The Incumbency Advantage in U.S. Elections: An Analysis of State and Federal Offices, 1942-2000[1]

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Abstract

Rising incumbency advantages in U.S. House elections have prompted a wave of new electoral laws, ranging from campaign finance regulations to term limits. We test a central claim for these reforms – that the incumbency advantage reflects the collective irresponsibility inherent in legislatures. We study incumbency advantages for all state executive elections from 1942 to 2000 and contrast that with incumbency advantages in state and federal legislative elections. We find that incumbency advantages for state executives and for legislators are similar in magnitude and have grown at the same rate over the last 60 years. If anything legislators have lower incumbency advantages than state executives. This finding reveals that the incumbency advantage is not unique to legislatures and that theories of incumbency advantages based on redistricting, legislative irresponsibility, pork barrel politics, and other features of legislatures do not explain the incumbency advantage.

Some time in the late 1960s, congressional scholars began to note the increasing vote margins of U.S. House incumbents. By the mid-1970s a full-blown debate about the magnitude and sources of the incumbency advantage in US House elections had emerged. The list of potential causes is many – redistricting, congressional-bureaucratic relations, pork barrel spending, campaign finances, and declining party attachments. Broadly speaking, the debate over the sources of the incumbency advantage points either to factors that are distinctive to legislative politics, such as pork barrel politics and redistricting, or to factors that likely affected all offices, most notably the decline of party attachments or the growth of government generally.

The conventional wisdom holds that legislative incumbents have uniquely high electoral advantages for two reasons. The first is that many things that are thought to affect reelection rates are unique to legislatures. The most important of these are redistricting and seniority. Cox and Katz (2002) argue that the redistricting revolution caused the rise of incumbency advantages after the 1960s, because district lines can now be drawn to prevent competition. McKelvey and Reizman (1992) argue that seniority systems create a disincentive for voters to select someone else. Power within the legislature is tied to seniority, and as a legislator climbs the seniority rank the voters that legislator represents will benefit. Because all incumbents have some seniority no voters want to turn out their incumbent in the place of a new person, who will be the lowest ranked legislator.

A second reason that legislators are thought to have especially large incumbency advantages is the lack of collective responsibility. Executives are held accountable for the broad performance of their agencies. Governors are responsible for economic performance; attorneys general, for crime; and so forth. Executives are also accountable for their actions: an executive decision is the decision of the individual politician. Legislatures, by contrast, are collective bodies. It is hard to know who in the legislature is responsible for a weak economy or a high crime rate. Party leaders can also coordinate legislators so that an individual legislator does not have to cast a vote that is particularly unpopular in the individual's constituency. Morris Fiorina offers perhaps the most striking argument about collective responsibility in *Congress: Keystone to the Washington Establishment.* The collective nature of legislatures means that Congress has an incentive to have dysfunctional agencies, so legislators can do casework, increasing further their advantages.

The incumbency advantage has sparked a recent wave of reforms targeting legislators. The most significant are term limits imposed by many states on their state legislatures and members of Congress in the 1990s, though congressional term limits were declared unconstitutional. Reforms in campaign finance, redistricting, and the legislative budget process (e.g., the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Amendment) have sought to limit the particular advantages of legislative incumbents. With these reforms have come a wave of legal cases deciding the propriety of legal restrictions on legislative politics (See, Lowenstein, 1995, Chapter 15).

To better understand the growth and sources of the incumbency advantage, this paper studies state executive and legislative elections from 1942 to 2000. We study a large number of executives and legislators up for election within each state in a year, and we study a long time frame. This allows us to compare the incumbency advantages of a wide range of executive and legislative offices over time and it allows us to hold constant national tides (years) and party divisions (states). Our approach further allows us to examine directly the association between the strength of incumbency and the strength of party in each state, and the correlation between these two factors over time.

Contrary to the main current of thinking, all executive and legislative offices—from utility commissioner to Governor, from state legislator to Senator—have experienced a similar electoral transformation since World War II. Across all offices incumbency advantages have risen in magnitude and in relative importance as predictors of the vote. We also show that the normal party vote has come to explain a smaller fraction of the variation in the vote across offices and states. And, there has been a general rise in the relative importance in short-term, local factors, which comprise the residual component in our model.[1] The residual is of particular importance because it captures much of the risk that incumbents face, and, since the 1960s, it has been the single largest component of the vote. The causes of this change are less clear, and deserve further study.

Ultimately, the motivation for this study is to gain insight about the factors that might cause rising incumbency advantages. Comparison of incumbency advantages across a wide range of executive and legislative offices allows us to assess the plausibility of several important strains of thought.

We test three ideas. The first is that the structure of politics gives legislators higher incumbency advantages than executives. The literature on the incumbency advantage focuses on causes that are unique to legislatures or are shared by all offices. And, the literature on gubernatorial elections offer various arguments why incumbent governors are electorally more vulnerable than legislators.[2] The second idea is that party decline causes rising incumbency advantages. Psychologically, party and incumbency are thought to be conflicting voting cues, and rising incumbency advantages in the House occur in an era of declining party.[3] The third idea is that declining challenger quality has driven incumbency advantages up. Challenger political experience is an important predictor of the vote in House and Senate elections. Researchers have hypothesized that average quality has fallen or that voters respond more to candidate quality now than they did in the past.[4]

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[1] The residual is component of the vote that is not explained by the causal factors (or "independent variables") contained in the model. Each election deviates from the vote share predicted by the normal party division in the state, the incumbency advantage, and the national tide in a given year toward one party or another. Each deviation is squared and then the square residuals are averaged. This average is the variance in the residual.

[2] Fiorina (1989) and Lowenstein (1992) provide excellent surveys of the search for the causes of the incumbency advantage. Ranney (1965, page 91), Schlesinger (1960, 1966, pages 68-69), Seroka (1980, page 161), and Turett (1971, pages 108-112) discuss the electoral problems incumbent governors face. Empirical studies, however, are mixed. Chubb (1988) and Hinkley (1970) find little or no incumbency advantages for governor, while Turett (1971), Pierson (1977), and Tompkins (1984) find significant effects. Research comparing Senators and governors tends to find that Senators face better electoral circumstances and thus tend to have higher incumbency advantages (Hinkley, 1970; Hinkley, Hofstetter, and Kessel, 1974; Seroka, 1980; Squire and Fastnow, 1994). The exception is Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993), who find that governors and Senators have comparable and large incumbency advantages.

[3] Again, the focus of this literature is legislative elections. Kostroski (1973) observed a pattern similar to that described in Figure 3 below for the Senate and attributes it to party dealignment. Erikson (1972), Burnham (1974), Ferejohn (1977), Nelson (1978-79) and Romero and Sanders (1994) also argue that party dealignment caused higher incumbency advantages in House elections. Krehbiel and Wright (1983) argue that declining *loyalty* of voters explains the growth of the incumbency advantage in House elections.

We find little support that these arguments can account for the rise of the incumbency advantage. There is nothing distinctive about legislative elections. Instead, there is a remarkable similarity in the incumbency advantages of most offices, both in magnitude and patterns of growth. Declining loyalty to parties looks more plausible, as party effects shrink over time, while incumbency grows. However, there is no association in the cross section between party effects and incumbency across offices, and there is little drop in the effect of party identification on the vote at the individual level. Rather, the decline of party mainly reflects changing partisan divisions within the states. Finally, inclusion of indicators of challenger quality does not affect the estimated incumbency advantage, and indicators of challenger quality show no trend in statewide elections from the 1940s to the 1990s. This is not to say that these factors do not affect elections. Rather, these three ideas do not appear to explain the main variation in the incumbency advantage.

The central pattern is that incumbency advantages in *all* statewide offices, as well as the U.S. House and Senate, have trended up from about 2 percent in the 1940s to, on average, 8 percent in the 1990s. Such a striking, common trend suggests that there is likely a common cause. It remains an open question what transformed elections throughout the nation over the last half-century.

The organization of this paper is as follows. We first describe the methods and data used. Second, we present estimates of the incumbency advantage across many offices. We then discuss the components of the vote derived from a statistical technique known as analysis of variance and decompose those components into some of their elements. Fourth, we consider theoretical arguments about the incumbency advantage in light of these data. Finally, we offer concluding remarks to stimulate future theoretical and empirical inquiry.

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[4] Jacobson (1980) shows the importance of challenger quality. But, the literature on whether this could account for changes in incumbency advantages is mixed. Canon (1990) documents the average challenger experience has trended up. Cox and Katz (1996) argue that the coefficient on challenger quality has changed. Hinkley (1980), Krasno (1994) and others argue that challenger quality is lower in the House than in the Senate, and thus explains much of the difference between the House and Senate elections.

Data and Methods

We exploit the panel-data structure of three features of American elections. First, the U.S. holds many elections within a given jurisdiction at once. Second, the U.S. holds many elections for any one type of office (e.g., state legislature, U.S. House, or governor) at one time. Third, the U.S. holds elections in even years and at regular intervals over time.

Many studies exploit one of these features. The methods commonly used to study incumbency advantages use over-time or cross-sectional variation in races for a particular type of office. For example, histograms and regression analyses exploit the cross-sectional variation; other measures, such as "Retirement Slump" and "Sophomore Surge," exploit variation in the time-series.[5] Some studies of state legislative elections make comparisons across states. This is the first paper to exploit completely the variation across offices, across states, and over time.

Using all three features of the data provides unique leverage in estimating incumbency and party effects. To estimate incumbency effects, we can use a simple and intuitive differences estimator across states within offices and over time within offices. In each state, we compare the vote-share received by each party's incumbents to the vote-share received by the party's non-incumbents who are running at the same time and in the same state. We then average these differences across groups of states, or groups of years, to obtain more precise estimates. To estimate party normal votes within each state, we use the average Democratic vote share across all offices, holding constant incumbency and year of the election. Specifically, this average is calculated using an indicator (or dummy) variable for each state and year, also called a "fixed effect." The panel structure allows us to estimate the average party division within each state in each year, holding constant incumbency effects, national tides and other factors. Importantly, we do not require additional measures of partisanship, such as surveys or presidential vote. To test specific hypotheses about the incumbency advantage, such as differences across types of offices or the importance of challenger quality or state size, we can use tests based on simple differences-in-differences.

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[5] Retirement slump is the difference in the vote share from one election, when the incumbent is running, to the next, when the incumbent is not running. Sophomore Surge is the difference in vote from an open seat election to the subsequent election, when an incumbent runs for reelection.

Our approach corrects several well known statistical problems in the study of elections. First, it does not rely on lagged vote to identify the normal vote, i.e., the party division within the state. Slump, surge, and regression models rely on lagged vote. The problem with the lagged variable is that it contains the incumbency advantage plus any short-term shock that allowed the sitting incumbent to win: this is potentially a source of selection biases. Second, we do not suffer from the limits of survey based measures of the party division within each state. Survey based measures necessarily include measurement error—the sampling error associated with the survey quantities. If the sample sizes are small, the measurement error can be quite large. In multivariate regressions, this can bias all coefficients.

One contribution of this project is that we have assembled a comprehensive data base on all statewide elected offices, including lieutenant governors, attorneys general, secretaries of state, auditors and treasurers, judges, and various commissioners, in addition to U.S. Senate, governor, U.S. House, and state legislators.

We study all statewide partisan elected offices over the period 1942-2000, and also all U.S. House elections over the same period. In addition, we study state legislative elections over the period 1972-2000. Collecting the data on statewide elections is tedious, and must be done state by state.[6] The main data sources are shown in Appendix Table A.1. This table also shows which offices are (or were) elected in which states. Not all offices were elected for the entire period. For example, in many states the Lieutenant Governor was originally elected separately, but later was elected with the Governor on a joint ticket. Overall, there has been a gradual downward trend in the number of elected offices.

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[6] We strongly suspect that this is the main reason no one appears to have done this before.

Following the main current of the incumbency advantage literature, we study vote-shares. We wish to estimate the normal party vote, the incumbency advantage in vote margin, the effect of national tides on the vote, and the unexplained component in the vote. In this respect, we follow directly from work on decomposition of the vote (Stokes, 1965) and on estimating the incumbency advantage (Erikson, 1971; Alford and Brady, 1989; Gelman and King, 1990; Levitt and Wolfram, 1997). Alternatively, we could study re-election rates. Study of re-election rates involves redefinition of several concepts, such as normal vote, and presents several methodological problems, such as heterogeneity in the standard deviations, which are best estimated using the votes. In this respect, studying the votes is the first step to understanding reelection probabilities.[7]

Figure 1 graphs the Democrat's share of the two-party vote in all statewide races in our study, for each decade in our study. This is our dependent variable. The figures are analogous to Mayhew's famous diagram of vanishing marginals (Mayhew 1974a). Unlike Mayhew's diagram, no dip in the middle of the distribution appears. Evidently, the marginals never vanished in state elections. In state elections during the 1940s and 1950s, 41 percent of all seats were "marginal"—Democratic vote share between 45 percent and 55 percent. That figure is nearly identical in subsequent decades: it is 42 percent in the 1960s and 1970s and 39 percent in the 1980s and 1990s. By contrast, in U.S. House elections, 27 percent of all seats have Democratic vote shares between 45 and 55 percent in the 1940s and 1950s. That figure falls to 19 percent in the 1960s and 1970s, and 16 percent in the 1980s and 1990s.

[Figure 1 about here]

Curiously, as we demonstrate below, the incumbency advantage is as large in state elections as in U.S. House elections, and it grew in state elections as much as in U.S. House elections. This suggests that the incumbency advantage may not be sufficient to explain vanishing number of marginal seats in U.S. House elections.

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[7] There is some confusion in the literature between vote margin and reelection probabilities. The belief that governors, Senators, and House members have differing incumbency advantages emerges from the study of reelection rates. The observation that incumbency advantages have grown dramatically emanates from the study of vote margins. Reelection rates have not changed as much as vote margins, owing in part to the non-linear relationship between them (*e.g.*, Kendall and Stuart 1950). Other issues to resolve in the study of re-election rates involve the difference between survival rates and reelection rates (Glazer and Grofman 1987).

The Growth of Incumbency Advantages

Figure 2 shows the growth of incumbency advantages in all offices over the last 60 years. The estimates in the figure are the coefficient estimates from specification (1) for each office in each decade. The estimated coefficients, standard errors, and other summary statistics are in Appendix Tables A.2-A.4. Tables A.2 and A.3 cover the statewide races, and Table A.4 covers U.S. House races. Table A.2 contains the estimates for specifications (1) and (2), and Table A.3 shows the estimates for specification (3). All three specifications produce the same basic patterns, over time and across offices. Table A.4 presents the estimates for House races. These approximately reproduce the estimates in Levitt and Wolfram (1997).

[Figure 2 about here]

The horizontal axis presents each decade—e.g., 1940 corresponds to the decade 1940 to 1950, 1950 corresponds to 1952 through 1960, and so forth. The vertical axis presents the estimated incumbency advantage in percentage points of the vote. Five different types of offices are displayed: Governors (GOV), U.S. Senators (SEN), U.S. House members (HSE), other "high" state executives (HI, which contains Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, and Attorney General), "low" state executives (LO, which includes offices such as Auditor, Treasurer, and Public Utility Commissioner), and state legislators (STL). The figure also displays the average incumbency advantage for all of these offices (AVG).

The average incumbency advantage grows four-fold over the time span of this study. At the beginning of the period (1942 through 1960), the incumbency advantage for all offices is around 2 percentage points in all offices. That quantity increases dramatically during the 1960s and again during the 1970s. The average incumbency advantage jumps from 2 percentage points in the 1950s to 4 percentage points in the 1960s to 6 percentage points in the 1970s. The incumbency advantage continues its growth after the 1970s, but at a slower pace. At the end of the period the average of all offices' incumbency advantages equals 8 percentage points—four times the incumbency advantage in the 1940s and 1950s.

Each office shows a similar pattern of growing incumbency advantages. What scholars first observed in the U.S. House happened in all offices at about the same time, and it grew at the roughly the same pace.

There are noticeable differences across offices, especially at the end of the period. In the 1940s and 1950s, incumbency advantages were quite similar in all offices. The 1960s show significant differentiation across offices. In that decade U.S. House and Senate incumbents had relatively high incumbency advantages, followed by higher state executives. Governors and lower state executives had lower incumbency advantages. Over the subsequent decades, governors showed the fastest growth in the incumbency advantage; lower state executives, such as Auditor and Treasurer, remained on the low end of the spectrum, but they too showed significant growth. In the 1980s and 1990s, the incumbency advantage was 9-10 percentage points for Senators, Governors, and Higher Statewide Officers—Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, and Secretary of State. It was only about 6 percentage points for Lower Statewide Officers. These differences are statistically highly significant (see Table A.2).

Figure 2 also reveals that legislators do not enjoy uniquely high incumbency advantages. House and Senate incumbency advantages track with governors and other higher state executives. Interestingly, in the 1990s, House incumbency advantages dropped significantly, falling to the same level as lower statewide officeholders. We are unsure whether this reflects a general shift, or if it is a temporary shock produced by the tumultuous elections that accompanied the shift to a Republican House in 1994.

As noted above, we have conducted an additional analysis of state legislative elections in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The estimated incumbency advantages of state legislators were about 5 percentage points throughout this time period.[8] State legislators, then, have the lowest incumbency advantages, substantially below the incumbency advantages of executives.

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[8] These are similar to the average estimates in King (1991) and Cox and Morgenstern (1993). This is not

The differences across offices, however, are second-order phenomena compared to the overall growth in incumbency advantages in all offices. Even the lower level state-wide offices now have incumbency advantage that are triple the advantages of the 1940s. The common pattern of growth suggests that the incumbency advantage is part of a nation-wide political transformation.

Incumbency, Party, and Short-term Forces

A simple analysis of variance puts the incumbency effects in context of other factors shaping elections. Our statistical specifications divide the variation in the Democrats' and Republicans' respective shares of the vote into three components: that due to incumbency, that due to party, and that due to residual or risk. The party component itself consists of two factors. National tides capture the extent to which all members of a party rise and fall together, and normal votes capture the average behavior of voters in a state or district. This is similar to Stokes (1965).

Figure 3 presents the elements of the analysis of variance from specification (1) for each decade in the analysis. The four components in our model are (i) the incumbency variables (one for each office), (ii) the state fixed-effects, (iii) the year fixed-effects, and (iv) the residual. Each state's fixed-effect captures the normal vote or underlying partisanship in the state; the year-effects capture national partisan tides; and the residual offers a measure of short-term and local variation, which gauges candidates' electoral risk.

The relative importance of incumbency grows dramatically over the period 1962-2000. Incumbency advantages account for less than 5 percent of the variation in vote shares in the 1940s and 1950s, but 30 to 35 percent of the total variance in vote shares in the 1980s and 1990s.

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too surprising, since we use the Levitt and Wolfram model, and King and Cox and Morgenstern use the Gelman and King (1990) model, and Levitt and Wolfram (1997) showed that their model produces broadly similar results to the Gelman and King model for the U.S. House. It is comforting nonetheless.

Party effects—the national tide and normal vote combined—have fallen in importance substantially.

National tides—annual swings in the national vote from one party to another—account for a relatively small percent of the total variation in the vote. At their peak in the 1950s, national tides explain 10 percent of the total variance, and otherwise explain around 5 percent of total variation in the vote.

The significant variation in party effects comes in the normal vote. Figure 3 shows a strong decline in the state- and district-level effects, which capture the normal vote or "partisanship" of the state or district. The normal vote accounts for 53 percent of the variation in the vote in the 1940s. It's importance drops substantially in the 1950s, to 40 percent of total variance in the vote. And it collapses in the 1960s, explaining only 20 percent of the variance in the vote in the 1960s and 1970s. The decline of the normal vote as an explanatory factor continues in the 1980s, falling to 10 percent in the 1980s and 1990s.

Of note, the declining importance of the normal vote is evident even in the very first decade of our study. The declining predictive power of party predates the rise of the incumbency advantage.

The third important factor in our model—the residual—captures the relative importance of factors that operate in the short-term and locally. The percent of the variance attributed to the short-term, local factors increases dramatically from the 1940s to the 1990s. The residual accounts for 12 percent of the overall variation in the vote in the 1940s and 20 percent of the total variance in the 1950s. In the 1960s, the relative importance of the residual jumps dramatically, to 40 percent. Over the subsequent decades, it holds steady at 40 percent. As with the decline of party, most of the increase in the relative importance of the residual comes in the 1960s.

The timing of these changes suggests that region might confound our results. Democratic control of the South begins to disintegrate in the early 1960s. So part of what we might observe, especially with the party and residual components, is the decline of Democratic voting in the South. We test for this factor by breaking the data into the South and non-South. We then compare the estimates across regions for two categories of office—High (Senator, Governor and Higher Executive) and Low (Lower Executive). We find no substantively large differences between southern and non-southern states. Comparable changes in incumbency, party, and residual factors occur in the South and outside the South in the 1960s. This is not to deny the importance of changing race relations and other issues. Rather, we believe that these important issues transformed the entire nation, not just the South.

Accounting for Components of the Vote

To gain some perspective on the relative importance of the different factors we calculate the percent of total variation in the vote (displayed in Figure 1 above) that each of the factors in the model explain. Recall that there are four factors: the normal party vote, national tides, incumbency advantages, and local idiosyncratic factors (residual). National tides account for a very small share of the variation in the vote. The relative importance of the normal vote, incumbency, and the residual change dramatically from the 1940s to the 1990s.

The amount of variance explained by any independent variable, such as party or incumbency, itself consists of two parts. The first part is the variance in the independent variable; the second part is the square of the effect of that variable on the vote. For example, the amount of variation in the vote explained by incumbency equals the square of the incumbency advantage (β) times the variation in the incumbency code (i.e., the trichotomous variable that indicates whether there is a Democratic incumbent, an open seat, or a Republican incumbent). Both parts are substantively important. Changes in the variation in the independent variable reflects changes in the frequency with which incumbents run for reelection or with which a particular party holds a seat. Changes in the coefficients reflect changes in the voters' response to party and incumbency.

First, consider incumbency. The incumbency effect rose in both magnitude and relative importance. The average incumbency coefficient grew from .02 to .08, a four fold increase. The percent of the variance attributable to incumbency grew more than 15 fold, from about 2 percent to over 30 percent. The change in the coefficient accounts for most of the increase in variance explained. The squared coefficient grows 13 fold, but incidence of incumbent contested races did not change from the 1940s to the 1990s.[9]

Second, consider party. The percent of variance explained by party drops from over 50 percent in the 1940s to only 15 percent today. How much of the change is due to declining voter loyalty, and how much to changing party divisions within states? The change appears to be driven mainly by the latter.

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[9] To test whether there is a trend in incumbency. We regressed the percent of seats with an incumbent running on time. There is no evidence of a statistically significant trend over time.

To assess whether party loyalty has changed, we analyze survey data from the National Election Survey for each election from 1956 through 1998. We conduct probit analyses to predict respondent's reported votes for U.S. Senate, governor, and U.S. House using party, incumbency, and year effects. Figure 4 displays the effects of party identification and incumbency in the NES surveys for each decade (pooled) from the 1950s to the 1990s. The graph looks nothing like Figure 3. The coefficient on party identification drops by 25 percent from the 1950s to the 1960s. It gradually regains its predictive power over the subsequent decades. By contrast, Figure 3 shows a 50 percent drop in the predictive power of party from the 1950s to the 1960s, and a continued decline in subsequent decades.

The aggregate data reveal a significant change in the distribution of party effects overtime. Figure 5 shows the variance of the estimated party effects across states (i.e., the αs). The variance declines throughout the time period, and shows a sharp decline from the 1940s to the 1950s and the 1950s to the 1960s. Falling variance in the effects indicates that the party divisions within states are becoming more similar over time. This squares with other accounts of state politics (Erikson, Wright and McIver, 1993). The Southern states and Mountain West are no longer solidly Democratic, as they were in the 1940s and 1950s, and are now either evenly divided or leaning Republican. The Northeast, Far West, and Midwest were once Republican bastions and now have even party balances or lean Democratic. The dramatic differences in party divisions across states that characterized American politics in the 1940s and 1950s are gone.

The literature often misinterprets the declining predictive power of party as decline in party loyalty (*e.g.*, Kostroski, 1973). It is not. Instead, our analysis of the party component reveals that the change in the predictive power owes to the shift in most states toward more competitive statewide elections.

Equally dramatic as the changes in party and incumbency is the sudden rise in the relative importance of the residual component. The rise in the percent of variance explained by the residual might reflect the dramatic drop in the variation due to party, and the resulting drop in the total variance. Alternatively, it might reflect a true increase in the variation in the vote due to local, idiosyncratic factors.

Figure 6 graphs the variances of the residuals over time. The figure shows clearly that the residual variance grows sharply in magnitude, as well as in relative importance. Most of the increase in the residual variance occurs from the 1960s to the 1970s, rather than from the 1940s to the 1960s. This implies that the decline in the relative importance of party from the 1940s to the 1960s mainly reflects the decrease in the predictive power of party over these decades, rather than the growing importance of idiosyncratic factors. The 1970s are a different matter.

There are also intriguing differences across offices. Senators and governors have much higher residual variance than other statewide elected officials and than House incumbents. This is somewhat surprising because all statewide offices run in the same constituency, and because Senators and governors are considerably better known than other statewide officials. Perhaps, their public salience brings both benefits and risks.

Substantively, the residual component is difficult to interpret. It may reflect factors that the candidates observe and might even control, but that social scientists have not yet measured. For example, the residual might capture the incumbents' ideological fit with the constituency or unmeasured aspects of candidate quality.

Alternatively, the residual might reflect factors that the candidates cannot control, observe, or anticipate—incumbents' "electoral risk."[10] Mann (1978) and Jacobson (1987) argue that even though incumbent voter margins have grown, politicians face higher risk. Figure 6 provides some evidence to support this argument. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the decades covered by Mann and Jacobson, the standard deviation of local, idiosyncratic factors in the vote of U.S. House members indeed increased. In fact, all offices show an increase in their residual variance. However, for U.S. House races the residual component in the 1990s has dropped back to the levels that it was at in the 1950s. The standard deviation of the idiosyncratic components of all other offices remained high compared to the 1950s.

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[10] It may be interesting to model electoral risk as diversifiable and not diversifiable by regressing percent change in the Democratic vote for any one office holder on percent change in the national Democratic share of the vote.

Implications for Theories of the Incumbency Advantage

An extensive literature examines a wide array of factors conjectured to explain the incumbency advantage. Comparison of the estimates derived from our analysis is revealing about three broad sorts of explanations: legislative politics, challenger quality, and declining party loyalty.

Legislative Politics

Much theorizing about the incumbency advantage focuses on factors specific to legislatures, and sometimes to the U.S. House. Redistricting reputedly became an "incumbency protection plan" (Erikson, 1972; Tufte 1972, 1973, 1974). Legislators can take popular positions on many issues, and avoid taking stands on controversial ones (Mayhew, 1974b). Legislative logrolls and pork barrel politics allow individual politicians to target special programs for their districts without having to bear the direct cost of sacrificing programs for other constituents or raising taxes (Fiorina, 1980; Bickers and Stein, 1994; Alvarez and Saving, 1997; Levitt and Snyder, 1997). Seniority and committee systems force voters to continue voting for their incumbents so that they can gain the rank necessary to have significant influence over policy (McKelvey and Riezman, 1992). Legislators devote considerable time and resources to casework, and even use the bureaucracy as a convenient scapegoat and source of casework (Fiorina, 1977; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1987). Summarizing this literature, Lowenstein (1992) concludes that members of the U.S. House should have especially high vote margins.

Comparison of incumbency advantages in legislative and executive elections casts doubt on the ability of such theories to explain rising incumbency advantages. If legislative politics confer uniquely large advantages to legislators, then we would expect that state legislators and U.S. House members would have especially high incumbency advantages. They do not. As shown in Figure 2, Governors and higher state executives have incumbency advantages that are at least as large as members of the U.S. House and Senate.

Redistricting seems especially unlikely to contribute additionally to the incumbency advantage. The U.S. Senate and U.S. House have comparable incumbency advantages in all but the last decade of our analysis, while only the House has redistricting. Similarly, state executives are never redistricted, and nonetheless have higher incumbency advantages than state legislators.

It may still be true that casework and other office resources explain the magnitude and growth of the incumbency advantage. However, for that to be an adequate explanation, all offices must experience a rise in the resources at their disposal and the casework that they do. In any case, it is difficult to see how attorney generals, secretaries of state, state treasurers, and other executives can use the bureaucracy as a scapegoat as effectively as legislators—after all, they *are* the top bureaucrats. Careful study of these factors awaits further investigation.

Challenger Quality

Growth in incumbents' vote margins may reflect the opposition they face. Challengers who have previously held prominent political offices are thought to be especially strong opponents – for example, Senators running for governor. The incidence of such challengers may partly explain rising incumbency advantages (Canon, 1990; Cox and Katz, 1996). Challenger quality is also widely held to account for differences in the reelection rates of House Representatives and Senators (Mann and Wolfinger, 1980; Hinckley, 1980; Abramowitz, 1988; Abramowitz and Segal, 1992; Westlye, 1991; Kranso, 1994; Gronke, 2000).

To test for this possibility, we include indicators for statewide officers, U.S. Senators, and

U.S. House members challenging statewide incumbents. The results are displayed in Table A.5 in the appendix. Statewide candidates are somewhat better opponents than other challengers, though most of these effects are statistically insignificant. Importantly, the inclusion of the indicators for challenger quality *does not* change the estimated incumbency advantage in each decade. Including the challenger quality variables increases the incumbency advantage estimates by at most one percentage point.

We further analyze the effect of challenger quality on incumbency advantage estimates in the U.S. House. Here, we use Jacobson's (1980) indicator of challenger quality.[11] In each decade, the experienced challengers receive approximately 2 percentage points more in the vote than inexperienced challengers. The incumbency advantage estimates change only slightly once we include the challenger experience indicators.

Another possibility is that challenger quality has trended downward, leading to higher incumbent vote margins. However, there is no trend at all in the percentage of statewide offices challenged by a statewide office holder, and a slight upward trend in the percentage of statewide offices challenged by a House incumbent.[12]

These results present a puzzle. Most of the literature comparing House and Senate elections examines the differential probabilities of reelection. Here, we document that challenger quality has little direct effect on vote shares, so any differential effect of challenger quality on probabilities, if real, must come in the standard deviation, without affecting the average vote.

Party

Perhaps the leading explanation for the rise of incumbency is the declining loyalty of voters to the parties. A stylized view of elections holds that two competing forces—incumbency and party—shape the contours of elections. Parties represent collective interests or broad views of politics, and many politicians act in coordination to present those collective interests to the public. Incumbency reflects the interests and activities of individual candidates. To the extent that voters respond to incumbency, the argument goes, they must turn away from collective interests (Fiorina, 1980). Likewise, declining loyalty to parties in the 1960s allegedly precipitated the rise of candidate-centered campaigning and an era of high incumbency advantages (Ferejohn, 1977; Fiorina, 1980; Wattenberg, 1984; Jacobson, 1990; Aldrich and Niemi 1996). These arguments suggest a strong, causal connection between incumbency and party.

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[11] We thank Gary Jacobson for providing us with an updated version of his measure.

[12] We do not yet have the analogous percentages for state legislators, so there is still some possibility that challenger political experience has declined. It is also possible that other aspects of challenger quality have fallen over time.

At first blush, the connection between incumbency and party looks quite strong. In Figure 3, incumbency rises in relative importance from less than 5 percent of the variance to fully a third of the variance in the vote. Party effects show a nearly equivalent drop in the percent of the variance of the vote explained—from over 50 percent to approximately 20 percent.

Closer consideration of the data raises doubts about the argument that lower party effects cause higher incumbency advantages (or vice versa). If the association between party and incumbency is a strong one, then we expect that it will be evident across offices as well as over time in the aggregate data and that the same pattern shown in Figure 3 will be evident in the NES survey data.

To test the association between party and incumbency in the aggregate data, we examined the estimated effects across all offices in the most recent decades using specification 3 with the survey measure of party division. This allows us to estimate the effect of party on each office, as well as the incumbency effects. The limitation is that these data are available only over the last two decades and not for all states. The estimated party effects and incumbency effects for different offices are displayed in Figure 7.

No relationship between party and incumbency effects across offices is evident. For governor, party has relatively small effects and incumbency relatively large effects. For the lowest level state executives the opposite pattern holds. However, for most other offices, party and incumbency have relatively strong effects. The correlation of the effects across offices is only .007.

From the perspective of existing political science thinking this pattern is quite puzzling. Party and incumbency are typically viewed as alternative modes of representation and alternative ways of voting. Our data suggest they are not. Were there only two important components of the vote—party and incumbency—there would necessarily be a negative association between these components of the vote. However, there is a third substantial component in our analysis, the residual. And it is large enough to absorb fluctuations in either party or incumbency.

Our evidence suggests that legislative politics, declining party loyalties, and changes in candidate quality are not sufficient to explain the patterns we observe. Clearly, more theoretical and empirical work is needed to identify the causes of rising incumbency advantages.

Discussion

American elections over the last half century have changed dramatically. For political scientists, the growing vote margins of U.S. House members have served as a key indicator of those changes. We have documented that since the 1940s, the incumbency advantage has climbed steadily in all state and federal elections, not just in the U.S. House. The incumbency advantage is a nation-wide phenomenon. It is equally powerful at the state and federal levels. It is equally important in legislative and executive elections.

Today, we are in an era of high incumbent vote margins and of strong short-term local factors. The incumbency advantages in all offices are four times what they were in the 1950s. But the residual component in the vote is as substantial as the incumbency advantage. We believe that many of these idiosyncratic factors are not controlled by and perhaps not foreseeable to incumbents. In effect, the 1960s and 1970s ushered in an era of high risk in elections. The incumbency advantage itself may be an adaptation to a climate of high risk elections.

Today, we are in an era of party competition within the states. The differences in party divisions across the states have shrunk enormously since the 1940s. The Solid South and the Republican North are history. Instead, it appears that state elections are competitive everywhere. In most states, local party monopolies over government have broken down. When incumbents run for statewide offices, the out party will have a relatively difficult time. But when incumbents are not running, either party may be able to win anywhere.

We conclude with a speculative reflection on the normative importance of incumbency for electoral accountability. The main objection to the incumbency advantage is that it lowers electoral control over the institutions of government. Our data analysis reveals that incumbency is not sufficient to explain the declining marginals in American elections. We have documented that the incumbency advantage has grown for all offices, and is at least as large in statewide elective offices as in the House. We have also shown (in Figure 1) that the incidence of marginal races in statewide offices has not fallen over the last 50 years, as it has in the U.S. House. Why the difference between the House and statewide offices? Other factors have also changed; most notably, the party divisions within the states have shrunk and the residual component in the vote has grown. That there are two different patterns of marginality – one for the U.S. House and one for the statewide elected offices – despite similar growth in the incumbency advantages suggests that the important change in the marginality of U.S. House seats rests in other political changes, factors that are more unique to the House, but are largely unrelated to incumbency.

Appendix: Statistical Methods

Specification

We estimate three different specifications. Let i index offices, j index states, and t index years. Let V_{ijt} be the share of the two-party vote received by the Democratic candidate running for office i in state j in year t. Let $I_{ijt} = 1$ if the Democratic candidate running for office i in state j in year t is an incumbent, let $I_{ijt} = -1$ if the Republican candidate running for office i in state j in year t is an incumbent, and let $I_{ijt} = 0$ if the contest for office i in state j in year t is an open-seat race.[13] The specifications are as follows:

$$V_{ijt} = \alpha_j + \theta_t + \beta_i I_{ijt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

$$V_{ijt} = \alpha_{jt} + \beta_i I_{ijt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad (2)$$

$$V_{ijt} = \alpha_i P_{jt} + \theta_{it} + \beta_i I_{ijt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad (3)$$

Model (1) includes separate year and state fixed-effects. The state fixed-effects capture the underlying partisanship (normal vote) in each state, and the year fixed-effects capture national tides. This is analogous to the specification used by Levitt and Wolfram (1997). Model (2) includes state-times-year fixed-effects. This is a version of the differences estimator discussed above. Model (3) includes a direct measure of state partisanship P_{jt}, which varies over time, plus year fixed-effects. Note that in this model we can allow the parameters to vary across offices (that is, we can estimate the model separately for senators, governors, lieutenant governors, and so on). In all models we can allow the parameters to change over longer periods of time—we typically allow them to change every decade.

Model (1) is more parsimonious than (2), requiring the estimation of many fewer parameters. However, (1) is an incorrect specification if, for example, partisanship has a trend and moves in different ways in different states. This is potentially a serious issue for our study, since the south and some western states have become much more Republican over the course of the post-war period, while the northeast and other western states have become noticeably more Democratic. One way to alleviate the problem is to allow the state fixed-effects to vary over decades. This is the approach taken by Levitt and Wolfram, and we adopt it as well. Comparing the estimates from (1) and (2) allows us to check how well this strategy works.

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[13] In the elections immediately following each decennial redistricting, there are a few U.S. House races and state legislative races in which both parties' candidates are incumbents. We drop the year just after each redistricting, so these never appear in our analysis.

We do not need a direct measure of state or district partisanship in order to estimate the overall size of the incumbency advantage, since we can use model (1) or (2). Having such a measure is useful, however, for investigating some of the main hypotheses about the incumbency advantage. We employ two different variables to measure partisanship. The first is the party identification variable of Erikson, Wright and McIver. These are constructed by combining the results from a large number of CBS News/New York Times polls, and cover the period 1976-2000.[14] The second is the statewide average presidential vote. For each year this is equal to the average vote each party received in the three most recent previous presidential elections. The main advantage of the presidential vote is that we can use it for entire 1942-2000 period.[15]

We estimate models (1)-(3) separately for six different decades, the 1940's, 1950's, 1960's, 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's (the 1940's cover 1942-1950, the 1950's cover 1952-1960, and so on). We do not allow the incumbency advantage to vary across all statewide offices, because many of these offices are only elected in a few states—for example, only five states had an elected Labor Commissioner at some point during the post-war period, only three states had an elected Commissioner or Inspector of Mines, and only two states had an elected State Printer (see Table A.1). Instead, we create groups of offices and estimate the average incumbency advantage for all offices within each group. We grouped the statewide offices two different ways. In the first grouping we treat seven offices separately—Senator, Governor,

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[14] See Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) and Wright, McIver, Erikson, and Holian (n.d.) for details.

[15] In constructing the averages, we omit observations (state-years) in which a state had a "home-state" presidential candidate.

Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer—and lump the remaining offices together in an "Other Office" category. In the second grouping there are just four categories—Senator, Governor, "High" Offices, and "Low" Offices. The High Offices are Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, and Secretary of State. All other statewide offices are in the Low Office group. The second grouping was determined inductively, after seeing the estimates from the first. Note that in both cases we estimate distinct incumbency advantage parameters for Governors and Senators. We do this in order to compare our findings with the previous literature.

We also want to compare our results for statewide offices with those for the U.S. House, since so much of the previous literature has focused on the House. To do this, we estimate a modified version of specification (1) in which district-specific fixed-effects are used in place of the state-specific fixed-effects. This is the basic model in Levitt and Wolfram (1997).

We use an analogous model to study state legislative elections for the period 1972-2000.[16] We only include single-member district races.[17] Also, as in King (1991), Cox and Morgenstern (1993, 1995) and others, we focus on the lower houses. Data for the period 1968-1988 are from the commonly used data set, *State Legislative Election Returns in the United States, 1968-1989*, ICPSR #8907. We collected the data for the period 1990-2000 ourselves, from the various sources listed in Table A.1.

Finally, we use data from various National Election Studies to study how the relationship between party, incumbency, and voting has changed over time at the individual-level. The NES only contains voting data for Governor, U.S. Senator, and U.S. House Representative.[18] As before, let i index offices, j index states, and t index years. In addition, let k index voters.

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[16] We include all state except Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia, Vermont, Virginia, and Wyoming. These states are dropped for one of the following reasons: most of the elections are multi-member, free-for-all elections, the legislature is very small, the legislature is non-partisan, or there are too many uncontested races. Most previous analyses have also dropped these states; in fact, the set of states we analyze is a superset of the states studied by King (1991) and Cox and Morgenstern (1993).

[17] This includes some races that are classified as "at-large races with post positions."

[18] Also, this is self-reported vote data, which has well known problems of accuracy.

Let $V_{kijt}=1$ if voter k votes for the Democratic candidate running in state j in year t; $V_{kijt}=0$ if voter k votes for the Republican. Let $I_{jt}=1$ if the Democratic candidate running in state j in year t is an incumbent, let $I_{ijt}=-1$ if the Republican candidate running in state j in year t is an incumbent, and let $I_{ijt}=0$ if the contest in state j in year t is an open-seat race. Finally, let P_{kj} be the party identification of voter k in state j. We estimate probit equations of the form

$$Prob(V_{kijt}=1) = \Phi(\alpha_i P_{kj} + \theta_{it} + \beta_i I_{ijt}) \tag{4}$$

where Φ is the standard normal cumulative distribution function. We estimate equation (4) separately for each office (as the notation implies) and each decade.

Comparing Measures of the Normal Vote

One methodological note concerns the appropriate measure of the normal vote.

Three common measures of the normal vote in the study of elections are the lagged vote for an office, the average vote for a given office overtime, and the presidential vote. Lagged vote is used to capture variation within incumbents (Erikson 1971). Lagged vote is likely a poor proxy for the normal vote, because it includes who won the seat last time (the incumbency effect) as well as idiosyncratic factors from the last election. It be adjusted, say by including indicators for who won last time (Gelman and King, 1990).[19] Presidential vote is sometimes used to proxy for the normal vote because that is only national elected office, and voters evaluate the parties' standard bearers. The problem with presidential vote is that it reflects idiosyncratic factors in that election. Also, presidential vote reflects national party and ideological divisions, rather than state party divisions. The average vote most closely captures the idea of the normal vote. One theoretical justification is that in a Markov model of elections the long-run average will converge to the normal vote (Stokes and Iverson 1962).

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[19] Solid theoretical and statistical foundations for adjusting the vote do not yet exist. See the discussion in Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2000) and Gelman, et al, (1995). Also, one cannot estimate the magnitude of the effect of party division on the vote.

Party divisions, however, are not necessarily stable overtime.

An important innovation, developed by Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993), is the use of state-level surveys to measure the normal vote. Assuming no survey biases, these polls capture the party division in the state. Survey measures are limited, however, by the number of states in which surveys are available and to the years for which such data are available.

In this paper, we introduce another approach to estimating the normal vote, which builds on Levitt and Wolfram's (1997) model. With many offices running at the same time, the normal vote is the average division of the vote across offices, holding fixed incumbency and national tides (see also the statistical definition of the normal vote in Gelman and King (1990)). The normal vote, then, is captured by the state-decade fixed-effects in specification (1) and the state-year fixed-effects in specification (2). The correlation between the fixed-effects from specifications (1) and (2) is .95 or higher in every decade in our study.[20]

Our estimates are highly correlated with the survey estimates of the party division. The correlation of the fixed-effects from specification (1) with the survey measures compiled by Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) is .83 for the 1970s, .81 for the 1980s, and .80 for the 1990s. The corresponding correlations using the fixed-effects from specification (2) are .79 for the 1970s, .85 for the 1980s, and .76 for the 1990s. These are reasonably high reliabilities, especially considering that the survey data also contain measurement error due to the sampling error. This suggests that our approach offers a valid way to estimate state normal votes when survey data are not available.

Comparison with presidential vote looks quite different. The correlations of the presidential vote with the fixed-effects from specification (1) are .94 for the 1940s, .88 for the 1950s, .41 for the 1960s, only .23 for the 1970s, .64 for the 1980s, and .71 for the 1990s. The corresponding correlations with the fixed-effects from specification (2) are .95 for the 1940s,

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[20] We have one fixed-effect per decade for each state from specification (1). To compare across specifications, we average the fixed-effects from specification (2) for each state across the years of each decade to create a set of decade averages. We also construct decade averages of the presidential vote and the survey-based party identification measure to calculate the correlations reported below.

.89 for the 1950s, .42 for the 1960s, only .28 for the 1970s, .68 for the 1980s, and .70 for the 1990s.

Our measure and Erikson, Wright, and McIver's validate each other. Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) found a similarly low correlation between their survey measure and the presidential vote in the 1970s. This arises in part from the fact that the presidential vote across states reflects other national political divisions in addition to party, and sometimes these divisions are not highly correlated with party (*e.g.*, Civil Rights and the Vietnam War).

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Table A.1: Elected Offices and Data Sources for Each State

	Elected Offices	Sources
All	Gov., Sen., House Rep.	Dubin (1998), ICPSR #7757,
All	1999, 2000 data, all offices	various state web pages
AL	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, PU, J	*Official and Statistical Register*
AZ	SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Co, M, Tx	*Year Book*; *Official Canvass*
AR	LG, SS, AG, Au, Ld	*Official Register*
CA	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, I	*Statement of Vote*
CO	LG, SS, AG, Tr, E, Rg, J	*Abstract of Votes Cast*
CT	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au	*Statement of Vote*
DE	LG, AG, Tr, Au, I	*State Manual*
FL	SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, RR	*Report of Secretary of State*
GA	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, PU, Lb, I	*Official and Statistical Register*
ID	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, M	*Abstract of Votes*
IL	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ck	*Official Vote of the State of Illinois*
IN	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ck, J	*Report of Secretary of State*
IA	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, Cm, J	*Official Register*; *Canvass of the Vote*
KS	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, I, Pr	*Official Statement of Vote Cast*
KY	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag	*Statement of Official Vote*
LA	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, xx	*Biennial Report of Secretary of State*
MD	AG, Au	*Complilation of Election Returns*
MA	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au	*Election Statistics*
MI	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au	*State Manual*
MN	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, RR	*Legislative Manual*
MS	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, Ld, I, Ck, Tx	*Official and Statistical Register*
MO	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au	*Official Vote of the State of Missouri*
MT	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, RR, Ck	*Official General Election Returns*
NE	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, RR	*Official Report of the State Canvassing Board*
NV	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, M, Ld, Ck, Pr	*Political History of Nevada*
NM	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ld, Co, J	*Blue Book*
NY	LG, AG, Au	*Legislative Manual*
NC	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, Lb, I, J	*State Manual*
ND	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, PU, Lb, I, Tx	*Official Abstract of Vote Cast*; *Compliation of Election Returns, 1976-1987*
OH	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, J	*Election Statistics*
OK	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Co, Lb, I, M, CC, J	*Directory of the State of Oklahoma*
OR	SS, AG, Tr, Lb	*Blue Book*; *Official Abstract of Votes*
PA	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, J	*State Manual; Official Results*

Table A.1, continued
Elected Offices and Data Sources for Each State

	Elected Offices	Sources
RI	LG, SS, AG, Tr	*Official Count of the Ballots Cast*
SC	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, Ad	*Supplemental Report of Sec. of State*
SD	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, PU, Ld	*Offical Election Returns*
TN	RR	*Directory and Official Vote*
TX	LG, AG, Tr, Au, Ag, RR, Ld, J	*Texas Almanac*
UT	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, J	*Abstract of Vote*
VT	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au	*Legislative Directory and State Manual*
VA	LG, AG	*Report of Secretary of State*
WA	LG, SS, AG, Tr, Au, Ld, I	*Abstract of Votes*
WV	SS, AG, Tr, Au, E, Ag, J	*Official Returns*
WI	LG, SS, AG, Tr	*Blue Book*
WY	SS, Tr, Au, E	*Official Directory*

In AK, HI, ME, NH, and NJ there are no statewide races other than Senate and Governor.

LG = Lieutenant Governor
SS = Secretary of State
AG = Attorney General
Tr = Treasurer
Au = Auditor, Controller, Comptroller, Examiner
Ag = Commissioner of Agriculture, Agriculture and Industry, etc.
E = Commissioner of Education, Superintendent of Schools, etc.
Rg = Regent
PU = Public Utility Commissioner, Public Service Commissioner, etc.
RR = Railroad Commissioner, Railroad & Public Utility Commissioner, etc.
Co = Corporation Commissioner
Cm = Commerce Commissioner
I = Insurance Commissioner
Lb = Commissioner of Labor
Ld = Land Commissioner, Surveyor
M = Commissioner of Mines, Mine Inspector
Tx = Tax Commissioner, Tax Collector
CC = Charities and Corrections Commissioner
Pr = Printer
Ck = Court Clerk, Court Reporter
Ad = Adjutant General
J = Supreme Court Justice, Appeals Court Judge

Table A.2: Estimates of the Incumbency Advantage
Statewide Races 1942-2000, Models (1) and (2)

Dep. Var. = Democratic Share of Two-Party Vote

Model (1)	1942-1950	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
Senate	0.69	2.12**	5.85**	6.19**	9.53**	8.93**
Incumbent	(0.48)	(0.44)	(0.53)	(0.77)	(0.66)	(0.65)
Gubernatorial	1.52**	1.58**	3.44**	6.31**	7.11**	10.56**
Incumbent	(0.52)	(0.52)	(0.60)	(0.98)	(0.84)	(0.90)
‘Hi’ Statewide	1.81**	2.28**	4.97**	8.24**	8.75**	9.75**
Incumbent	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.47)	(0.74)	(0.71)	(0.70)
‘Lo’ Statewide	1.61**	1.93**	3.87**	5.47**	5.62**	5.20**
Incumbent	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.39)	(0.64)	(0.57)	(0.52)
R^2	.88	.80	.61	.58	.60	.62
# Obs.	1122	1094	1041	801	881	824
F	1.38	0.51	4.62**	3.00**	8.25**	15.35**
Model (2)	1942-1950	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
Senate	1.29**	2.13**	5.92**	5.35**	8.87**	8.79**
Incumbent	(0.41)	(0.38)	(0.59)	(0.99)	(0.78)	(0.86)
Gubernatorial	1.03*	1.18**	3.63**	6.55**	7.48**	10.46**
Incumbent	(0.40)	(0.41)	(0.61)	(1.02)	(0.88)	(0.95)
‘Hi’ Statewide	1.71**	2.33**	5.39**	8.54**	8.78**	10.10**
Incumbent	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.46)	(0.73)	(0.70)	(0.70)
‘Lo’ Statewide	1.93**	2.29**	3.88**	5.54**	6.10**	5.17**
Incumbent	(0.25)	(0.24)	(0.39)	(0.67)	(0.56)	(0.53)
R^2	.95	.91	.74	.72	.74	.73
# Obs.	1122	1094	1041	801	881	824
F	1.64	2.29	5.26**	4.16**	4.47**	15.21**

OLS estimates. Standard errors in parentheses.

Model 1 includes state-fixed effect and year fixed-effects; see equation (1) in text.
Model 2 includes state-times-year fixed-effects; see equation (2) in text.

F gives the F-statistic for testing the null hypothesis that all incumbency effects are equal.

* = statistically significant at the .05 level
** = statistically significant at the .05 level

Table A.3: Estimates of the Incumbency Advantage with Non-Incumbent Political Experience Controlled Statewide Races 1942-2000, Model (1)

Dep. Var. = Democratic Share of Two-Party Vote

Model (1)	1942-1950	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
Senate Incumbent	0.52 (0.49)	2.51** (0.48)	6.36** (0.55)	6.59** (0.78)	10.40** (0.69)	9.30** (0.67)
Gubernatorial Incumbent	1.43* (0.53)	1.73** (0.52)	3.67** (0.61)	6.73** (0.99)	7.52** (0.84)	11.09** (0.92)
'Hi' Statewide Incumbent	1.79** (0.35)	2.34** (0.36)	5.04** (0.47)	8.31** (0.74)	8.77** (0.70)	9.82** (0.69)
'Lo' Statewide Incumbent	1.59** (0.32)	1.99** (0.31)	3.92** (0.39)	5.59** (0.64)	5.63** (0.56)	5.24** (0.52)
Non-Incumbent Statewide Officer	0.12 (0.51)	0.55 (0.51)	0.95 (0.60)	1.22 (0.99)	1.21 (0.91)	1.90* (0.86)
Non-Incumbent House Rep, Small	1.38 (1.87)	2.10 (1.21)	0.96 (1.56)	5.72** (1.81)	8.24** (2.13)	4.80** (1.81)
Non-Incumbent House Rep, Large	−2.31* (0.96)	1.48 (1.03)	5.09** (1.11)	1.34 (1.74)	2.85* (1.31)	0.84 (1.34)
R^2	.88	.80	.62	.59	.61	.62
# Obs.	1122	1094	1041	801	881	824
F	1.72	0.68	5.94**	2.82*	10.88**	16.98**

OLS estimates. Standard errors in parentheses.

Model 1 includes state-fixed effect and year fixed-effects; see equation (1) in text.

F gives the F-statistic for testing the null hypothesis that all incumbency effects are equal.

Non-Incumbent Statewide Officer = non-incumbent candidate holds an elected statewide office other than the one he or she is seeking.

Non-Incumbent House Rep, Small = non-incumbent candidate is a U.S. House Representative running in a state with 4 or fewer U.S. House districts.

Non-Incumbent House Rep, Large = non-incumbent candidate is a U.S. House Representative running in a state with 5 or more U.S. House districts.

* = statistically significant at the .05 level
** = statistically significant at the .05 level

Table A.4: Estimates of the Incumbency Advantage
Statewide Races 1942-2000, Model (3)

Dep. Var. = Democratic Share of Two-Party Vote

Model (3)^1	1942-1950	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
Senate Incumbent	2.28**	3.48**	7.19**	6.66**	10.67**	10.13**
	(0.63)	(0.53)	(0.60)	(0.84)	(0.64)	(0.63)
Gubernatorial Incumbent	3.51**	2.55**	3.86**	7.10**	7.61**	10.61**
	(0.68)	(0.61)	(0.70)	(1.08)	(0.85)	(0.90)
'Hi' Statewide Incumbent	3.65**	2.17**	6.14**	9.82**	9.06**	9.66**
	(0.46)	(0.42)	(0.52)	(0.81)	(0.71)	(0.69)
'Lo' Statewide Incumbent	3.51**	2.31**	5.15**	7.69**	6.23**	5.64**
	(0.41)	(0.36)	(0.44)	(0.70)	(0.55)	(0.52)
State Party Strength	1.26**	1.07**	0.26**	0.26**	0.39**	0.48**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)
R^2	.75	.68	.42	.40	.53	.56
# Obs.	1122	1094	1037	801	881	824
Model (3)^2				1974-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
Senate Incumbent				5.27**	9.63**	9.38**
				(0.89)	(0.64)	(0.63)
Gubernatorial Incumbent				5.95**	7.56**	10.46**
				(1.11)	(0.83)	(0.89)
'Hi' Statewide Incumbent				8.81**	8.91**	9.63**
				(0.86)	(0.68)	(0.68)
'Lo' Statewide Incumbent				6.74**	5.39**	5.28**
				(0.74)	(0.54)	(0.51)
State Party Strength^2				0.49**	0.38**	0.37**
				(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)
R^2				.49	.55	.56
# Obs.				638	871	815

OLS estimates. Standard errors in parentheses.

Model 3 includes year fixed-effects; see equation (3) in text.

[1] State Party Strength measured using previous Presidential vote.
[2] State Party Strength measured using Erikson, Wright, and McIver survey measure.

* = statistically significant at the .05 level
** = statistically significant at the .05 level

Table A.5: Estimates of the Incumbency Advantage U.S. House Races 1942-2000, Model (1), and State Lower House Races 1972-2000, Model (1)

Dep. Var. = Democratic Share of Two-Party Vote

U.S. House	1942-1950	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
House Incumbent	1.09^{**} (0.24)	2.87^{**} (0.26)	5.48^{**} (0.46)	7.26^{**} (0.37)	8.18^{**} (0.47)	6.16^{**} (0.30)
R^2	.94	.93	.95	.90	.93	.95
# Obs.	974	1495	814	1422	1316	1466
U.S. House	1942-1950	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
House Incumbent	1.05^{**} (0.34)	3.26^{**} (0.31)	6.49^{**} (0.54)	8.46^{**} (0.44)	9.01^{**} (0.50)	7.41^{**} (0.34)
Non-Incumbent Officeholder	1.17^{**} (0.38)	0.69^{*} (0.31)	1.93^{**} (0.55)	2.59^{**} (0.50)	2.31^{**} (0.50)	2.56^{**} (0.35)
R^2	.97	.93	.95	.90	.93	.95
# Obs.	974	1495	814	1422	1316	1466
State House	1942-1950	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
State Legislative Incumbent				4.52^{**} (0.14)	5.17^{**} (0.18)	5.05^{**} (0.19)
R^2				.87	.93	.96
# Obs.				8771	6316	5175

OLS estimates. Standard errors in parentheses.

Model 1 includes district-fixed effect and year fixed-effects; see equation (1) in text.
Years immediately following redistricting are omitted.

* = statistically significant at the .05 level
** = statistically significant at the .05 level

Table A.6: Individual Voter Behavior in Senate and Gubernatorial Races 1952-2000

Probit Estimates, Dep. Var. = Voted Democratic

Governor Vote	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
Gubernatorial Incumbent	.05**	.13**	.14**	.12**	.16**
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
	[.05]	[.13]	[.13]	[.12]	[.15]
Voter Party Identification	.20**	.17**	.16**	.15**	.17**
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
	[.75]	[.64]	[.60]	[.59]	[.67]
Pseudo R^2	.44	.31	.29	.27	.35
# Obs.	1255	1883	2342	2121	1218

Senate Vote	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
Senate Incumbent	.08**	.08**	.13**	.18**	.13**
	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
	[.08]	[.08]	[.12]	[.17]	[.12]
Voter Party Identification	.20**	.18**	.15**	.16**	.17**
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
	[.76]	[.64]	[.56]	[.63]	[.66]
Pseudo R^2	.43	.35	.25	.31	.35
# Obs.	2392	2168	3140	3233	3227

OLS estimates. Standard errors in parentheses.

Terms in square brackets give comparative statics. For the incumbency variables, they show how changing from an open-seat race to a race with a Democratic incumbent affects a voter's probability of voting Democratic (holding all other variables fixed at their mean values). For the party identification variables, they show how changing from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean affects a voter's probability of voting Democratic (holding all other variables fixed at their mean values).

Model includes year fixed-effects; see equation (4) in text.

* = statistically significant at the .05 level
** = statistically significant at the .05 level

Figure 1

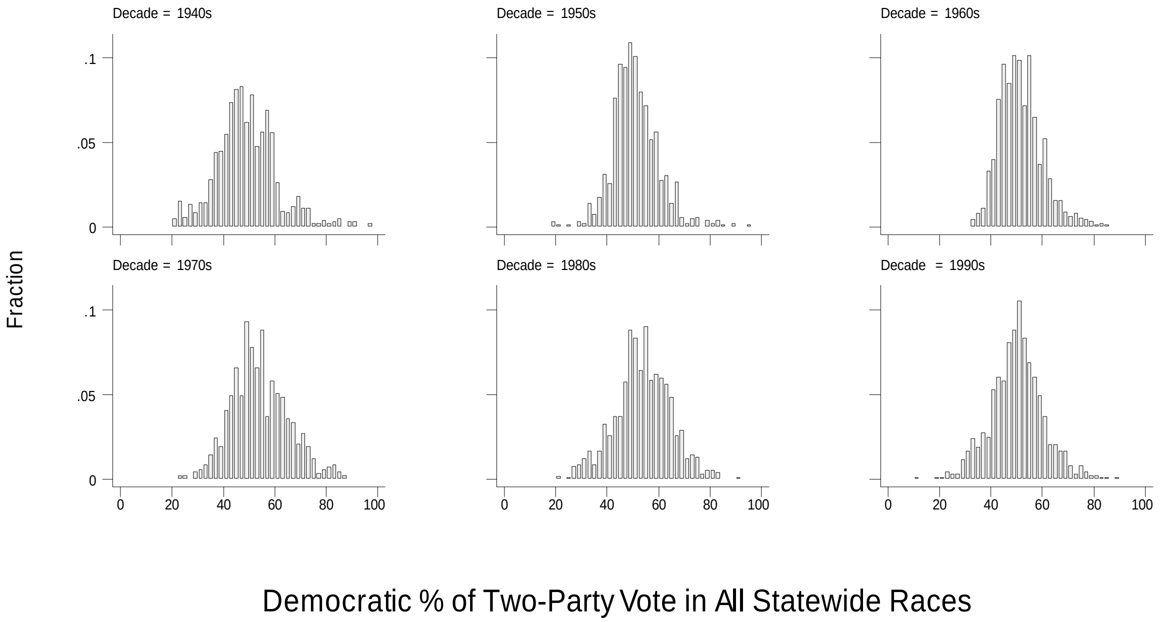

Decade = 1940s
Decade = 1950s
Decade = 1960s
Decade = 1970s
Decade = 1980s
Decade = 1990s
Fraction
.1
.05
0
.1
.05
0
0
20
40
60
80
100
Democratic % of Two-Party Vote in All Statewide Races

Figure 2

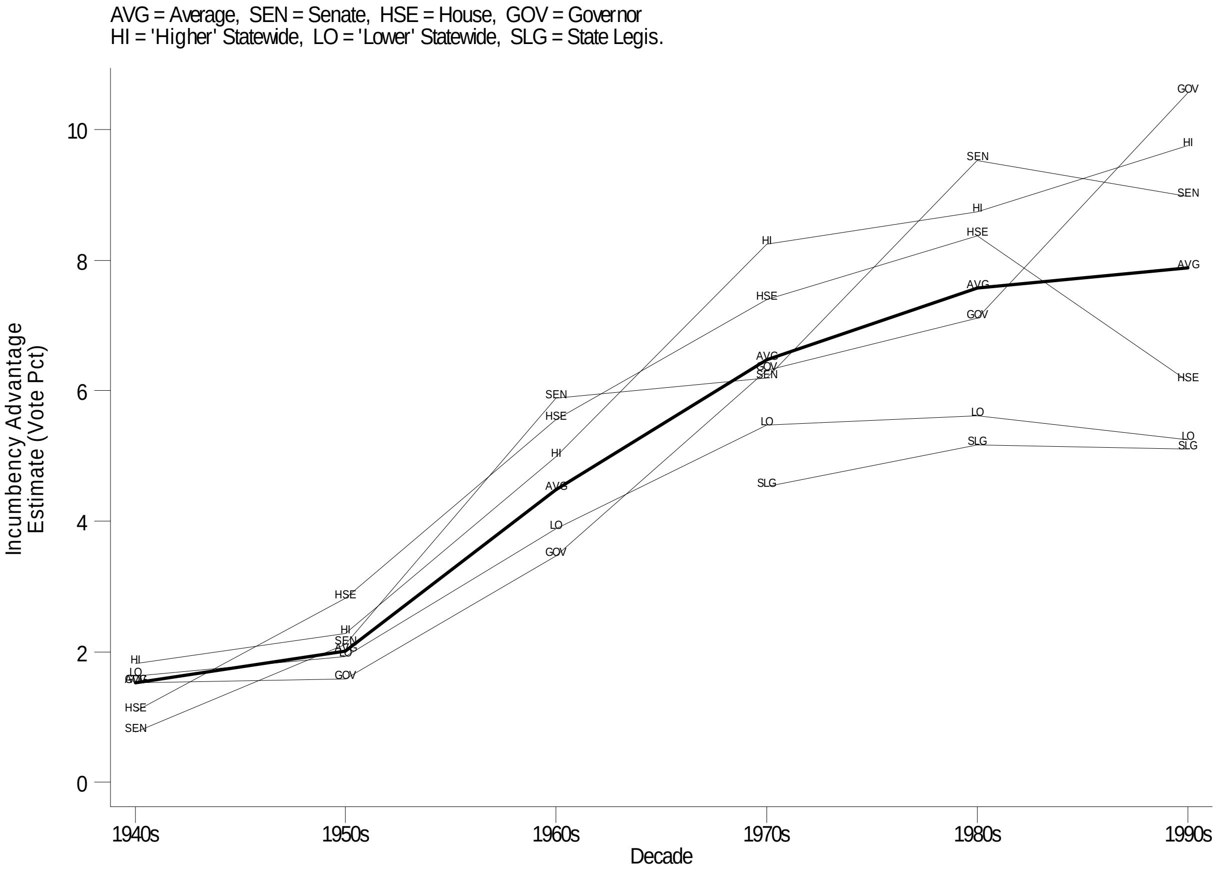

AVG = Average, SEN = Senate, HSE = House, GOV = Governor
HI = 'Higher' Statewide, LO = 'Lower' Statewide, SLG = State Legis.
Incumbency Advantage
Estimate (Vote Pct)
0
2
4
6
8
10
1940s
1950s
1960s
1970s
1980s
1990s
Decade
HI
LO
AVG
GOV
HSE
SEN
HSE
HI
SEN
AVG
LO
GOV
SEN
HSE
HI
AVG
LO
GOV
HI
HSE
AVG
GOV
SEN
LO
SLG
SEN
HI
HSE
AVG
GOV
LO
SLG
GOV
HI
SEN
AVG
HSE
LO
SLG

Figure 3

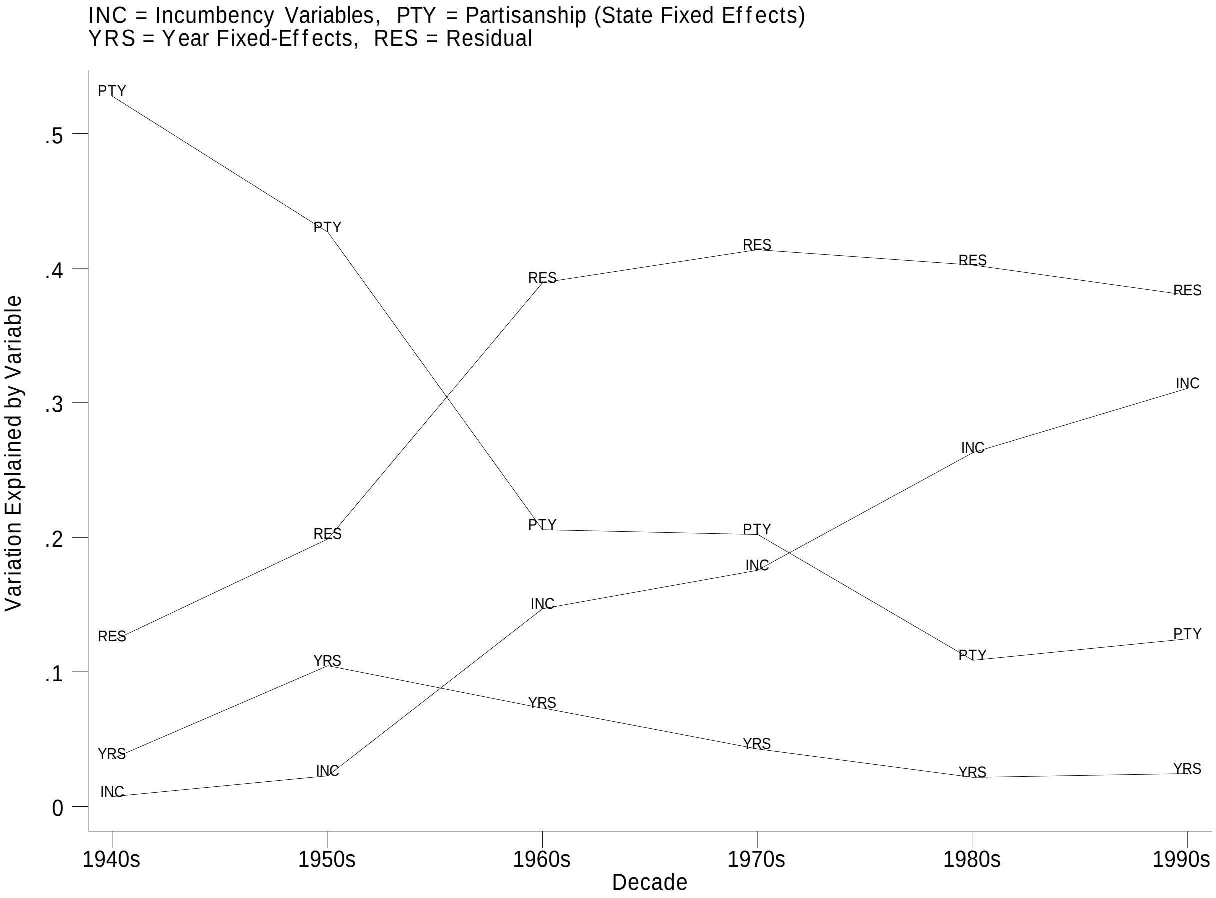

INC = Incumbency Variables, PTY = Partisanship (State Fixed Effects)
YRS = Year Fixed-Effects, RES = Residual
Variation Explained by Variable
0
.1
.2
.3
.4
.5
1940s
1950s
1960s
1970s
1980s
1990s
Decade
PTY
RES
INC
YRS

Figure 4

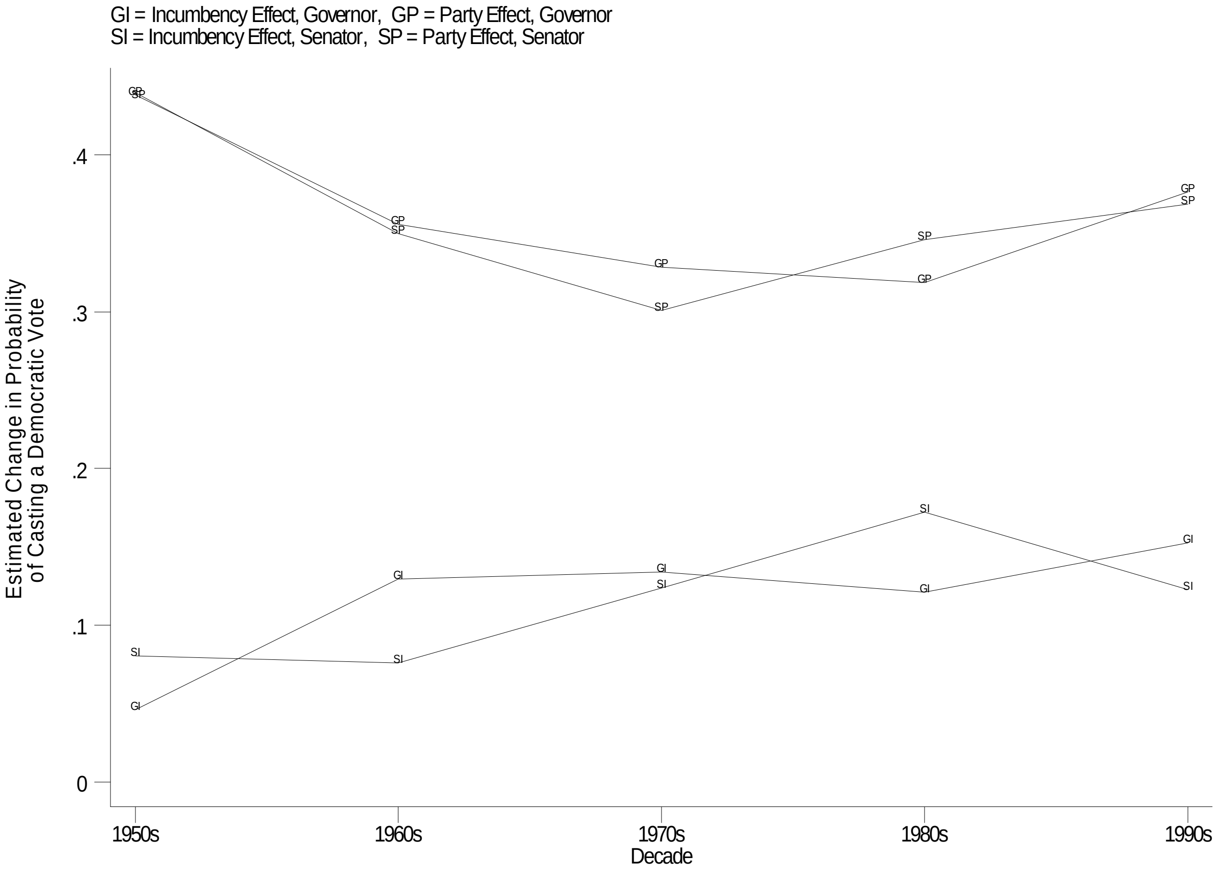

GI = Incumbency Effect, Governor, GP = Party Effect, Governor
SI = Incumbency Effect, Senator, SP = Party Effect, Senator
Estimated Change in Probability of Casting a Democratic Vote
0
.1
.2
.3
.4
1950s
1960s
1970s
1980s
1990s
Decade
GP
SP
SI
GI

Figure 5

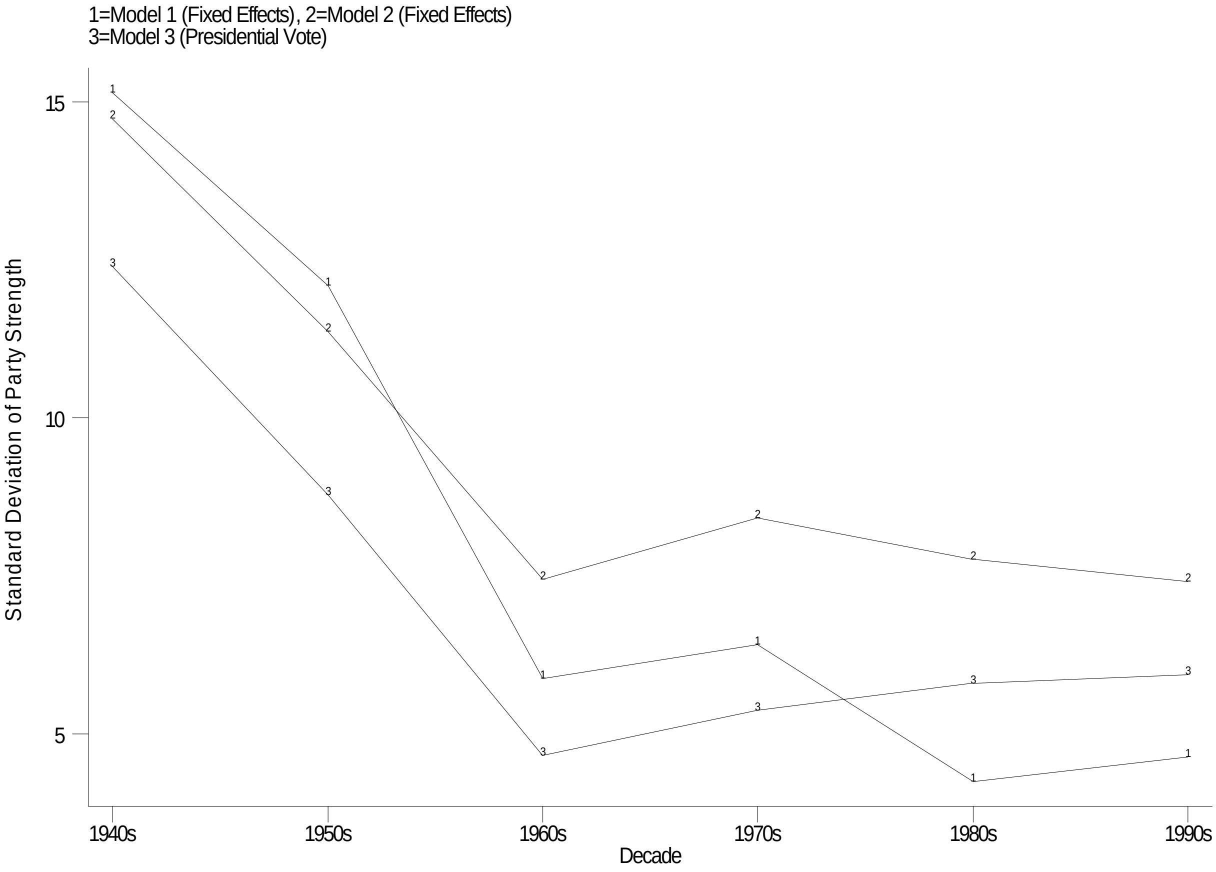
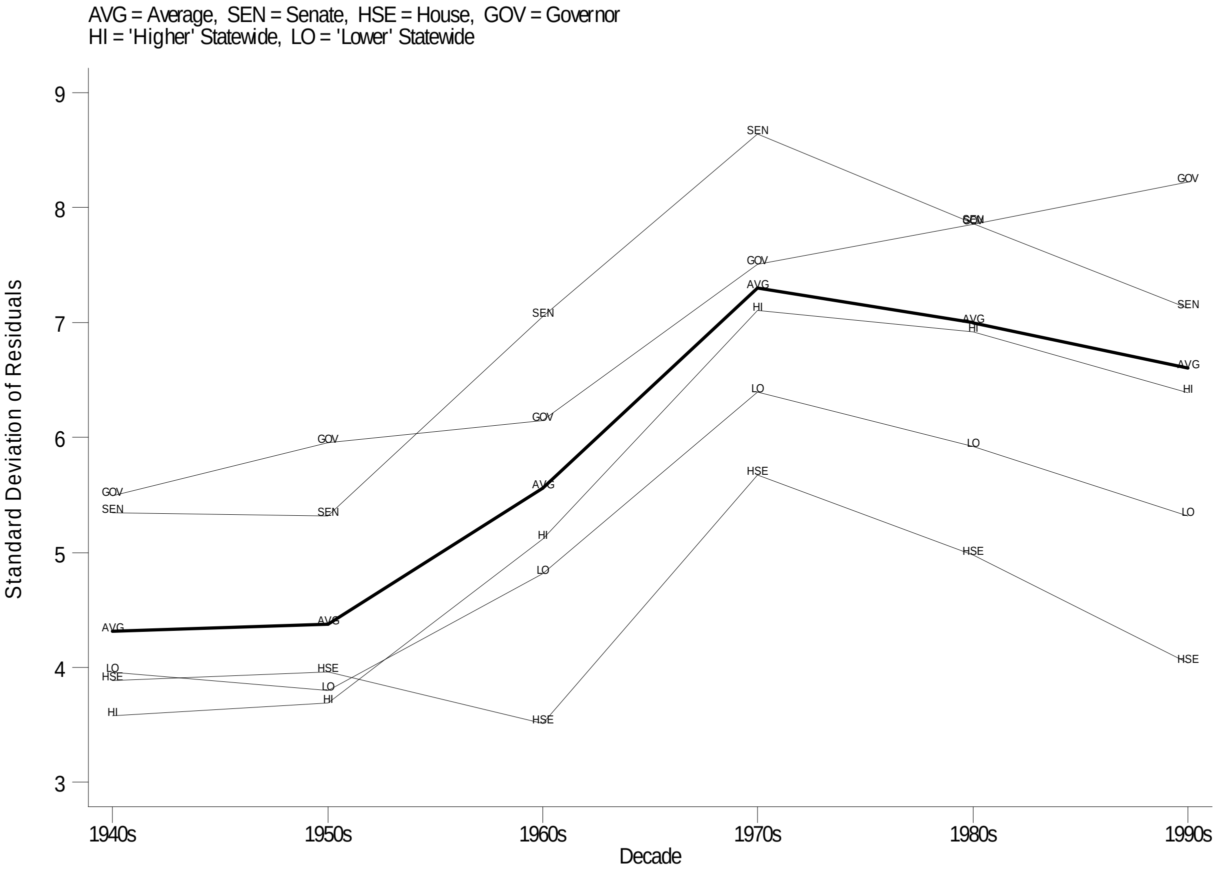
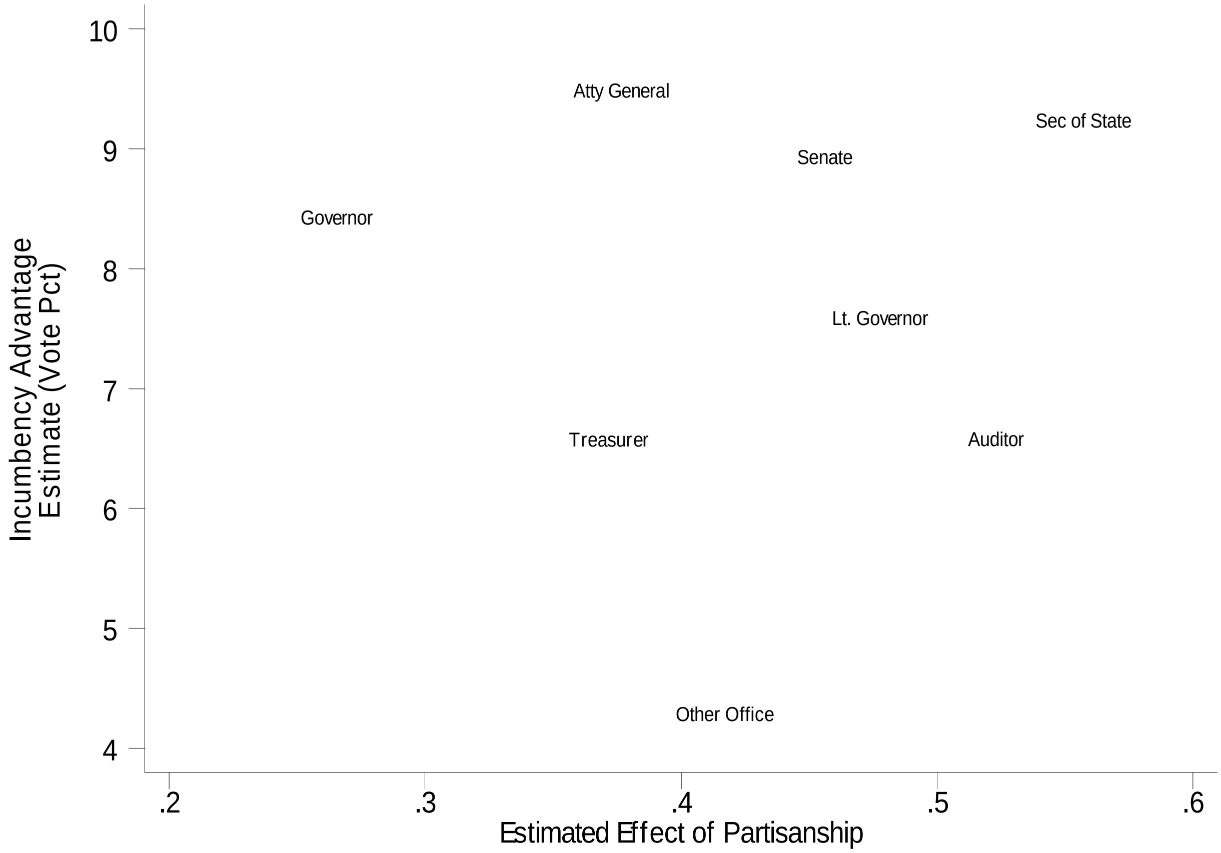

1=Model 1 (Fixed Effects), 2=Model 2 (Fixed Effects)
3=Model 3 (Presidential Vote)
Standard Deviation of Party Strength
15
10
5
1
2
3
1940s
1950s
1960s
1970s
1980s
1990s
Decade

Figure 6



AVG = Average, SEN = Senate, HSE = House, GOV = Governor
HI = 'Higher' Statewide, LO = 'Lower' Statewide
Standard Deviation of Residuals
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
1940s
1950s
1960s
1970s
1980s
1990s
Decade
SEN
GOV
AVG
HI
LO
HSE

Figure 7


Atty General
Sec of State
Senate
Governor
Lt. Governor
Treasurer
Auditor
Other Office
Incumbency Advantage Estimate (Vote Pct)
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
.2
.3
.4
.5
.6
Estimated Effect of Partisanship