

*Running Ahead or Falling Behind:*

*The Coattail Effect  
And  
Divided Government*

Research Project  
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## Abstract

In review of the 2000 and 2004 election results, it is abundantly clear that divided government is not a constant, and possibly not mandate of the voting public. Given the recent rise of unified government, it seems that there are several topics in Political Science that should be reconsidered to determine their applicability to this phenomenon and their validity in explaining its continued value as useful research. Understanding this point, the coattail effect and divided government can easily produce a number of questions to utilize for research; however, there are some specific issues to review that relate to the following questions: What has changed about American politics and government that would increase the frequency of unified government? Why has the presence of the coattail effect dwindled in recent years and what is the cause of the decline? Clearly, the study of the coattail effect and divided government may easily produce a great variety of research questions and findings. For this reason, an examination of these questions and the validity of the associated predominant variables are necessary in a time where changes have occurred in relation to culture and politics.

Understanding that there are a number of questions still lingering about this area of political study, the following research design focuses on the following question: Do factors like incumbency and the status of the government, as either unified or divided, play a role in decreasing the frequency of the presidential coattail effect? Considering this question, the author of the following research design hypothesizes that within presidential-congressional elections the issue of incumbency and unified government combined will most affect the pulling power of a presidential candidate to win seats for his fellow congressional candidates. Although other variables like the length of time the president's party has held control of the House prior to the election, presence of incumbents, status of government, and partisan affiliation may affect the strength of the coattail effect, it is the author's belief that the presence of an incumbent combined with the appearance of unified government will most increase the length of the president's coattails in on-year elections. Utilizing the wealth of available information on this topic, this research work presents a statistical model that compares and contrasts the significance of the previously mentioned variables in reference to the election outcomes from the 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections, which after its future application may produce the evidence needed to illustrate a strong connection between presidential incumbency and unified government in increasing the strength of the coattail effect.

In its current conference submission form, this paper represents a research design, which is in the process of being implemented to become a Master's thesis.

The study of presidential and congressional elections can be approached in a variety of ways employing a multitude of views and perceptions. With little study, one can easily find research pertaining to issues that both explain and analyze election outcomes, campaigning strategies, constituent vote choices, and even institutional frameworks affecting the campaigns and election process. One particular issue in this area of study relates to what is commonly known as the “coattail effect”, which is the “number of candidates of the party that wins the presidency [that] are swept into office on the president’s coattails” (Erikson and Wright 72). Over time the frequency of this occurrence has varied to the point that some scholars argue over its validity as a theory. Nevertheless, it will be the focus of this work to examine the previous literature regarding the frequency of the coattail effect in presidential and congressional elections to develop a process by which to study the changes developing in this area of political study.

It has been noted that the “stronger the coattail effect in the preceding [presidential] election, the greater the loss of seats” from the president’s party during the midterm election (Erikson and Wright 72). Although this and the concept of a divided government, where the presidency and Congress are held by opposite parties, held true as pseudo-standards in early political study, this is no longer the case. For this reason, one must obviously seek to find out what dynamics are at play in changing what had been a long-held belief in the study of Political Science. Particularly, one should ask the following questions: What has changed about American politics and government that would create more periods of unified government? Why has the occurrence of the presidential coattail effect dwindled in recent years? Clearly, there are a number of questions and a number of answers to be found in relation to this issue; however, it is my goal to pull together a research proposal to seek out these answers to aid others in coming to a conclusion.

Specifically, the focus of this essay will be to provide a framework to answer the following question: What factors play a role in either increasing or decreasing the frequency of the presidential coattail effect, and to what degree do these factors have an effect on the results of the midterm congressional elections? Although it is quite clear that a definitive answer will not be reached in this short literature review, the means and methods of previous scholars will be examined and scrutinized so that any further work on this subject may be well founded and beneficial to the understanding of the coattail effect.

### An Introduction of the Study of the Coattail Effect

Throughout the process of reviewing much of the literature relating to the coattail effect, several consistencies were found in relation to particular patterns of study and research model productions. As in many small research fields, it is not uncommon to see one research note building upon the work of another; this is certainly the case in regards to the study of coattails. In addition to the more traditional style articles collected within this work, I have included a number of articles that are entirely original in their study of this political phenomenon that provide alternative views of this research area, which include research dealing with specific kinds of variables affecting the strength of coattails or particular election cycles that were noted for either the lack or abundance of coattail strength. Even with peculiar approaches to the coattail effect included in this review, four methods of studying this issue emerge in the literature: time-focused studies, specific variable studies, aggregate data studies, and survey-focused studies.

Each category presents a method of study that pertains to some aspect of research, which in some respects is quite significant and in others quite minimal. The following sections will review and discuss the articles relating to these categories to illustrate their contributions to the study of the coattail effect.

### *Aggregate Data Studies*

Aggregate data studies, in relation to the study of coattails, tend to focus on the analysis of data pertaining to collective election results. Moreover, aggregate data studies often present collective data representing local, state, and national election outcomes, which aid researchers in developing a collective understanding of the role of the public in shaping the coattail effect. The following three articles all serve as good examples of studies making use of statistical data to illustrate the functions and effects of coattails in presidential-congressional elections.

In 1952, one of the first efforts to study the effects of presidential coattails was written by Malcolm Moos. His book, Politics, Presidents, and Coattails easily serves as one of the best examples of what an aggregate data study would encompass due to its direct approach of measuring the margin of difference existing between the presidential and congressional vote. Particularly, Moos studied elections taking place in the period of 1896 to 1950; however, the bulk of his work is devoted to his findings in relation to the 1938 to 1950 election cycles (9). In studying these elections, Moos measured coattail voting as “the ratio of the vote received by a presidential candidate to the vote received by congressional candidates of his party”, which studies the implications of straight-ticket voting (Calvert and Ferejohn 409). Upon reviewing results from national elections, Moos reported that coattails extend to the President in the same way that they extend to Members of Congress (Press 329). Particularly, the author suggests that the perception of leadership qualities pertaining to a presidential candidate can produce times when the coattail-riding would be reversed, which would put the concept of leadership into a more tenuous position in the study of coattails (Moos 155). Specifically, the reversal of coattails relates to a situation where the presidential candidate rides into office on the coattails of his fellow congressional candidates, who are either more popular or are in a greater position to boost the electoral success of their party members (Moos 155). Ultimately, however, Moos concluded that four factors most affected “coattail influence on congressional elections”, which were related to policy differences between presidential and congressional candidates, personality differences between presidential and congressional candidates, local factional structures, and the total turnout of vote (82). In short, Moos suggests that the individual strength of a candidate will make the most difference to voters, which can provide straight-ticket voting to benefit the effects of coattails; however, as Moos notes, this can be a fickle measure of support (117).

Earlier in his research, James Campbell produced an article known as “Predicting Seat Gains from Presidential Coattails” in which the author carefully spells out the factors affecting “the partisan distribution of seats in the House of Representatives” (165). Although his study does share the traits of those found in the “time-focused” study area due to inclusion of three separate time tables for examination (1944-1980, 1900-1940, and 1900-1980), Campbell’s work is primarily an aggregate data study because of his assessment of how to approach understanding the change in the number of seats held by the presidential party versus the traditional study method of examining the proportion of seats gained or lost in an election period (166). Utilizing this method, the author has built upon the work of Randall Calvert and John Ferejohn, who tested

a “direct model of coattail effects”, by looking at the percentage of the two-party vote won by the presidential candidate and “the proportion of the House held by presidential candidate’s party prior to the election” (Campbell 166). Moreover, Campbell sought to determine the differences in the proportion of the House held by the presidential candidate’s party both before and after the 1964 election, and also to distinguish between elections before and after the New Deal (168-169). Although Campbell’s study is quite thorough in filling in the gaps in research left by the Calvert and Ferejohn study, the author admits that his results may be skewed by the sensitivity of the 1944-1980 election series equation and also by the utter simplicity of his equation formats, which he asserts, very early in his article, makes his model so “highly predictive” (174). Nevertheless, Campbell’s work did produce significant results in that his model was able to predict the “net change of seats in the House of Representatives in presidential elections”, while also showing that “despite [a] decline [in the effect of coattails], they remain quite strong” (180-181). Finally, the author was able to demonstrate to what degree the number of seats held by the presidential candidate’s party prior to the election affects the net gain or loss of seats, which, as Campbell stresses, aids in producing a more accurate indicator of coattails coupled with a review of the incumbency advantage and other significant events (181-182).

In the process of studying the effects of presidential coattail voting, one cannot ignore the related results of midterm elections. For this reason, James Campbell’s article “The Presidential Surge and its Midterm Decline in Congressional Elections, 1868-1988” examines the dynamics of the surge and decline theory in relation to concept that “a party’s presidential vote positively affects the change in its share of votes and seats in presidential election years and negatively affects the change in its shares of votes and seats in the following midterm elections” (478). To illustrate these effects, the author examined 61 congressional election years, which consisted of 31 presidential election cycles and 30 midterm elections (Campbell 478). Next, Campbell tested the data against a range of variables, which included the following: “the two-party division of the popular presidential vote”, type of election, interactions between the type of election, midterm or on-year, and the party division of the vote, party’s share of previously held seats, the New Deal, partisan eras, and the midterm penalty effect (479-481). After reviewing the results of his aggregate study, the author found that the surge and decline theory of the coattail effect has “exerted a substantial influence on congressional vote and seat change” (Campbell 482). Although the study attempted to determine what, if any, effect the midterm penalty variable had on vote and seat change, Campbell suggested that this finding was only a result of the surge of votes in the presidential election years. Perhaps, a better explanation may exist regarding the factors affecting the incidence of a midterm penalty. At any rate, the author does provide valid proof regarding the continued existence of the coattail theory of surge and decline. Specifically, he notes that the surface significance of coattails has waned in recent years, but the effects of surge and decline can still be found in the study of multivariate analyses (Campbell 484). Moreover, Campbell asserts that factors including party dealignment, the incumbency effect, the wasting of coattails and the lack of quality challengers all play a role in the diminished appearance of the coattail effect (485).

In a similar sort of study, Charles Press’ article “Presidential Coattails and Party Cohesion” focuses on how party responsibility relates to coattails. In order to develop a connection between these two concepts, Press discusses party responsibility in terms of party control and policy agreement (320). Although the requirements for this concept are easily stated,

the author makes it implicitly clear that neither asset is easily obtained or maintained over the course of a presidency or an election cycle (Press 320). With this understood, Press makes the argument that institutional factors separating the executive and legislative branches of government create a dynamic where a member of Congress must actively decide if supporting a presidential candidate will increase his or her own chances of gaining a seat, which would result in an instance of straight-ticket voting (321). To aid in the study of this concept, Press determined that only those House members in competitive districts would be included in his study, which would bridge the gap between coattails and party cohesion; however, the exclusion of any seats in this study would be found problematic by political scholars like Mayhew and Fenno, who would suggest that all Members of Congress would easily assert that no seat is ever safe, even when deeply steeped in incumbency (321-322). At any rate, Press utilizes aggregate data to measure national and sectional shifts in party strength and cohesion, which he suggests will affect the power of the coattail effect (324). Looking at data from 1922 to 1962, Press found that “in presidential years, the party that won the presidency had percentage increases in well over half the congressional district races”, which typifies the coattail theory results (325). After his initial round of testing, Press returned to the concept of competition within the districts selected for study with a six category model of variance in levels of competition; however, in the forty year period studied, the author found that the level of competition did not reflect any departure from the typical coattail findings (328). Alternately, Press discovered that in situations where responses to presidential appeals were muted, internal realignment was taking place, or a concentration of trends relating to new candidates were taking place, the presidential trends relating to coattails and party cohesion were not found (335). Nevertheless, Press was able to show that coattails can increase party cohesion in the presence of viable presidential leadership.

Clearly, Campbell, Press, and Moos were all able to illustrate some facet of the coattail effect in their respective studies; however, the degree to which these studies were groundbreaking in providing valuable and lasting information to the study of coattails seems uncertain. Nevertheless, each author’s work provides an excellent example of how to approach the study of presidential and congressional elections from an aggregate perspective with regard to the coattail effect.

#### *Survey-Focused Studies*

Survey-focused studies will be examined to show their contribution to the study of the coattail effect. Particularly, survey-focused studies in this field utilize survey data to determine how individual level factors affect coattails in on-year and off-year elections. With this in mind, the following articles each illustrate an example of this sort of study, which is distinct from other sorts of research in that the work presented focuses on the individual contribution to the development of the coattail effect.

Unlike many of the other articles addressed in this review, Warren Miller’s “Presidential Coattails: A Study in Political Myth and Methodology” looks at the study of the coattail effect from the perspective of the “vote-pulling power of presidential candidates” (353). As Miller explains, a presidential candidate’s “pulling power” is a measure of the candidate’s ability to lead his congressional ticket, which introduces the two issues that most often influence the frequency of the coattail effect (353). These two issues pertain to how leadership abilities of the presidential candidates may influence coattails (Miller 353). Particularly, the author posits that a

candidate may be perceived as either weak or strong as a result of his pulling power. According to Miller, weak candidates are perceived as such due to the fact that they trail behind their related congressional ticket (353). Likewise, strong candidates may be perceived as strong because of their ability to lead their congressional ticket (Miller 353). Understanding this simple distinction, Miller goes on to closely examine the importance of the presidential candidate to deliver votes to his congressional party mates, which primarily entails a great deal of insight into what may influence voter behavior and what causes straight-ticket voting (355).

Conducting his research in relation to the 1952 Presidential Election with data from the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan, Miller suggests that in order to determine what influences coattails, one must redefine coattails as the Congress carrying the President rather than the President carrying the Congress (357). For this to be the case, two theoretical conditions must exist regarding what prompts a voter to cast a straight-ticket vote, which will provide the basis for analysis to relate his findings to the coattail effect. Basically, Miller states that voting for president will be motivated by a “reaction to the personal appeal of the candidate” (358). Moreover, voting for a congressional candidate will entail independent choices that could pertain to similar “forces” influencing the presidential vote, but inherently, this vote is based on alternative concerns (Miller 358). To measure the sequence of voting decisions, Miller determined that there are three categories of voters: coattail influenced, non-coattail influenced, and inconclusive, which were determined through pre-election interviews (361). After reviewing his results, Miller found that the majority of voters were influenced by party identification, candidate orientation, and issue orientation (365). Furthermore, the author found that there are different factors that may influence straight-ticket voting, which can cast doubt on the relationship of this vote with the coattail effect.

Placing their focus on the concepts of partisanship and incumbency effects, Herbert Kritzer and Robert Eubank’s article “Presidential Coattails Revisited: Partisanship and Incumbency Effects” looks to explain why the number of seats carried in an election by the President’s party may not be as significant as in the past. Particularly, the authors address “five of the six presidential elections since 1955” using SRC-CPS data to examine the various election survey results (Kritzer and Eubank 615-616). In the course of their study, Kritzer and Eubank attempt to define the coattail effect “as the voter’s choice of candidate for a major office tending to decide his final choices for the minor offices”, which aptly describes the order in which decisions are to be made by the voter for this theory to fit with the political atmosphere (616). Using a basic “two by two” model to illustrate the relationship shared by the presidential and congressional vote by party allowed the authors to evaluate how independent voters responded to each ticket and also to measure how often a party identifier deserted his or her party’s ticket (Kritzer and Eubank 619). Overall, Kritzer and Eubank found that independent voters tending to vote straight-ticket more often than party identifiers; however, the authors were unable to prove that voters moving towards the center of political ideology and away from strong party identification affected the reduction of the coattail effect (619, 624). In addition, the authors discovered that the role of incumbency in congressional and presidential elections “has increased over time” and may be a factor in limiting the strength of the coattail effect, which has become a sort of common conclusion regarding the status of the surge and decline theory of presidential and congressional elections (Kritzer and Eubank 623-624).

Having written a great deal of the literature available regarding the coattail effect, Randall Calvert and John Ferejohn's article "Coattail Voting in Recent Presidential Elections" produces a picture of coattails in decline. Specifically, the authors propose through this research that "partisan affiliation, attitudes toward the presidential candidates, and local forces unique to the congressional race" affect the turnout of the congressional vote in on-year elections (Calvert and Ferejohn 407). In order to study this hypothesis, Calvert and Ferejohn adapted the SRC model to survey data ranging from 1956 to 1980. Looking at the results produced by this study, the authors determined that "the principal source of the decline in the responsiveness of the composition of the House to national-level electoral forces is to be found in this association and not in the decline in the number of competitive seats in the House" (Calvert and Ferejohn 408). Nevertheless, Ferejohn and Calvert assert that the decline in the coattail effect has substantially increased due to an increase in incumbency effects at a local level and the decrease in partisan factors influencing public opinion and vote choice (417). By and large, the authors assert that the movement of voters away from a reliance on publicly influenced voting cues is a key factor in why the coattail has dwindled over time (Calvert and Ferejohn 417).

### *Time-Focused Studies*

Empirical studies in Political Science sometimes include time-series studies that measure shifts in an event in particular spaces of time. Although some of the studies included in this section would fall into this category, the majority of the work included in this area are devoted to the examination of a particular point in time and its contribution to the understanding of the coattail effect.

In his article "Reassessing the Decline of Presidential Coattails: U.S. House Elections from 1952-80", Richard Born analyzes House elections taking place from 1952 to 1980 in order to determine if "the district presidential vote has lost little of its ability to expand or contract House election margins" (60). In order to examine this aspect of the coattail effect, Born suggests that it is important to understand the traditional evidence used to support the disappearance of coattails, which consists of the increase in split-ticket voting, "successful presidential candidates responsible for electing fewer fellow party members to the House," and the decline in effect of coattails in general on congressional election margins (61). Additionally, the author notes the use of survey data in this study area may not be enough to garner a clear picture of the current shape of the coattail effect (Born 61). In addition to the issues mentioned above, Born notes that the incumbency factor has played a role in the changing strength of coattails; however, to determine the current character of coattails, one must combine the study of incumbency with the congressional election margins in comparison to the presidential vote margins across parties (62-66). Applying this method, the author found that both weak candidates and vulnerable party seats decrease the effectiveness of the coattail effect (Born 77). Moreover, the author found that the incumbency advantage allows for the party to control more of the voting process, which can limit the pulling power of a presidential candidate in aiding his congressional ticket (Born 76). Understanding this point, one must wonder what an updated version of Born's model would produce in regards to the incumbency effect on the strength of the coattail effect.



Another example of a time-focused study of the coattail effect is the article “Presidential Coattails in 1972” written by Gary Jacobson. In the context of this article, Jacobson reviews the conventional wisdom stating that “because Richard Nixon’s overwhelming victory in the 1972 presidential election was not accompanied by any significant increase in Republican representation in Congress” his coattails were nearly invisible; however, Jacobson contends that this is not the case (195). The evidence Jacobson presents to support his assertion relates to the study of both aggregate and survey data. Specifically, the author examines “the public’s evaluation of the President [and its relation] to the fate of his party’s congressional candidates”, which employed the study of individual voters and their party identification, presidential and House vote choice, and the relative competitiveness of the voting district (Jacobson 196). After reviewing these variables, the author found that “Nixon had the capacity to help as well as to hurt his fellow Republicans, but structural characteristics of the current political context determined that, in practice, the going up was not worth the coming down” (Jacobson 199). Particularly, Jacobson asserts that issues like awareness of the House candidates and the candidate’s incumbency status created situations where the benefit in actively campaigning for a congressional seat was non-existent, which is clearly an example of wasting coattails (197). Nevertheless, the seats that were viable for Nixon’s party without effort were solidly won by the respective Republican candidates seeking those seats, which also presents an example of voters acting as rational actors in political decision-making. In either case, Jacobson has illustrated that although diminished, coattails are still very much a part of congressional and executive elections.

#### *Specific Variable Studies*

In the course of this final section of this literature review, this section looks at specific variable studies, which pertain to studies that examine a particular facet of the coattail effect. In each of the following articles, the authors attempt to explain the nature of the coattail effect through the assessment of issues like party affiliations, media involvement, and other alternative variables that highlight the way in which seemingly separate political elements connect together to produce one result.

In Robert Erikson and Gerald Wright’s article “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections”, the authors focus on “national forces determining House elections and their influence on the partisan division of votes and seats” and also the role of individual candidates in House contests (67). In order to study this end of the coattail spectrum, the authors propose a model focused on determining “party control of the institution”, the level of party divisions, and “electorate’s party identification, the electorate’s ideological mood, and reactions to the performance of the current presidential administration” (Erikson and Wright 68). In reviewing these variables, Erikson and Wright found that “partisan tides reflect the electorate’s changing ideological mood” (73). In turn, the authors suggest that voters see “electoral change as a search for policy direction”, which can easily alter one’s view of the straight-ticket voting choice to fit more of a retrospective voting model (Erikson and Wright 73). In addition to reviewing the role of voters in the coattail effect, Erikson and Wright sought out differences in party and candidate ideology pertaining to incumbent voting behavior and financial support of policy issues (74-76). Moreover, the authors looked at the importance of incumbency on the coattail effect, which implied that the strength of incumbents mutes the power of coattails in both

on-year and off-year elections (Erikson and Wright 77-82). In total, Erikson and Wright found that policy values and concerns is what drives the voting process in relation to the coattail effect.

Approaching the study of coattails from a similar perspective, Morris Fiorina's book Retrospective Voting in American National Elections looks at how voters make their decisions in presidential and congressional elections. Although the study is not strictly devoted to the study of the coattail effect, Fiorina's conclusions relate to many of the research findings produced by other authors included in this literature review. Specifically, Fiorina makes the claim that "citizens need only calculate the changes in their own welfare" to make a voting decision, which is also known as retrospective voting (5). Understanding this, one can easily see how retrospective voting would apply to midterm voting patterns, but also in presidential election, or on-year election, voting patterns, like straight-ticket voting. In particular, Fiorina notes that "citizens care about results rather than the policies that produce those results," which could specifically explain straight-ticket voting as a short cut for ultimate policy change on behalf of the voter (8-12).

In yet another way of studying the coattail effect, John Ferejohn and Randall Calvert's article "Presidential Coattails in a Historical Perspective" examine two models of research that consist of the direct model, which consists of House votes determined by presidential votes and local factors, and the simultaneous determination model where "votes for both offices are simultaneous results of national issues, while factors specific to the presidential campaign enter presidential voting directly and congressional voting indirectly" (128). The framework that Ferejohn and Calvert present suggests that "the extent of coattail voting has declined steadily and drastically over the past decades" (128). Supporting this claim, the authors found that the increased "plurality of the presidential candidate has had a diminishing effect on the probability with which his congressional running mates are reelected" (Ferejohn and Calvert 141-142). However, the authors assert that it is the level of responsiveness, "the rate at which the vote received by the presidential candidate translate into House seats for his party", and behavioral connection, the "propensity of voters to associate their votes for House with their votes for president", that matters most in determining the level of coattail voting (Ferejohn and Calvert 142).

In "Presidential Coattails: The Effects of Presidential Campaign Advertising on Presidential and Congressional Elections", Noah Kaplan and David Park examine previous studies of the coattail effect in order to compare these concepts to "the persuasion effects of presidential campaigns" (3). Specifically, Kaplan and Park look at the surge and decline theory, which explains the basic surge of votes cast in presidential election cycles and the decline of votes cast in midterm elections, and the negative voting theory, which posits that midterm voters utilize their votes as a means to create a balance between the Congress and the Executive (3). With a clear understanding of these theories in mind, the authors proceed to suggest that "the number of television ads aired in a media market by the major parties' presidential candidates ... shapes the character of the informational environment", which in turn, can influence the voting process and the coattail effect (Kaplan and Park 4). Although the authors note that many political scholars have discounted the significance of persuasion effects, Kaplan and Park were able to demonstrate that television advertising utilized in the 1996 election cycle was significant; however, once local and other extraneous factors were considered, the authors found that the

number of ads produced by presidential candidates had no effect on their related congressional candidates (11).

In the same way that advertisement could play a role in relation to the coattail effect, Gregory Thorson and Stephen Stambough review the effects of independent presidential challengers in their article “Anti-Incumbency and the 1992 Elections: The Changing Face of Presidential Coattails”. Particularly, the authors look at mobilization and partisan voting in relation to incumbency and anti-incumbency in the 1992 presidential and congressional election cycle (210). In relation to mobilization, the authors note that candidates must be able to connect to previously inactive voters and these mobilized voters must “significantly and systematically affect the outcome of other races” (Thorson and Stambough 210). Utilizing these concepts, Thorson and Stambough seek to illustrate that “incumbent voting cues are replacing partisan voting cues” (211). Moreover, the authors examined the candidacy of Ross Perot to show how mobilization and partisan affiliation can be manipulated to influence presidential and congressional elections. Particularly, Thorson and Stambough inspect the effects of Perot on mobilization, regional differences in turnout, economic environment on turnout, and the 1988 election turnout results are compared to the 1992 turnout numbers (211-212).

Using National Election Studies data, the authors found “some individual-level support for the presence of [anti-incumbent sentiments]”; however, Thorson and Stambough were unable to utilize the coattail theory to thoroughly explain this political event due to the general decline in partisanship (213-218). Even so, the authors were able to show that all of the variables, with the exception of the economy, were significant in mobilizing voters during presidential election periods, which sheds light on further areas of study within the arena of coattail studies (Thorson and Stambough 217).

As it is the case that midterm elections are inextricably a part of the study of coattails in presidential and congressional elections, James Campbell in his article, “Explaining Presidential Losses in Midterm Congressional Elections”, invokes the surge and decline theory to aid in his explanation of the “loss of seats in the House of Representatives by the President’s Party in midterm elections” (1140). Particularly, Campbell utilized the economy/popularity theory of voting, which consists of a retrospective or referendum-style vote, to explain the midterm decline (1140). Along with the incumbency effect, the author asserts that the popularity of the president and the state of the economy “explain about four-fifths of the variance in the standardized measure of vote loss of congressional candidates in the President’s party” (1142). To build upon this information, the author collected data from ten midterm elections since 1946 and he reviewed the following variables including the number of seats lost by the President’s party, the share of the two-party vote won by the incumbent President in the preceding election, the popularity of the president, and the percent annual change in real disposable income per capita (Campbell 1144). Upon reviewing these concepts, Campbell discovered that the variable affecting the prior presidential vote was significant in “determining the distribution of the vote losses” (1154). Also, he found that “the public evaluation of the President’s job performance at the time of the midterm” was also quite significant in determining vote losses (1155). Moreover, each of these results provide a basis to review the use of a referendum decision vote in presidential election years, which, in a similar fashion to the Thorson and Stambough study that

notes the mobilization of voters is key in determining coattail strength, could provide scholars with another angle to the study of the coattail effect.

### Discussing the Coattails Literature

Given the diverse nature of work produced in this area of study, it becomes evident that there is no single way to study the coattail effect. Moreover, the angles from which one can approach the subject stem from seemingly unrelated issues like unified or divided government, voting styles, or party functions or policy issues affecting the course of elections. Whatever the case, the whole of reading on this issue provides researchers with an idea about how the actions of voters increase or decrease the appearance of coattails. In considering these points, one might question what other factors may signal voters to cast their ballots in such a way to provide the basis for a unified or divided government. Although any number of factors could lead to this reaction, the review of the literature suggests that established factors like incumbency and the state of the government that most affect the outcome of a future election.

In the proceeding sections of this paper, I will present a research design built upon the concepts presented by the authors included in this literature review. Utilizing the information provided in the previous works of the authors, I have developed an updated version of one of the theories presented within the literature review. Infusing the old theory with elements of other works contained within the literature review, it is my goal to present a fully remodeled and unique research design, which will hopefully present a new perspective on the coattail effect and its relationship with unified and divided government.

### Divided Government: A Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

In the attempt to understand the causes of divided or unified government, political scientists tend to review the habits of voters within elections. More specifically, those interested in this area of political study tend to focus on the actions of candidates, the importance of incumbency, the function of partisanship, and even the role of public policy. In whole, the bulk of research relating to the growth of divided or unified government is born out of the need to understand the behavior of the individual voter, which entails the review of each possible issue to play a role in the development of a vote choice. In particular, the work of researchers in this area is to link the previously listed topics to the decisions employed by the voting public, which is completed with the hopes that whatever information is gleaned from this study will aid in the ability to predict future voting patterns. With this in mind, the following work will examine the methods employed to study the choices made by voters in the process of developing the shape of government.

In an effort to aid in the clarification of this topic, this essay will focus on how the role of voters in elections is studied by researchers in the field of Political Science. With this understood, the great majority of the work conducted in this area focuses on the behavior of split-ticket voters, who tend to divide their ballots between the major political parties. As this definition of the split-ticket voter is very narrow, it is the goal of this section to illustrate how

split-ticket voters are perceived by researchers and how they contribute to the ultimate election results. In addition to reviewing the literature regarding split ticket voters, this section will consider the role of straight-ticket voters in this process to see how they are characterized as an actor within elections. Overall, this initial step in research is poised to aid other students' understanding of what is known about voters, voting and its relationship to government.

For the purpose of organization, the following research is divided into research topics that are devoted to the discussion of divided government, voting behavior, and the review of previous research. Specifically, the section regarding divided government will feature articles and books relating to how voting styles play a role in the development of this kind of government. In relation to the section focusing on voting behavior, each article or book in this area will address some aspect of split or straight ticket voting within a variety of elections to illustrate the numerous ways in which to study this subject area. Finally, the remaining articles will demonstrate how new theory can spring from previously developed findings. In whole, the division of each of these subject areas is intended to aid the readers of this note in understanding the various perspectives on voting behavior that are presented through the following readings.

### *The Role of Divided Government in Voting Behavior*

Discussing the concept of divided control of government, David Mayhew's work Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking, and Investigations, 1946-1990 looks at the often-reviewed question of "should we care whether party control is unified or divided?" (1). Considering this question and broader topics associated to this matter, Mayhew discusses deadlock in government as being a primary result of divided control of government, which he uses a tool to introduce the claim that "common partisan control of executive and legislature does not assure energetic government, but division of party control precludes it" (2)<sup>1</sup>. Mayhew bases his assumption on the work of previous scholars in this area that unified government should produce more legislation than periods of divided government (3).

As the author notes, many scholars have approached this field of study from the perspective that "voters prefer divided control [of government] on principle", which follows the argument that along with higher rates of produced legislation in unified times of government, we should find higher levels of opposition and polarization among the national parties in times of divided government (1, 3-4). In short, Mayhew claims that these hypotheses are invalid (4). Instead, the author suggests that "unified as opposed to divided control has not made an important difference in recent times" (4). In particular, Mayhew states that his research relates to scandal involving the executive and the development of noteworthy legislation, which the author notes will include items from "the Taft-Hartley Act and Marshall Plan of 1947-48 through the Clean Air Act and \$490 billion deficit reduction package of 1990" (4). With this in mind, Mayhew makes it his goal to provide the possible reasons for why divided or unified government occurs within the context of American democracy and why it seems to become the root cause for so many other political occurrences.

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<sup>1</sup> Key, V.O. Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Crowell, 1964.

In order to manage such a task, Mayhew states that his work will touch on the themes of "investigation" and "lawmaking activity"; however, its focus will relate to the development of a comparison of "what took place in investigating and lawmaking, in circumstances of unified as opposed to divided party control, from the Eightieth Congress of 1947-48 through the 101<sup>st</sup> of 1989-90" (4). As the author explains, this means of measurement looks at each "two-year inter-election period" and classifies it as either unified or divided, which can provide Mayhew with a clear understanding of the setting of the times, so that the results of each period can be fairly judged in light of history (4-5). In the interest of simplicity, the author chose to study the 1946 to 1990 period due to the large number of cases of divided and unified periods of government. With a clear understanding of Mayhew's goals at hand, the purpose of this section is to review the author's research and findings to provide others with a basic appreciation for the development of divided government within American politics.

Following the detailed explanation of his methodology, Mayhew provides his readers with an extensive review of his findings in chart form that stretches across nearly a quarter of his complete work. Although narrow, these findings show that some "congresses contributed much more... than others" (75). Moreover, Mayhew noted, "any relation worth crediting between the incidence of important laws and whether party control was unified or divided" was limited (76). Given this distinction, it becomes clear to the reader that Mayhew's study is hollow in that the bulk of his findings are heavily devoted to historical facts. While interesting as trivial explanations, the focus on historic information rather than statistical data limits the external validity of Mayhew's work.

Adding strength to this argument, the author emphasizes the importance of "ideological commonality" in the development of policy between the Congress and the President, which illustrates the nature of individual differences over fundamental theories (81). Within the course of this discussion, the author implies that the roles of the actors involved in this process matter more than the setting (81). With Mayhew suggesting that it is the individual in each position that makes the greatest difference in the fruitful production of legislation, the concept is further enforced regarding the inclination to provide review of history in one's work rather than the implementing a thorough Political Science-based methodological experiment.

Taking their cues from Mayhew's work in addressing the alternative issues surrounding divided government, Barry Burden and David Kimball explain in the beginning of their book, Why Americans Split Their Tickets: Campaigns, Competition, and Divided Government, how the "competitive balance between the parties" that we currently enjoy in the chambers of Congress has provided a wealth of opportunities for scholars in relation to the study of divided government and increased split-ticket voting rates (ix). "Intrigued by the presence of divided government in the 1980s and 1990s", the authors sought to determine whether or not there was a connection between ticket-splitting voters and divided government, which prompted Burden and Kimball to begin a series of research assignments that ultimately brought about the creation of their book (ix). Looking at the government shut down of 1995 and 1996 and its immediate results, the authors found that the approval ratings of President Clinton and Congress and its members rested at their lowest lows (2). Nevertheless, the 1996 election resulted in the reelection of President Clinton with a larger margin than his 1992 win and even the Republican Party gaining two seats in the Congress (2). Understanding this situation, Kimball and Burden wondered, "Why would voters choose the same divided government configuration again after it seemed to fail so miserably in the winter of 1995 [and] 1996?" (2). Furthermore, the authors

asked, “do voters prefer divided government and policy stalemate?” (2). One explanation is derived from the conclusion that voters are acting as rational actors, which “in this [state of] divided government [the rational actor] understands that the only way for either side to achieve anything is by working and negotiating with the other” possibly motivating voters to split their tickets (2). Basically, Burden and Kimball seek to examine “the underlying causes of divided voting behavior in American national elections”, which entails an understanding of “why ... some voters split their ballots by selecting a Republican for one office and a Democrat for another, and ... some voters switch parties from one election to the next” (2-3).

Although many other scholars, like Morris Fiorina and David Mayhew, feel that divided government is a result of the electoral system, Burden and Kimball suggest that this phenomenon maybe a result of the whims of the voting public or possibly something else entirely (5). Moreover, the authors contend that to determine the causes of this behavior one must review the multitude of reasons leading citizens to divide their votes (31). As many scholars do, the authors examine the work of others in relation to the forces that influence voting decisions. Specifically, Burden and Kimball note that “voting decisions are influenced by forces at three levels of aggregation”, which are national forces, contest-specific forces, and individually focused forces that look at political attitudes and perceptions of individual voters (31-32). Although each of these concepts are fundamental to the explanation of divided voting behavior, the authors observe that little work has been conducted in regards to contest-specific forces and national forces (32-33). With this understood, Burden and Kimball assert that ticket splitting and divided government become a result of the ideological stances of the national political parties, which are fundamentally related to contest-specific forces and national forces (33). In particular, the authors suggest, “clarity from the parties begets clarity from the voters, [whereas] confusion [from the parties] begets confusion [from the voters]” (33).

Implying the importance of congressional races and candidates to the development of divided government and split ticket voting, Burden and Kimball state that ideological positioning can significantly influence vote outcomes especially in “state and district levels because election outcomes are determined by aggregating votes within these electoral units” (35). In order to measure these concepts, Kimball and Burden apply “King’s ecological inference technique, which allows [the authors] to use aggregate data to draw more accurate conclusions about individual-level relationships” (42). Among the ways to analyze ticket splitting, the authors discuss the use of individual-level surveys and aggregate-level outcomes in relation to the use of their modified version of King’s ecological inference technique, which provides empirical validity through the application of the model with survey and aggregate data estimates made in regards to ticket-splitting (50, 65-66). After selecting a means of measurement, Burden and Kimball began to discuss their results and findings, which primarily suggested that “split outcomes are largely a by-product of lopsided congressional campaigns that feature well-funded, high-quality candidates versus unknown, poorly financed opponents” (103-104). With this understood, it is the authors’ assessment that it is the fault of both the voter and the candidate for creating divided government and divided voting behavior. Moreover, Kimball and Burden note that one must carefully study the specific characteristics of a congressional campaign within a district in order to accurately capture the reasons for and amount of ticket splitting taking place within that race (104). Specifically, the authors suggest that the incumbency advantage and the occurrence of party defection both play a role in explaining ticket splitting and midterm losses

(124). In particular, Burden and Kimball note that there are variations in defection rates from one district to another that become a result of the amount of competition existing in these elections because of incumbency and challenger/candidate quality (124).

As the authors stipulate, “divided voters, who split their ballots or switch parties in midterm elections, are the target of fierce political campaigns and an important source of electoral change in American politics” (157). Noting that the absence of competition within congressional elections is a primary cause of ticket-splitting, Kimball and Burden explain that “incumbency, campaign spending, and candidate name recognition” represent factors that determine the level of competition in a race, which also determines the amount of ticket splitting and divided voting behaviors (158). Thus, with the level of competition in congressional elections being the determinate factor in explaining the occurrence of ticket splitting and divided government, it can be assumed that the nature of the American electoral system that creates times of divided government rather than just candidates and voters (157). Although the authors recognize these concepts as factors affecting this phenomenon, Burden and Kimball do not devote the time and research necessary to fully explaining the linkage of these concepts to their ultimate findings. Instead the authors suggest, “the adoption of congressional term limits, improved reapportionment and redistricting practices, and campaign finance reforms” to increase competitiveness and to decrease ticket splitting (160). Nevertheless, the authors assert that “despite continuing efforts to uncover the rationale behind ticket splitting, the main causes of ticket splitting and divided government – a blurring of party differences and a lack of competition in locally driven congressional campaigns – are not as closely linked to voter motivations as some might think” (170).

Grasping the central themes of their argument, it is clear that the primary goal of the authors was to illuminate the alternative possibilities contributing to the development of divided government and its connection to ticket splitting. By noting that “ticket splitting is more frequent when candidates’ positions are nearer to one another and nearer to the ideological center”, Burden and Kimball showed the importance of party polarization being a factor in influencing a divided vote, which is a fresh revelation regarding the study of ticket splitting (162).

Following the tone of Burden and Kimball’s argument, Paul Allen Beck, Lawrence Baum, Aage Clausen, and Charles Smith have focused the content of their article, “Patterns and Sources of Ticket Splitting in Subpresidential Voting”, on split-ticket voting “to test [their] model across the partisan ballot in a typical election setting”, which pertains to the incorporation of “partisan strength, candidate visibility, and the individual characteristics that distinguish ... ticket splitters” (916). Looking at these various concepts, Beck, Baum, Clausen, and Smith discuss the impact of divided control of government, which the authors note “has become the norm for state governments just as it has for the government in Washington” (916). Although this information is somewhat dated, the core of the authors’ argument remains functionally true, which is that “the principal roots of divided government are to be found in voter choice, however, not political structure” (916).

Reviewing “the contests for five Ohio state-wide offices in 1990”, Beck, Baum, Clausen, and Smith were able to show how the differences between presidential and congressional elections can create divided voting behaviors (916-7). Specifically, the authors suggest that in



order to understand the causes for ticket splitting and divided government one must carefully review the states (917). Within their own study, Beck, Baum, Clausen, and Smith “examine electoral choices across contests for offices in the same electorate” that also maintain the opportunity for comparison with executive contests (917). Understanding this point, the authors suggest that a lack of strong party identification may play a role in the development of split-ticket voting behaviors, which may also relate to the lack of focus on partisanship among “the majority of the electorate” (917-8). At any rate, it is the goal of Beck, Baum, Clausen, and Smith to provide a general means to identify ticket splitters and explain the growth of divided government.

Particularly, the authors focus their study on partisanship and candidate visibility using a multivariate analysis incorporating other lesser known variables, which enables Beck, Baum, Clausen, and Smith state relate to party identification, age, dependence on short cuts, political interest, and media exposure (919-23). Upon calculating their results, the authors found that “the primary motivating factor for ticket splitting ... is a long established and powerful force in American voting behavior, strength of party identification (925). Moreover, Beck, Baum, Clausen, and Smith found that the level of education and amount of interest play no role in determining vote choice; however, the age factor creates ticket splitting in older voters (926). Nevertheless, the authors note that “any theory attempting to explain ticket splitting behavior would be wise to focus its attention on partisanship, candidate visibility, education, and age”, which, like any of the other works listed in this section, is just one component of a lengthy process to provide explanations for this phenomenon (926).

### *Approaching the Style of Voting*

With it understood that there are a great many ways to approach the study of how voters cast their ballots, it is no surprise that the longest section of this work is devoted to the understanding and illustration of that very topic. In particular, the authors included within this section examine the influences that affect voting behavior, which can be incredibly varied, yet similar. Whatever the case, the following works are all examples of the ways in which to study voting behavior in presidential and congressional elections.

At the very beginning of James E. Campbell’s book The Presidential Pulse of Congressional Elections, the author quotes an often used sentiment uttered by Benjamin Franklin that “in this world nothing is certain but death and taxes,” which clearly sets the tone for the rest of Campbell’s work relating to presidential and congressional election outcomes (7). Like many studies reviewing the coattail effect, which is the “number of candidates of the party that wins the presidency [that] are swept into office on the president’s coattails”<sup>2</sup>, Campbell’s work turns its focus towards the importance of vote choice or voter selection in relation to election outcomes. Building upon the thoughts and theories of other researchers, Campbell examines the roots of the “surge and decline” theory, which “explains midterm results as a repercussion of the prior presidential election” (1). As the author notes early in his work, surge and decline “offers a fairly well articulated theory of how micro-level voter behavior, in turnout and vote choice,

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<sup>2</sup> Erikson, Robert and Gerald Wright. “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections.” Congress Reconsidered. Eds. Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001: 67-95.

causes a pattern of macro-level election results” (1). In further assessment of this statement, it becomes quite clear that Campbell is suggesting that the study of the coattail effect becomes an issue of micro versus macro level studies. Understanding this point, the author notes that little empirical research has been conducted through this approach to the surge and decline theory, which goes on to serve as the basis for his work (1). Nevertheless, Campbell’s work remains focused on presenting and supporting his revised version of the surge and decline theory of coattails, so that “a reconsideration of the theory’s premises, its relationship with other theories of congressional elections, and the available evidence at the national, district, and individual levels” can be utilized to explain the role of voter turnout in determining midterm election results (1-2).

As a result of the outcomes of the 1982 and 1994 midterm elections, the author was inspired to ask the following questions: “Did [the results of these elections signal] that congressional elections were no longer structured by the “pulse” of presidential elections, the surge and decline of presidential politics?” and “Were long-term political changes embodied in a partisan realignment ... overshadowing the usual short-term political forces of surge and decline?” (2). In order to measure these sorts of changes, the author suggests that one carefully review both the consistency and the variability of midterm losses (8). However, as an alternative to analyzing statistical data, the author returns to the discussion of the traditional coattail theory of surge and decline, which Campbell argues is “in error and ... incomplete” as a result of its neglect of reviewing individual voting behavior and the ultimate role of turnout in electoral change (17). To correct these errors, the author suggests that a new framework should be constructed around the original theory, which entails a careful review of presidential election results in relation to the study of midterm losses (17-18). Moreover, Campbell looks at the importance of peripheral voters and identification in on-year and off-year elections (18). To develop his own revised surge and decline theory, Campbell addresses the various facets of the original theory. Specifically, the author addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the initial theory, which includes a review of Converse’s theory of information flow, the importance of visibility, and the higher incidence of split-ticket voting as a break in the foundation of the surge and decline theory (38).

Given that little empirical evidence had been collected in regards to the surge and decline theory, Campbell sought to review the work previously completed in this area and also to examine the various hypotheses found in this area of research, which covered hypotheses focused on the national-level, district level, and electorates (40). After concluding this extensive review of possible variables and hypotheses affecting the surge and decline theory, Campbell finds that the weakness of the hypotheses is derived from the differences in the “behavior of voters in the presidential and midterm electorates” (65). Understanding that incumbency and district partisanship “are constants from one election to the next and thus cannot account for inter-election change”, Campbell proceeds to examine party votes and seats from election to election (234). Clearly, it was the goal of the author’s work to show that the key to explaining the coattail effect and the surge and decline theory lies in an understanding of the individual voter, which specifically involves the levels of competence and interest of the public in fulfilling electoral responsibilities as well as policy-balancing voting initiatives (237).

Reviewing the whole of the comments made by Campbell in regards to the role of voters as rational-thinking actors, it becomes quite evident that the differences between straight-ticket and split-ticket voters lies in the rationality and coherence of the way in which voters cast their ballots. Particularly, the author's work prompts one to reflect on the specific differences between split-ticket and straight-ticket voters. According to Campbell, "the straight-ticket voter, whether loyally voting a straight ticket or defecting to vote a straight-ticket for the opposition, is casting a coherent vote" (238). Alternately, "split-ticket voting is a sign of the uncoupling of presidential and congressional politics by the public", which implies that party labels have become more important to the voting public whereas policy-balancing mandates have grown less important or at least actionable (239). In either case, it can be easily understood that Campbell's "revised theory draws a distinction between the charge of voter incompetence and the charge of voter apathy" (239). Given that voter incompetence and voter apathy are not easily treated with statistical research findings, Campbell takes his argument in an alternate direction that looks toward faults in the American system of government as a cause for split-ticket voting choices. In essence, Campbell's argument stresses that "the American political system would be both more effective in governing and more accountable to the public without midterm elections" (257). With this understood, the author suggests that the midterm election cycle be eliminated and replaced with a system of concurrent elections (255-7). Although accomplishing these goals may be impossible or at the least incredibly difficult, Campbell's assessment of the current system of government is quite plausible; however, correctly evaluating the state of things and providing solid answers and explanations regarding the phenomenon is not enough to solve the problem.

From a similar viewpoint, Gregory Thorson and Stephen Stambough look at mobilization and partisan voting in relation to incumbency and anti-incumbency in the 1992 presidential and congressional election cycle while reviewing the effects of independent presidential challengers in their article "Anti-Incumbency and the 1992 Elections: The Changing Face of Presidential Coattails", (210). In relation to mobilization, the authors note that candidates must be able to connect to previously inactive voters and these mobilized voters must "significantly and systematically affect the outcome of other races" (Thorson and Stambough 210). Utilizing these concepts, Thorson and Stambough seek to illustrate that "incumbent voting cues are replacing partisan voting cues" (211). Moreover, the authors examine the candidacy of Ross Perot to show how mobilization and partisan affiliation can be manipulated to influence presidential and congressional elections. Particularly, Thorson and Stambough inspect the effects of Perot on mobilization, regional differences in turnout, economic environment on turnout, and the 1988 election turnout results are compared to the 1992 turnout numbers (211-212). Using National Election Studies data, the authors found "some individual-level support for the presence of [anti-incumbent sentiments]"; however, Thorson and Stambough were unable to utilize the coattail theory to thoroughly explain this political event due to the general decline in partisanship (213-218). Even so, the authors were able to show that all of the variables, with the exception of the economy, were significant in mobilizing voters during presidential election periods, which sheds light on further areas of study within the arena of coattail studies (Thorson and Stambough 217).

Turning to the review of external factors affecting voter behavior, Andrew Cowart's article "Electoral Choice in the American States: Incumbency Effects, Partisan Forces, and Divergent Partisan Majorities", narrows its focus to examine whether "one source of conflicting partisan majorities between statewide office contests and presidential contests within the state lies in an important contextual phenomenon of state elections – the prevailing candidate

incumbency pattern” (836). With this understood, it is the goal of Cowart’s research to show that “the partisan incumbency context of the election ... provides an additional voter motivation either for partisan reinforcement or for defection of party” (836). In relation to divided government, the author’s work addresses the sort of voting behavior that hinges on incumbency status, which places the results of an election into a range very close to that of divided government.

In order to prove such his earlier statement, Cowart focuses his research on comparisons made in percentage voting across gubernatorial, congressional, and presidential elections. Specifically, the author notes that “a difference in the constitutional facts of life for the [various] kinds of contests does not tend to produce [only] two patterns at variance” (843). Although his inclination to study gubernatorial races alongside presidential races is valid, the author finds that the distinct variances in the level of incumbency acquired by either candidate produce barriers to balanced study and research (843). More specifically, Cowart states that “the importance of candidate incumbency pattern has been stressed as a source of partisan defection and as a means of overriding overt negative reactions to party, as well as reinforcing positive ones”, which implies that “voting in ... non-incumbent contest[s] should be more a function of attitudes toward party than it should be in ... incumbent races” (843-4). Whatever the case, Cowart makes it clear that non-incumbent contests allow for a more genuine disbursement of votes that would reflect partisan affiliation; however, the author notes that this situation is quite rare and forces his research to focus on the study of “presidential candidate partisanship and the tendency to approve of incumbent officeholders” (844, 852). Although his arguments regarding the study of statewide elections and the effect of incumbency are sound, Cowart’s article lacks the full development of a solid theory of how to approach voting behavior.

Moving in an alternate direction, James Enelow and Melvin Hinich examine the role of ideology and perceived policy positions in the development of vote choices in their brief article, “Ideology, Issues and the Spatial Theory of Elections”. More specifically, the authors state “voters use ideology as a shorthand device for judging candidates” (500). Understanding their approach to the examination of voting decisions, Enelow and Hinich explain that ideological labels serve as a forecast of future policy movements for voters, which provides an extended base of study for future researchers (493). Paying close attention to the role of incumbency in this study, the authors note that “if voters are convinced that small differences in ideology between the incumbent and challenger translate into large differences in actual policies, the position of the incumbent is strengthened ... likewise, if small differences in policies are thought to result from large differences in ideology, the challenger is better off” (498). With this understood, it is quite clear that the perception of ideology is of the greatest importance in determining vote choice, which Enelow and Hinich admit can be influenced by “generalized attitudes toward the political system” (494). Even so, the authors’ findings do set the stage for future research regarding the differences between straight and split ticket voters.

### *Criticism in the Study of Voting Behavior*

In keeping with the general academic theme of reviewing the research of others, many scholars begin their own research through the process of revising and, more importantly, analyzing the work of previous researchers. In the articles that follow, debates over the proper

way to study voting behavior and divided government are addressed in order to encourage those studying this area of Political Science to continually revise their work to keep pace with the changing attitudes of voters.

With the purpose of reviewing and correcting the inaccuracies of Morris Fiorina's previous work, Richard Born's article "Split-ticket Voters, Divided Government, and Fiorina's Policy Balancing Model" focuses on the alleged lack of empirical evidence to support Fiorina's landmark findings (95). In particular, Born's work is centered on retesting Fiorina's model, which would verify its validity as a genuine theory; however, as the author states early in his article, "there is only scattered support for the propositions that are developed as logical extensions of this theory" (95). Much like the suggestions developed by Enelow and Hinich, Born suggests that ideology is an important indicator of ticket splitting within elections, which relates to Fiorina's belief that the "voters view policy as a simple weighted mean of the stances taken by the party of the president and the congressional majority party" that implies that policy positions and ideology influence voting behavior (96).

In order to mount his own review of Fiorina's work, Born reexamines the idea that "policy may be conceptualized as a weighted average of the positions attributed to the presidential and congressional majority parties," as he feels that Fiorina's means of measurement did not fully explain the differences in policy positions (97). Secondly, Born notes that Fiorina's theory that "voters indeed endorse the pair of candidates for president and representative whose parties average weighted position appears closest to their own ideological preference" lacks the complete addition of competitive districts in its statistical analysis (97-9). Moreover, Born states that Fiorina incorrectly operationalized "the key ideological distance utility function ... that jeopardizes the analysis as a test of the policy-balancing hypothesis" (99). Furthermore, the author states that "the utility function for ideological distance ... [actually shows] that the partisan voting combination seen as nearest to the voter's own ideology will be the one actually selected" (112). Nevertheless, Born does make it clear that Fiorina's findings that ticket splitters are ideologically closer to their presidential party choice than their House choice and that divided voting will occur more often when a president is perceived to be more powerful than Congress were both found to be significant conclusions (113). Clearly, these findings are quite strong; which Born suggests is a result of the need to update one's approach to the study of ticket-splitting behavior.

Combating the criticism of Richard Born regarding Morris Fiorina's own policy-balancing theory, "Response to Born" is an article devoted to the discussion of the various motivations of ticket splitting voters. Although Fiorina admits early within his essay that "policy balancing can not be directly tested" due to its roots in the "familiar divide between more empirically and more theoretically oriented [research]", he notes that the importance of his work is to develop a theory to explain the habits of split ticket voters (118, 123). Despite this distinction in research styles, the author insists that further study of the original components of his model must be examined before it can be declared completely inaccurate (118). Specifically, Fiorina explains that "there are multiple indications that, consciously or not, voters may be up to something that political scientists have heretofore overlooked, something that shows up in aggregate outcomes, even if it does not leap out of the survey data", which may relate to issues outside of incumbency, ideology, and the fundamental components of divided government (122-

3). Although Fiorina's article is primarily a defense of his own prior work, his article provides readers with some of the most basic elements of study regarding ticket splitting, which makes the article an excellent primer for those conducting future work in the field. Nevertheless, Fiorina's response neglects to offer a means to correct the perceived problems of his theory, which ultimately adds credence to Born's argument that the policy-balancing theory does not fully explain the ticket splitting phenomenon.

Taking the review of another group's work in another direction is Charles Press' article "Voting Statistics and Presidential Coattails", where the author addresses the previous work of Angus Campbell and Warren Miller to revisit the coattail effect on voter behavior. Specifically, Press examines some of the basic criticisms of the coattail effect made by Campbell and Miller, which pertain to assumptions regarding how congressional candidates can sometimes lead the president into office, and how margin of victory for a president can become an indicator of his strength as a candidate (1041). Understanding these statements, Press explains that "the most significant symptom of the coattail process is straight ticket voting" due to its connection to the outcomes relating to these criticisms (1041). Nevertheless, the author suggests that it is necessary to review the work leading to these findings to determine their validity and value to the understanding of voting behavior.

More specifically, Press reviews the research conducted by Campbell and Miller over the time period of 1944-1956 to examine the role of voter choice in election outcomes, which revealed that "candidate or issue orientation caused an unusual amount of split-ticket voting in traditionally Democratic areas" (1044). Although Press notes that party identification did not prove to be a strong indicator of vote choice, he still implies that is an important component of the research process. Grouped with the variables of issue partisanship and candidate partisanship, the author explains that researchers will be able to identify changes in these concepts from election to election, which could weaken the overall effectiveness of the resultant findings. For this reason, Press stresses that the examination of competitive districts "is most crucial" in determining the impact of vote choice (1045).

Moving away from the discussion of basic methodology, Press argues that various patterns emerge within the review of election results that may aid researchers in the understanding of the "relationship between presidential and congressional races" (1045). Specifically, the authors notes that the rate of turnout increases with presidential elections, "Republican congressional nominees usually [receive] fewer votes ... and Democratic nominees [receive] more votes", and "Democratic candidates held control of the House despite the fact that the Republican presidential nominee increased his percentage ... of the total national vote" (1045). Although it is clear that a variety of explanations can be employed to explain the results of this contest, Press suggests that shifts in voting creating divided government may have resulted from "voter drop outs", which consists of voters who chose only to vote for one particular office leaving the rest of their ballots blank (1045). Clearly, this concept of voter drop outs is quite interesting in relation to explaining the discrepancy in election results; however, this is not an explanation that can be easily researched. For this reason, it is clear that Press' argument is somewhat out of step with what modern research has been able to develop regarding individual level voting behavior. Even so, the core of his methodology leads to prosperous research, which is the introduction of voter motivation as a possible independent variable (1047).

As Press states, “the major conclusion in relation to voting behavior is that the competitive pattern of the district has an effect on voter motivation”, which as he notes is the key to understanding vote choice and predicting election outcomes (1050).

Understanding Press’ points, it is quite clear the implementation of research based on previous work is a process where one learns and then modifies his own addition to the field of creation, which should be the ultimate goal in attempting to develop theory. Although the debate waged among Fiorina and Born may have been more of a recycled chain of findings, it also illustrated the importance of moving forward with one’s research to develop new findings and new theories.

### *Discussing the Divided Government Literature*

In reviewing the work presented within this essay, it becomes quite clear that there are a number of divergent view points concerning the ways in which voting behavior can be viewed and studied. Even so, some very basic concepts can be gleaned from these vastly different viewpoints to aid those beginning research in the area of vote behavior. Specifically, the various authors involved in the study of this subject have most often touched on the issues of election context, partisanship, and policy orientation in developing theories to explain the phenomenon of split-ticket voting. With quite a few of the articles featured in this essay focusing upon the premise of critiquing and revising the work of others, it becomes clear that there is a great deal of contention over what is the best way to study split and straight ticket voters. Moreover, it becomes even more clear that the effect of these voting styles on the shape of government is another contentious issue that cannot be resolved in the course of twenty or 200 pages. Whatever the case, it should be apparent that this is an area of research that, like its focal point, will continue to grow and develop as time moves forward. Understanding this concept, the most valuable advice and information that can be sought in the process of studying voting behavior is to consult the work of others, so that new information regarding the motivation of voters can evolve from the initial research of old.

### Research Design

#### *Hypotheses*

Over the course of the prior literature reviews, a number of issues pertaining to the study of the coattail effect and divided government have been examined to show either the strengthening or dwindling side of these tenuous research areas. In essence, it is the goal of this research exploration to examine the varying sides of the coattail effect to show what is relevant regarding the coattail effect in congressional-presidential elections. In addition, my goal has been to determine if incumbency and the state of government representing divided or unified government are the causes for the stifling of the coattail effect.

As mentioned in the introduction, this review of scholarly works was meant to build a framework for the understanding of the coattail theory and its causes, which many have suggested pertains to issues of incumbency and partisan affiliation. Given that it is clear that the previous research conducted in this area provides cause for additional study, it is my goal to build upon these studies and the data collected here to aid others in reaching a conclusion to this topic. With this in mind, those who choose to study this area in the future will be better able to

examine the relationship between the presidential and congressional vote margin and what factors may or may not hinder the coattail effect.

To begin this study, one must present a hypothesis that will define the scope and nature of the research. For this work, I propose that within presidential elections the issues of incumbency and unified government will most affect the “pulling power” of a presidential candidate to win seats for his fellow congressional candidates. Much like the work produced by Press regarding the coattail effect and party cohesion, specific variables must be addressed to determine the actual effect of this variable on the strength of presidential coattails. Although other variables, like the length of time the president’s party has held control of the House prior to the election, attitudes of both House members and voters towards policy spending and policy passage, and partisan affiliation, may affect the strength of the coattail effect, the presence of an incumbent in an election combined with the appearance of unified government will increase the length of the president’s coattails in on-year elections. In particular, these various concepts to be tested as variables were taken from the work of Calvert and Ferejohn in their article “Coattail voting in Recent Presidential Elections” where the authors utilized a multivariate analysis of survey data results to determine the cause of a declining “responsiveness of the composition of the House to national-level electoral forces” (408). To test my own hypothesis, the next section of this work will define and apply a number of variables that may provide an answer to the question of what causes the coattail effect to decline in its strength.

### *Testing Methods*

It is the intention of this research to determine what causes the strength of the president’s coattails to decline in presidential elections. The reason supporting this type of study stems from the growth of disharmony relating to the disappearance of divided government and the continuing appearance of presidential coattails, which has fostered a personal movement to determine the continuing relevance of this research topic. With this understood, the following section of this work will examine this updated approach to determining the continued importance of the coattail effect in relation to the status of government.

As was seen in the literature review of this paper, the most recent study of the coattail effect was conducted to cover the elections of 1988 (Campbell 1991). Understanding this, it is quite clear that to accurately determine what weakens the coattail effect one must look to the most recent series of election data from 1984 until the 2004 presidential election, a twenty-year period. Specifically, this research will focus on the 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and the 2004 presidential elections, which provides the most recent election data and also the freshest perspective on how incumbency and the state of the government, as either divided or unified, affects the strength of the president’s coattails.

Using the model developed by Calvert and Ferejohn in their article “Coattail Voting in Recent Presidential Elections”, I present a statistical model that will grant the opportunity to compare and contrast the significance of the variables listed in the previous section of this paper. Within their model, Calvert and Ferejohn both estimate the “turnout as well as the crossover effects associated with presidential elections ... and ... the model permits the separation of the efficiency of the coattails from the strength of short-term forces, and both the net size of the



coattail vote” (Calvert and Ferejohn 1983). In order to do this, the authors examine three variables, which consist of the presence of incumbent candidates in House elections, vote choice in both presidential and congressional elections, and voter party identification (Calvert and Ferejohn 1983). Within their study, Calvert and Ferejohn apply both aggregate and survey methods of research, which can possibly dilute the ultimate findings of the study by mixing individual level data with national level data. Moreover, the Calvert and Ferejohn model excludes several variables from their study that may have also significantly altered the findings of their research. Nevertheless, Calvert and Ferejohn’s model is valuable and applicable to this study as it looks at the “relationship between seats and votes ... to obtain an estimate of the effect of the coattail vote on the composition of the House of Representatives”, which will aid in determination of whether or not incumbency is actually a factor in the decrease of presidential coattails (Calvert and Ferejohn 1983).

Finally, my expansion on the Calvert and Ferejohn model allows for future researchers to utilize previously used data with modern conceptions of what may affect the strength of coattails to gain a new perspective on this area of political study. In many respects, Calvert and Ferejohn created a valuable and interesting model; however, this model was not entirely perfect. Learning from this reality, it is my intention to limit the use of survey data in my own study as it would introduce the possibility of misinterpretation of the ultimate results, which is also known as the appearance of an ecological fallacy. In addition to this point, Calvert and Ferejohn excluded a number of variables due to their belief that they would not affect the strength of the coattail effect. Alternately, my model applies these variables, in addition to variables taken from other relevant and related articles, to this study to provide a complete picture of the coattail effect (Calvert and Ferejohn 1983).

In order to clearly illustrate these additions, the next section of this paper will be devoted to identifying and defining the variables used in the implementation of this model to provide a distinct measure of the coattail effect in relation to these concepts. Particularly, the variables and their explanation to follow will serve the purpose of guiding future researchers in identifying what to focus on in attempting to answer the central question of this work, which is to discover whether or not incumbency and unified government produce stronger coattails.

### *Discussing the Variables*

#### Presence of Incumbents

As James Campbell explains in his article “Presidential Coattails Revisited: Partisanship and Incumbency Effects”, the variable relating to the *Presence of Incumbents* can be defined as congressional candidates who have already held at least one term in office (Campbell 1979). For the purposes of this study, the *Presence of Incumbents* variable will be viewed as a control that is coded to define three categories, which consists of a Democratic incumbent as 1, a Republican incumbent as 2, and no incumbent as 0 (Campbell 1979). To collect this information, the *Almanac of American Politics* would be used to determine what Members of Congress would fit into what coding area.

## State of Government

For the purposes of this study, the *State of Government* control variable represents times of either unified or divided government. Unified government, which is to be coded as 0, corresponds to periods where the party of the president holds a majority of seats in the House of Representatives. Alternately, divided government, which is to be coded as 1, relates to periods where the party of the president exists as the minority party in the House of Representatives. Given that none of the scholars featured in this research review included or even thoroughly discussed the concept of divided government, the information utilized in determining the *State of Government* variable comes from the *Almanac of American Politics*.

### Length of time the president's party has held control of House prior to election

In his study "Predicting Seat Gains from Presidential Coattails", James Campbell introduces the independent variable known as the *Length of time the president's party has held control of House prior to election* variable (Campbell 1986). As Campbell described it, this variable encompasses "the average number of Democrats [and Republicans] in the previous two Congresses – the Congresses following the prior presidential election and the prior midterm election" (Campbell 1986). However, for the purposes of this study, I will be utilizing the *Almanac of American Politics* to directly measure the number of years that the president's party has previously held control of the House of Representatives. For a time period consisting of zero to two years the data will be coded as 0, for three to four years the data will be coded as 1, and data related to five to six or more years will be coded as 2.

### Attitudes of House Members towards Policy Spending

Using Robert Erikson and Gerald Wright's method of determining the congressional candidates' preferences based on thirteen different policy areas, which were based on data compiled from the Project Vote Smart congressional survey, the *Attitudes of House Members towards Policy Spending* variable was narrowed to focus only the following four policy areas consisting of education, welfare, law enforcement, and foreign aid (Erikson and Wright 2001). These particular policy areas were selected due to their ability to illustrate the "average responses of Democratic and Republican candidates to a set of questions about what changes they would like to see in different policy programs [where] they were given the following options ... greatly increase, slightly increase, maintain status, slightly decrease, greatly decrease, or eliminate" (Erikson and Wright 2001). Included in this study as an independent variable, each policy area will be separated and denoted as HPS1 for education, HPS2 for welfare, HPS3 for law enforcement, and HPS4 for foreign aid related policies. Using Erikson and Wright's coding for the answer options, the selections will be coded as +2 for greatly increase, +1 for slightly increase, 0 for maintain status, -1 for slight decrease, -2 for greatly decrease, and -3 for eliminate (Erikson and Wright 2001).

### Voter Party Identification

Party identification can be measured in a variety of ways; however, one of the more common methods of determining partisanship among voters pertains to uncovering "the average

percentage of respondents identifying themselves as [either] Democratic [or Republican or Independent]”, which can easily be drawn from Gallup national poll data (Erikson and Wright 2001). Particularly, the independent variable known as *Voter Party Identification* can be coded in the terms listed above, which would consist of Democrat as 1, Republican as 2 or Independent as 0. The organization of this variable in this respect allows for an understanding of “the nation’s collective preference for more liberalism or more conservatism in its national policies” (Erikson and Wright 2001).

### Election Outcomes

Using Richard Born’s conception of the dependent variable known as *Election Outcomes*, from his article “Reassessing the Decline of Presidential Coattails: U.S. House Elections from 1952-80”, is composed of “the percentage of the two-party vote received by the party being examined” in presidential elections (Born 1984). Specifically, the margin of votes received by members of the Democratic Party will be coded as 0 and the margin of votes received by members of the Republican Party will be coded as 1, which will be drawn from data found in the National Election Studies Cumulative File.

### Conclusion and Possible Findings

Although it would seem impossible to lay out an idea of findings for this subject matter given the diverse nature of the topic, I would expect to find that there is a strong connection between the presence of presidential incumbency and unified government in increasing the strength of the coattail effect. In many respects, this hypothesis is supported through the conception that a standing precedent shapes future actions among voters. Nevertheless, a great deal more work must be conducted to determine the validity of this temporary conclusion. Moreover, implementation of the model and possibly further research on the topic are necessary before any assumption can be proposed as theory.

Over the course of this research work, a number of issues pertaining to the study of the coattail effect have been examined to show either the strengthening or diminishing elements of this tenuous research area. As mentioned in the introduction, the review of scholarly works was meant to build a framework for the understanding of the coattail theory and its causes, which many have suggested pertains to issues of incumbency and partisan affiliation. Whatever the case, those that choose to study this area in the future will be better able to study the relationship between the presidential and congressional vote margin and what factors cause or hinder the coattail effect.

Likewise in review of the literature pertaining to the study of divided government, it was discovered that an understanding of the issues of partisan affiliation, election context, and policy orientation aid in the development of theories explaining the causes of divided government, which may prove to be hindrances to the growth of presidential coattails. For this reason, it is obvious that comprehending the motivations of straight and split-ticket voters is essential in predicting an election’s outcome in relation to the occurrence of unified government.

To build upon this concept and contribute to a more thorough understanding of the coattail effect and divided government, this work also presented an examination of a particular set of variables, which could be tested through the implementation of aggregate data research. As it is suggested in the research design, the use of survey or time-series methods could be also be employed to determine how the frequency of the coattail effect may vary in times of divided government or unified government. Moreover, a number of alternative aspects of the coattail effect and its relationship with divided government can be reviewed using variables specifically related to data residing at the individual level, which could consist of an examination of each individual voter's party identification, vote choice, awareness of candidates, attitudes towards candidates, and attitudes towards policy and spending in the Congress. In turn, this sort of study could aid researchers in understanding what motivates voters to cast either a split-ticket or a straight-ticket vote.

Obviously, the study of coattails can encompass a great deal of issues that can be viewed and interpreted in variety of ways; however, the importance of this issue in the future will hinge on the strength of its continued research in the years ahead. To assure that this is the case, those researching this subject matter must consider those items on the periphery of the issue to develop and examine viable, new variables, which may shed a new light on an older issue in Political Science that has been affected by contemporary changes in government. Considering this point, the addition of a controlling variable like the state of government as either divided or unified could establish a new understanding of how retrospective thinking, as proposed by Fiorina, may affect the length presidential coattails. Although there is no guarantee that this is the case, it is as imperative to be creative in one's thinking and research, as it is important for one's results to be accurate and definitive.

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