377	377	377
χ^2	281.00	290.60	298.00
Pseudo- R^2	.66	.69	.70

Note: Dependent variable is 1=Bush (Rep), 0=Mauro (Dem). Source: October 1998 Texas Poll. Entries are maximum likelihood (probit) estimates with standard errors in parentheses. For all models, heteroskedastic-consistent standard errors are used. * indicates $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Table 5: Effects of Ideological Distance by Institutional Arrangement — Texas 1998

Independent Variables	Coeff. (S. E.)	Prob(Bush) $\mu - \sigma$	Prob(Bush) $\mu + \sigma$
Candidate Distance	0.062* (0.032)	.999	.940
Government Distance	0.053 (0.036)	.998	.961
Candidate Distance with strong gov. + opposition lgov. or weak gov. + copartisan lgov.	0.035 (0.047)	.996	.966
Government Distance with strong gov. + opposition lgov. or weak gov. + copartisan lgov.	0.115* (0.060)	.999	.864
Candidate Distance with weak gov. + opposition lgov. or strong gov. + copartisan lgov.	0.088* (0.047)	.999	.900
Government Distance with weak gov. + opposition lgov. or strong gov. + copartisan lgov.	-0.009 (0.042)	.987	.992

Source: October 1998 Texas Poll. Entries in the first column are maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors in parentheses for the effects of policy distance. Entries in the second and third columns are predicted probabilities given a 1 standard deviation change from the mean in the independent variable. * indicates $p < .05$, one-tailed.