

# **Elections & Voting Choice**



October 18, 2017

**POL 001: Introduction to American Politics**

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**Fall 2017**

**UC DAVIS**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

# Outline

1. Election Basics
2. Voter Knowledge
3. Incumbency
4. Redistricting
5. Partisanship
6. Campaign Spending
7. Campaign Nationalization

# Election Basics

# Legislative Election Basics

- House of Representatives
  - Elected in single-seat districts of about 700,000 people each
  - Districts are redrawn every census (every decade)
  - Two year terms
- The Senate
  - Members elected statewide
  - Two members per state
  - Six year terms (staggered)
- We will discuss the electoral college and presidential elections later!

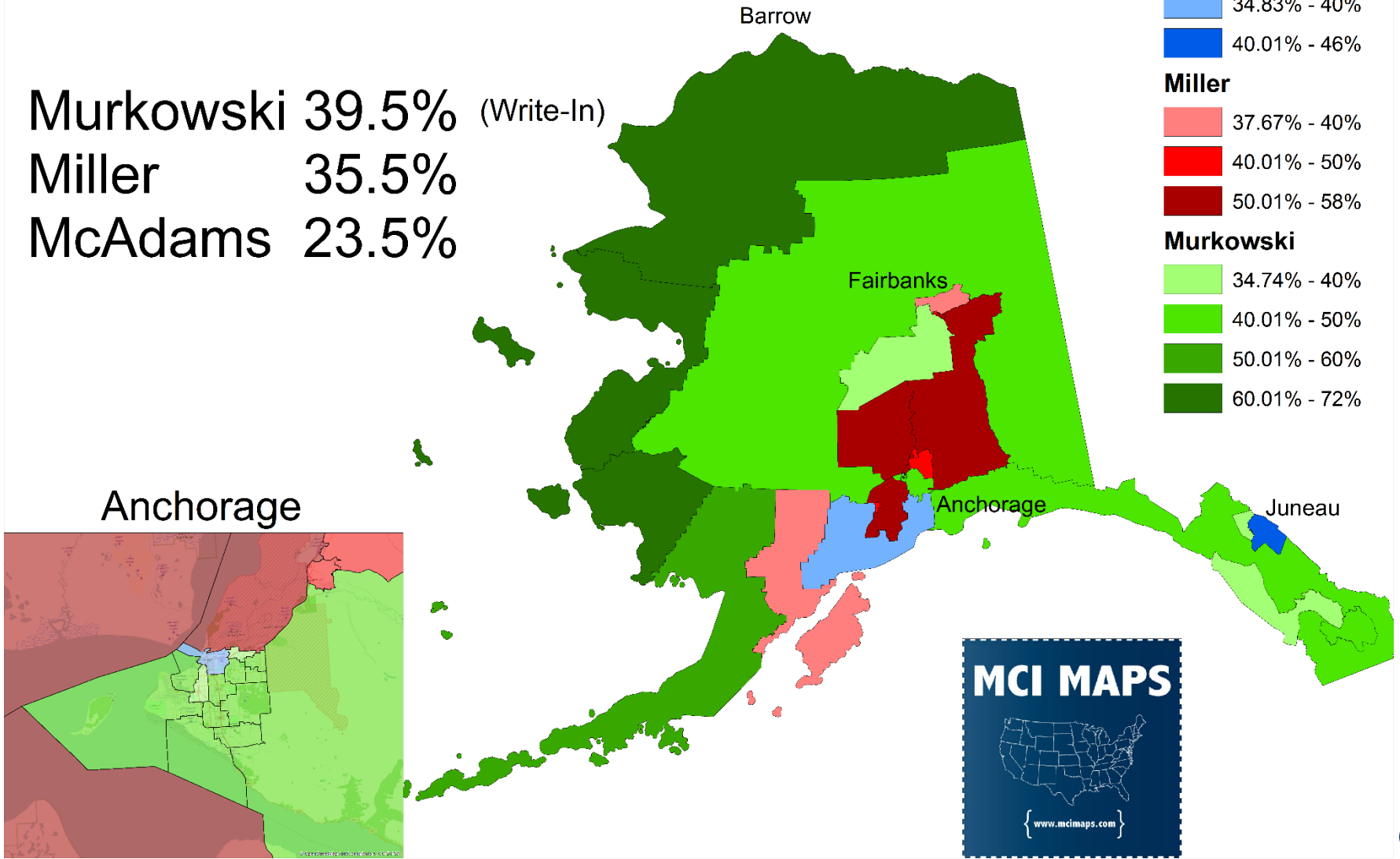
# Legislative Electoral System

- Members of both chambers are elected using a system called *First Past the Post*
- Under this system, the candidate with the most votes wins the election
  - This could be well under 50% of the votes!
  - Note: some Southern states have runoff elections if no candidate receives 50% of the vote
- Primaries are used to determine the nominees of each party
  - Primary rules vary significantly from state to state

# 2010 US Senate Race in Alaska

## Results by State House Seat

Murkowski 39.5% (Write-In)  
 Miller 35.5%  
 McAdams 23.5%



# Legislative Primaries

- Most states have party primaries that are either
  - *Open*: any voter can vote
  - *Closed*: only voters registered with the party can vote
- Oregon, California, and Nebraska use *top-two* primaries
  - All candidates run on one ballot in the primary, with the two largest vote-getters advancing to the general election
- Louisiana uses a *jungle* primary
  - Louisiana has only a general election with all candidates running simultaneously
  - If no candidate gets over 50%, the top two advance to a runoff election

# The 2012 Texas Senate Race: Primary

U.S. Senate Runoff Election, Texas Democratic Primary, 2012		
Candidate	Vote %	Votes
✓ Paul Sadler	63%	148,940
Grady Yarbrough	37%	87,365
<b>Total Votes</b>		<b>236,305</b>

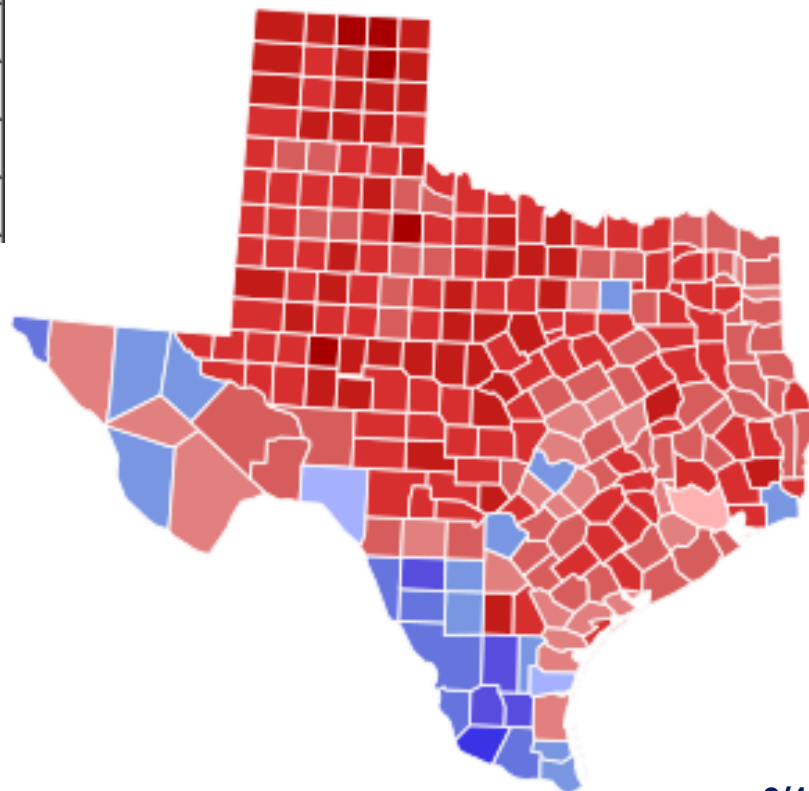
U.S. Senate Runoff Election, Texas Republican Primary, 2012		
Candidate	Vote %	Votes
✓ Ted Cruz	56.8%	631,812
David Dewhurst	43.2%	480,126
<b>Total Votes</b>		<b>1,111,938</b>

- [David Dewhurst is gone, but not forgotten](#)



# The 2012 Texas Senate Race: General

U.S. Senate, Texas General Election, 2012				[hide]
Party	Candidate	Vote %	Votes	
Republican	✓ Ted Cruz	56.5%	4,440,137	
Democratic	Paul Sadler	40.6%	3,194,927	
Libertarian	John Jay Myers	2.1%	162,354	
Green	David B. Collins	0.9%	67,404	
<b>Total Votes</b>			<b>7,864,822</b>	







# The 2016 California Senate Race: Primary

## Open Primary

CANDIDATES	PARTY	VOTE	PCT.
Kamala Harris ✓	Democrat	2,051,048	<b>40.4%</b>
Loretta Sanchez ✓	Democrat	943,002	<b>18.6</b>
Duf Sundheim	Republican	406,964	<b>8.0</b>
Phil Wyman	Republican	246,623	<b>4.9</b>
Thomas Del Beccaro	Republican	213,946	<b>4.2</b>
Greg Conlon	Republican	160,164	<b>3.2</b>
Steve Stokes	Democrat	105,568	<b>2.1</b>
George Yang	Republican	77,826	<b>1.5</b>
Karen Roseberry	Republican	74,845	<b>1.5</b>
Tom Palzer	Republican	65,522	<b>1.3</b>
Gail Lightfoot	Libertarian	65,203	<b>1.3</b>
Ron Unz	Republican	64,698	<b>1.3</b>

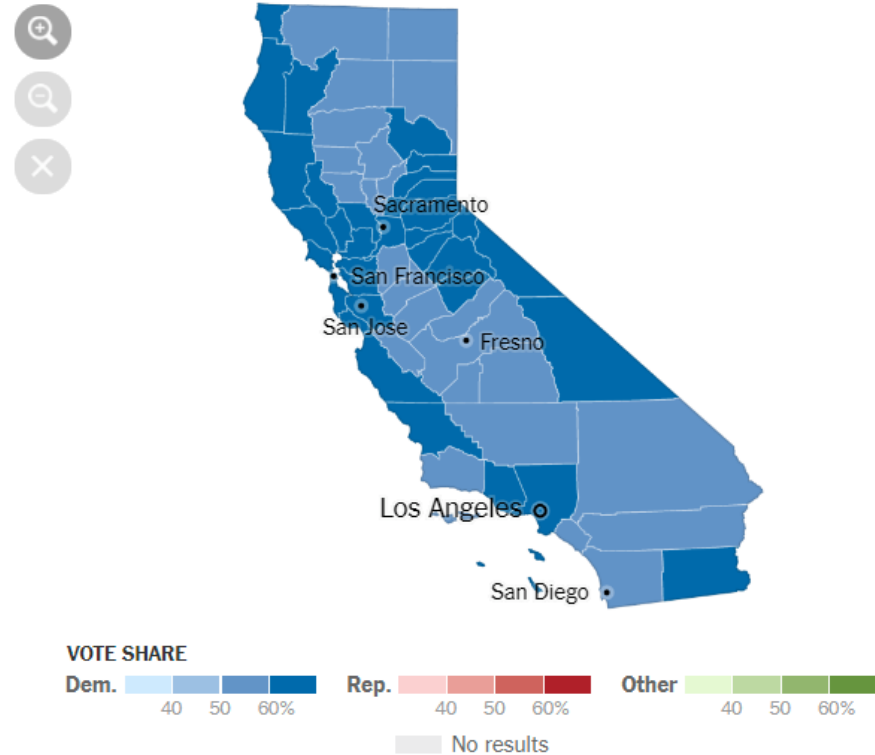
# The 2016 California Senate Race: General

## U.S. Senate

CANDIDATE	PARTY	VOTES	PCT.
 ✓ Kamala Harris	Democrat	7,542,753	<b>61.6%</b> 
 Loretta Sanchez	Democrat	4,701,417	<b>38.4</b> 

100% reporting (24,849 of 24,849 precincts)

[U.S. Senate Map »](#)



# Models of Electoral Accountability

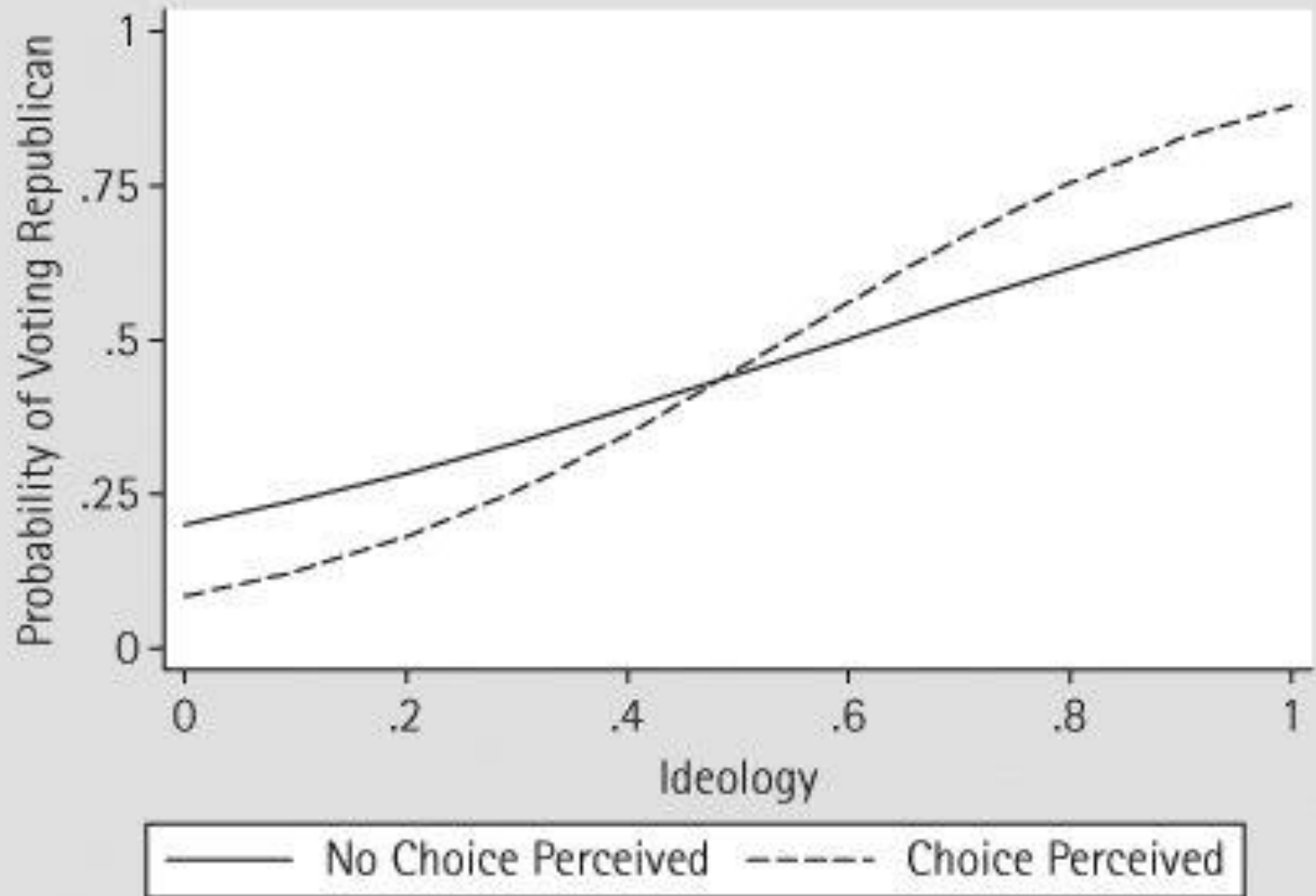
Heuristic	Model of Vote Choice	Effect on Politicians' Behavior	What Does the Model Explain?
<b>Party Identification</b>	Michigan Model	Respond to base voters in their party	Vote choice, partisan bias
<b>Ideology</b>	Spatial model/proximity voting	Respond to the median voter	Candidate ideology, ideological representation
<b>Valence</b>	Retrospective model	Motivated to provide goods, appear competent and moral	Vote choice, presidential elections

# Voter Knowledge

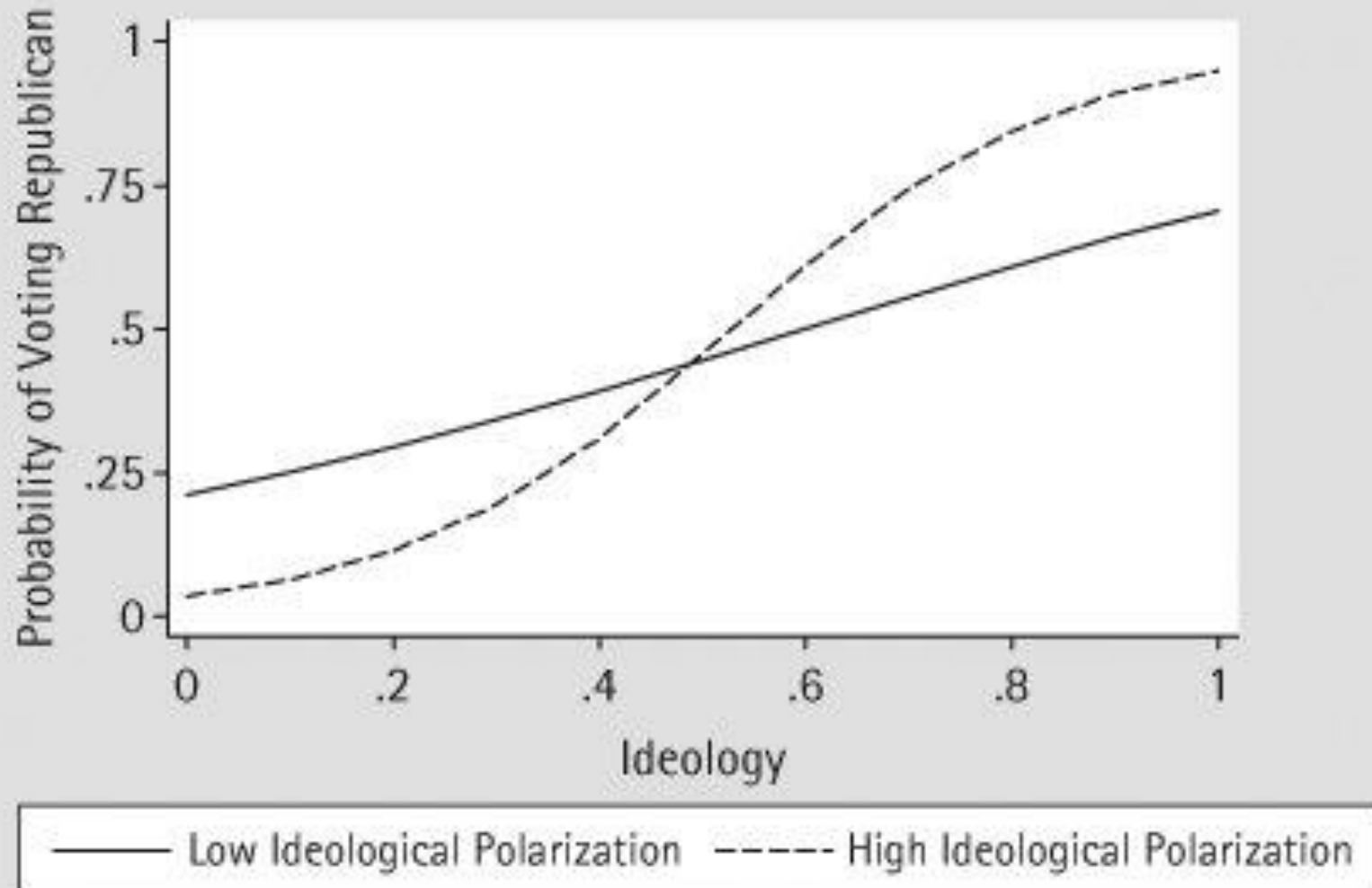
# Voter Knowledge Matters

- Recall, there are *information costs* to voters acquiring information about candidates and elections
- What do Stone and Buttice find in today's assigned article regarding voter knowledge?
- A voter's level of knowledge, along with the extremism of the candidates, is a good predictor of whether the voter perceives there being a choice in the election

## A. Ideology, perception of choice, and vote choice.



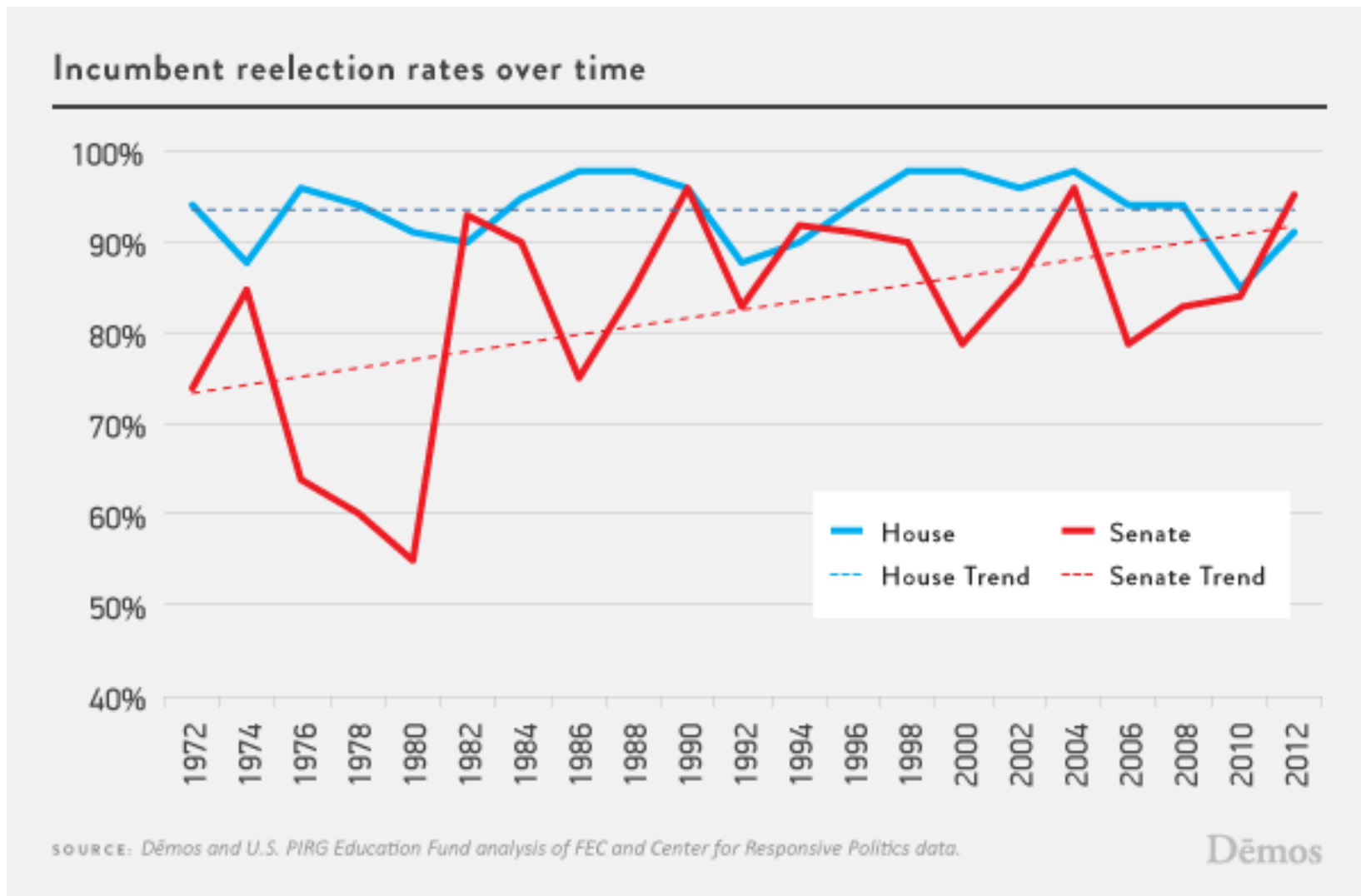
## C Ideology, candidate polarization, and vote choice.



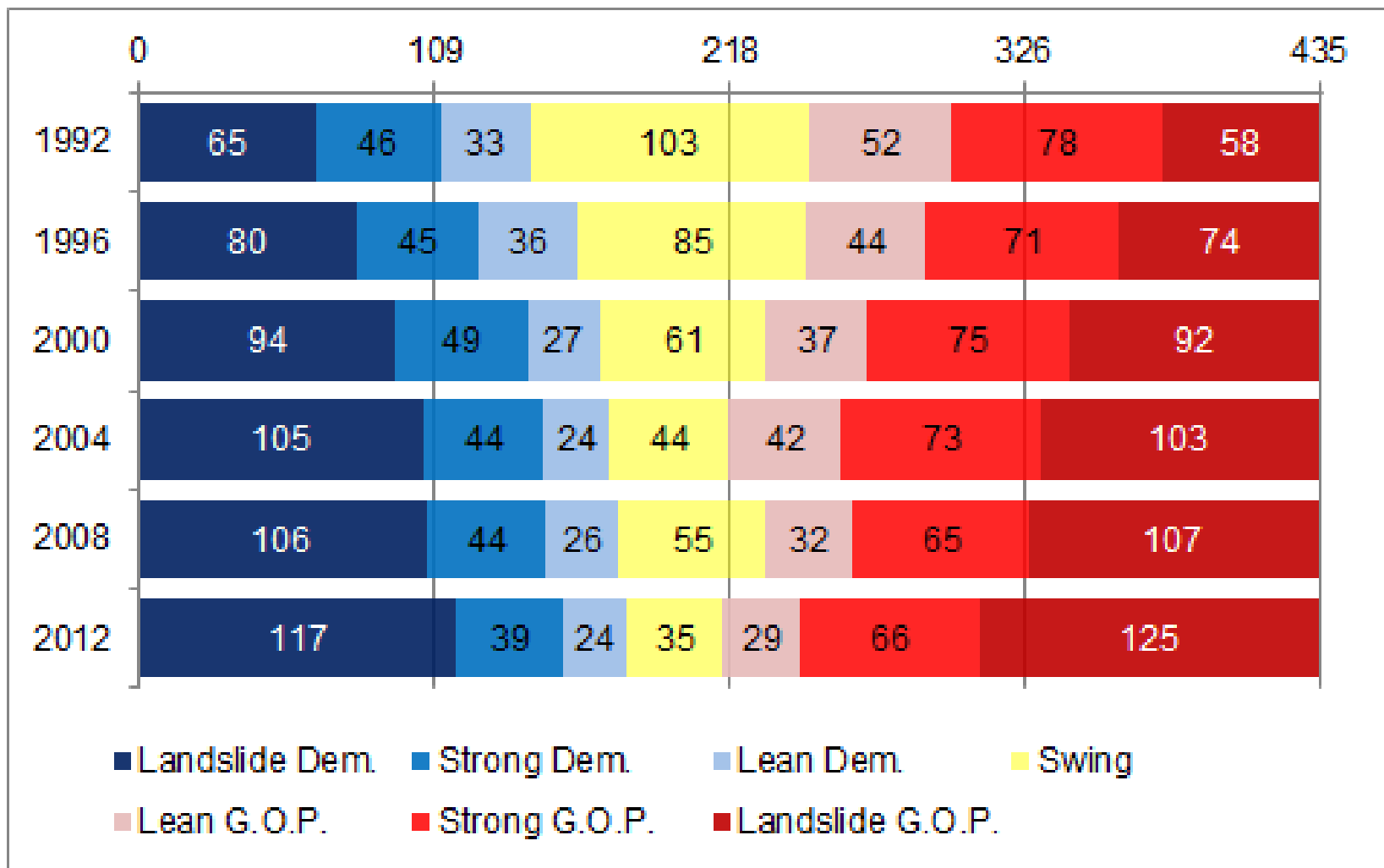


# Incumbency

# Decline in Senate Race Competition



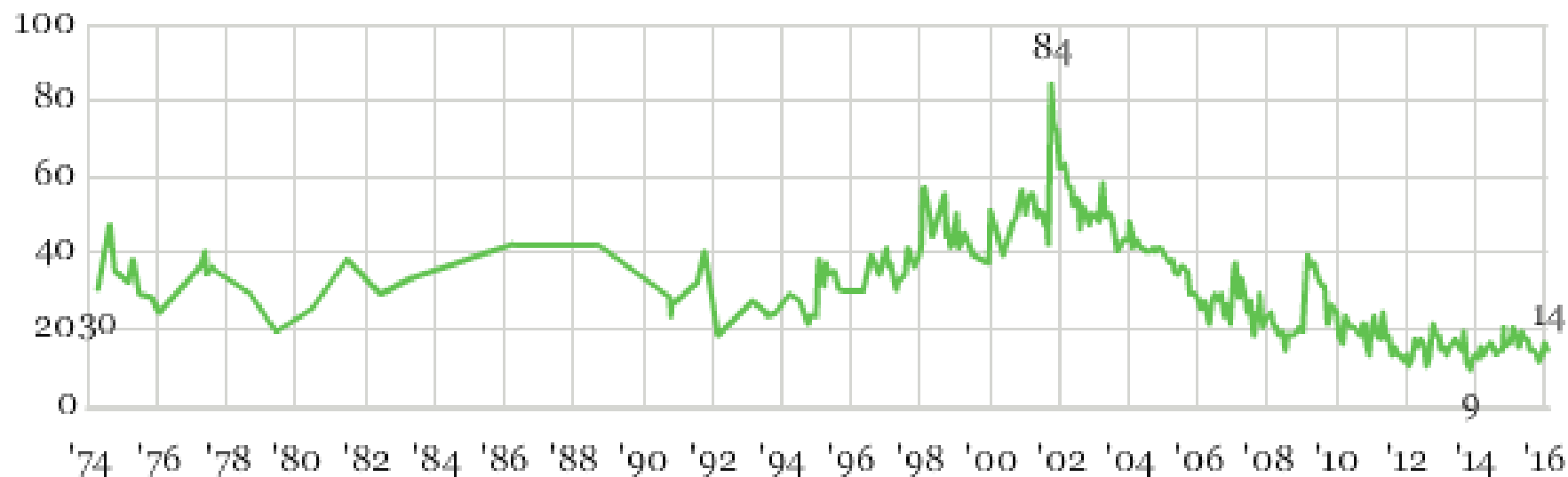
# Decline in House Race Competition



# Puzzle: Congressional Job Approval is Low

*Congressional Job Approval Ratings Trend (1974-Present)*

■ % Approve

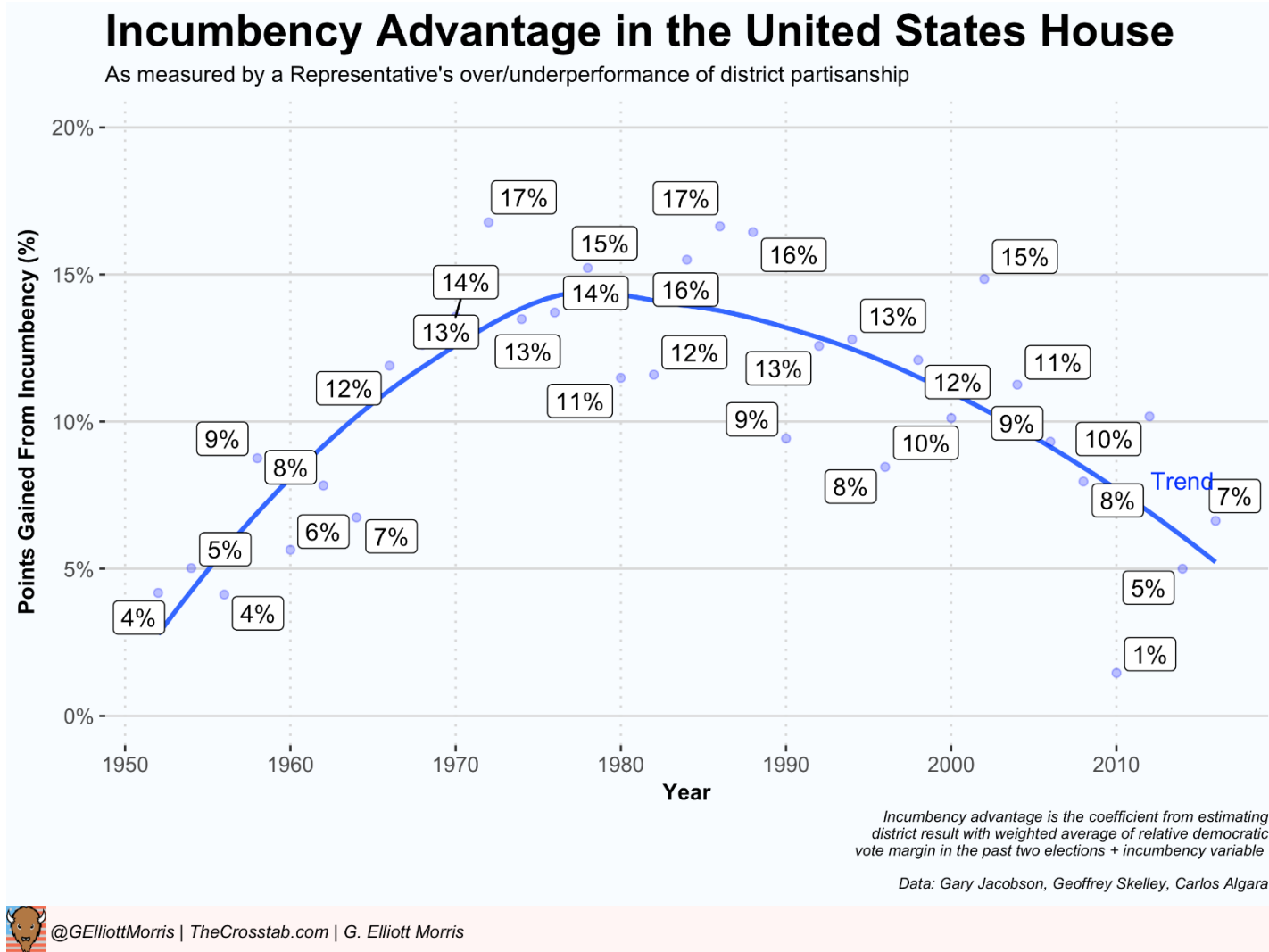


GALLUP

# Incumbency

- Despite disapproving of Congress, Americans tend to like their own representatives
- Incumbency confers benefits to the incumbent:
  - Name recognition
  - Ability to scare off high quality opponents
  - Can deliver pork or other indirect benefits to constituents
- Why do you think congressional races are so uncompetitive?

# The Incumbency Advantage is Declining

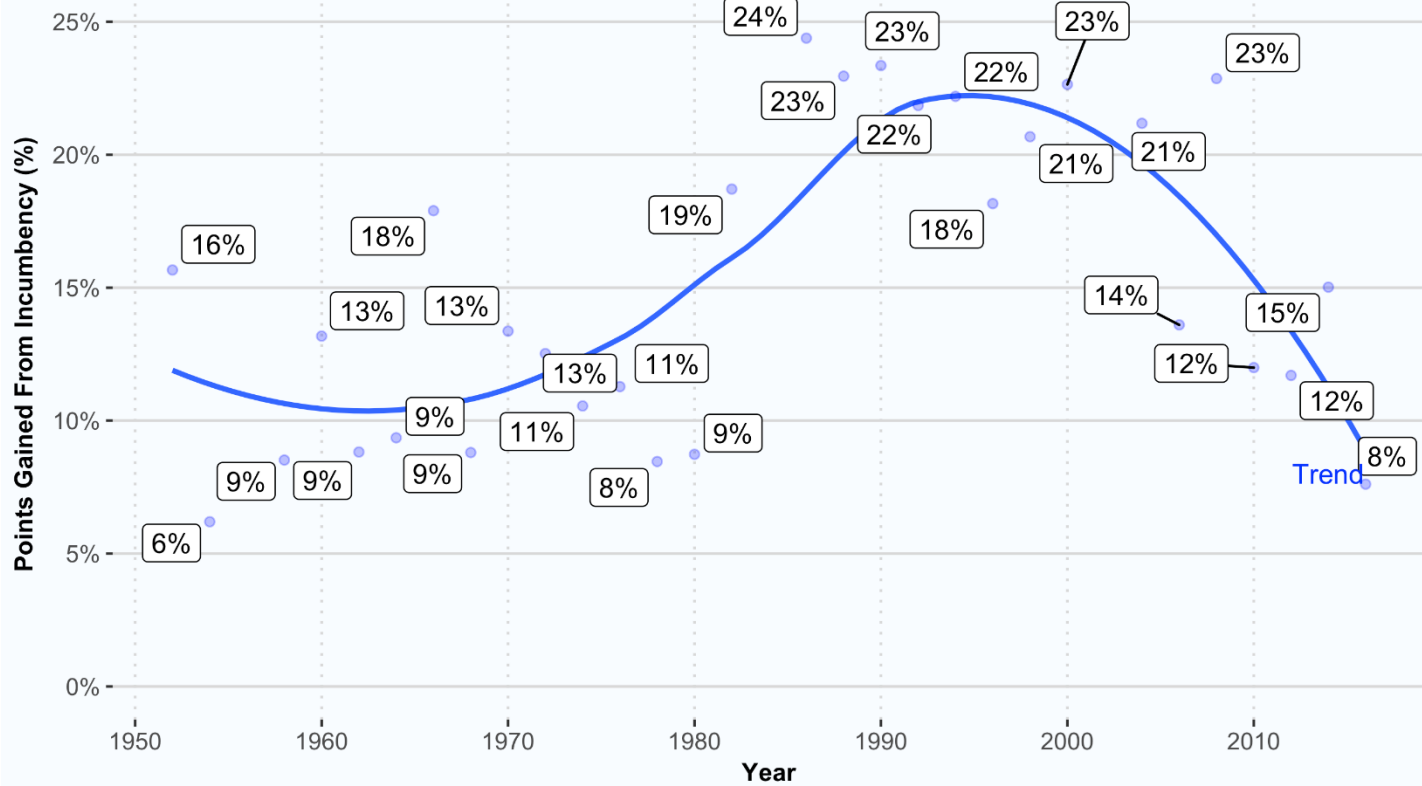


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# The Incumbency Advantage is Declining

## Incumbency Advantage in the United States Senate

As measured by a representative's overperformance of district partisanship



*Incumbency advantage is the coefficient from estimating district result with weighted average of relative democratic vote margin in the past two elections + incumbency variable*

*Data: Gary Jacobson, Geoffrey Skelley, Carlos Algara*



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# Redistricting



# Gerrymandering

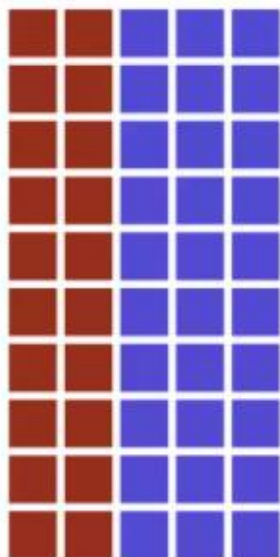


# Gerrymandering

## Gerrymandering, explained

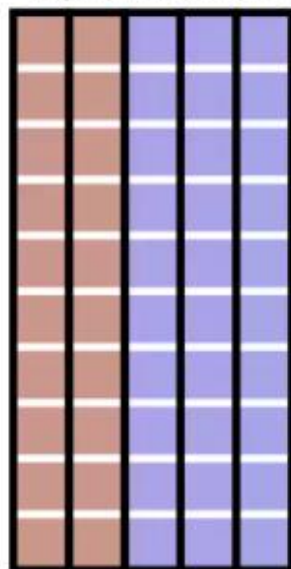
Three different ways to divide 50 people into five districts

50  
people



**60% blue,  
40% red**

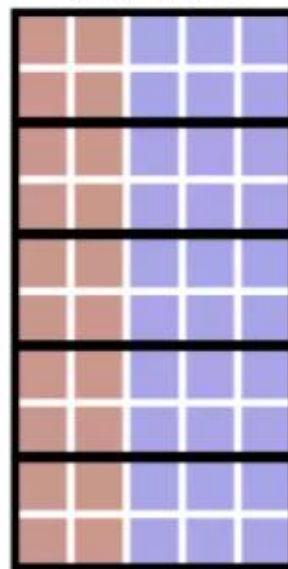
1. Perfect  
representation



**3 blue districts,  
2 red districts**

**BLUE WINS**

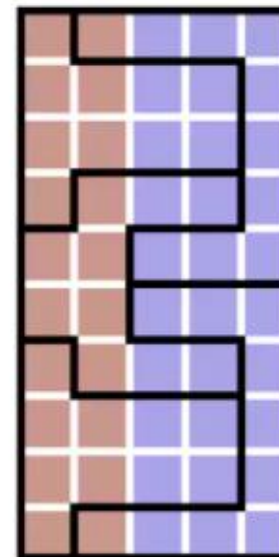
2. Compact,  
but unfair



**5 blue districts,  
0 red districts**

**BLUE WINS**

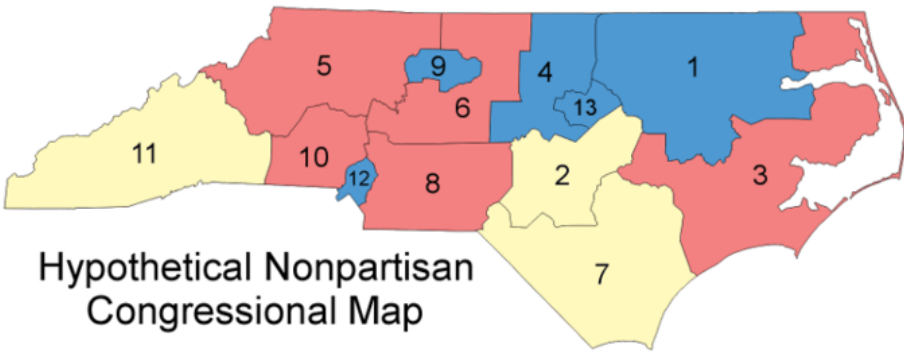
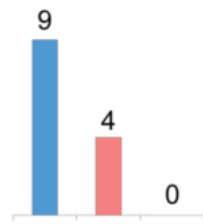
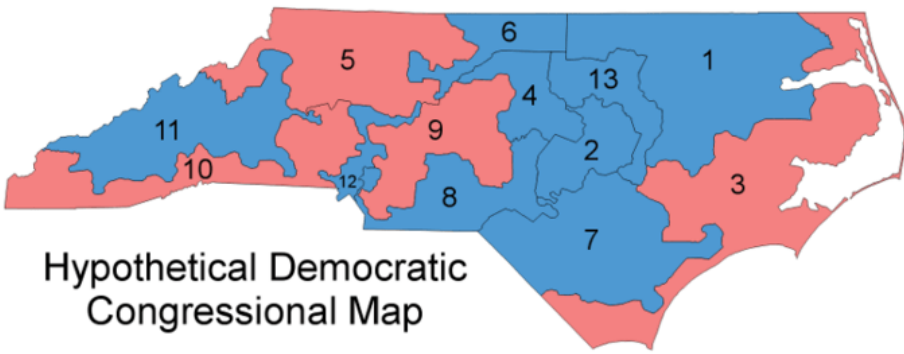
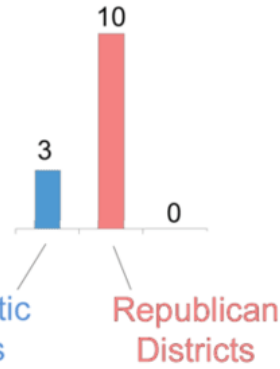
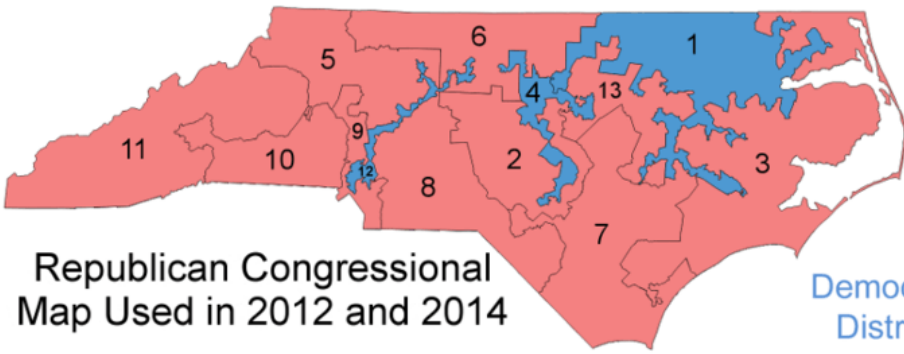
3. Neither compact  
nor fair



**2 blue districts,  
3 red districts**

**RED WINS**

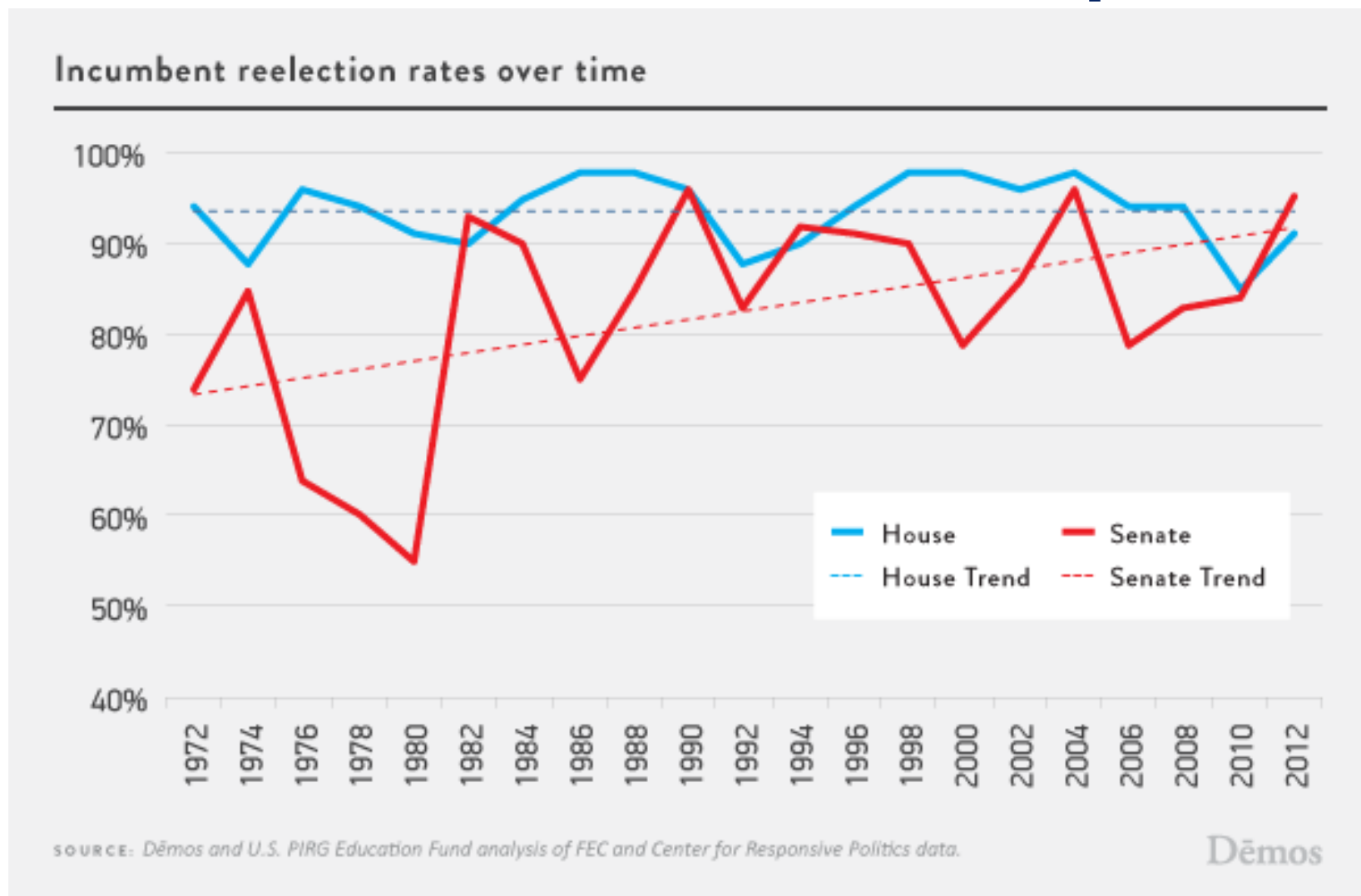
# How Gerrymandering Can Swing Elections



# Gerrymandering

- What effects does redistricting actually have?
- It definitely gives more seats to the party that successfully wields it
- But nationally there is little evidence that redistricting makes House races less competitive
- Incumbency is on the rise in the Senate – a venue with no gerrymandering is possible
- What other explanation is there? Partisanship!

# Decline in Senate Race Competition



# Partisanship

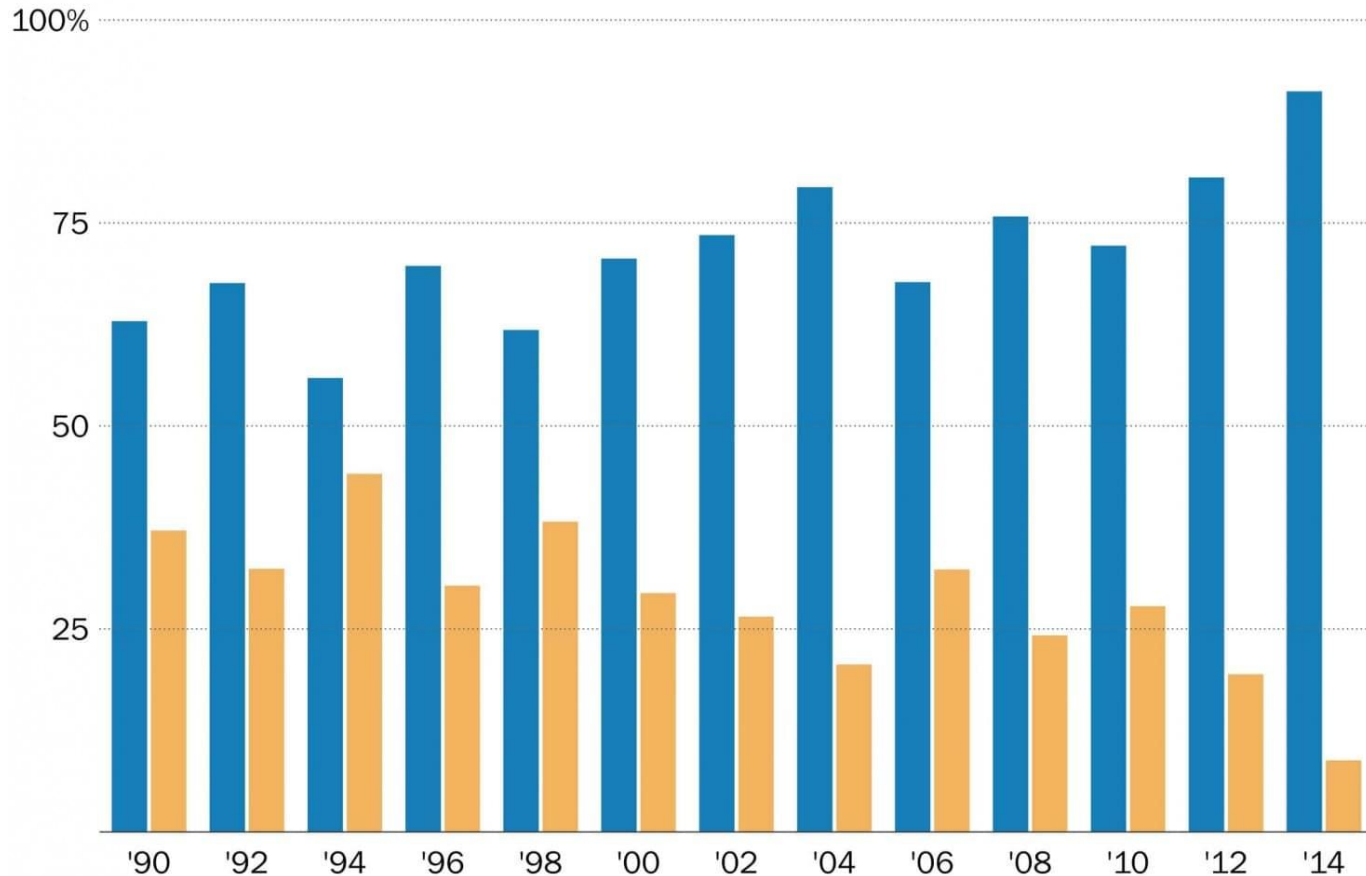
# Split-Ticket Voting Is Disappearing

## Split Senate votes since 1990

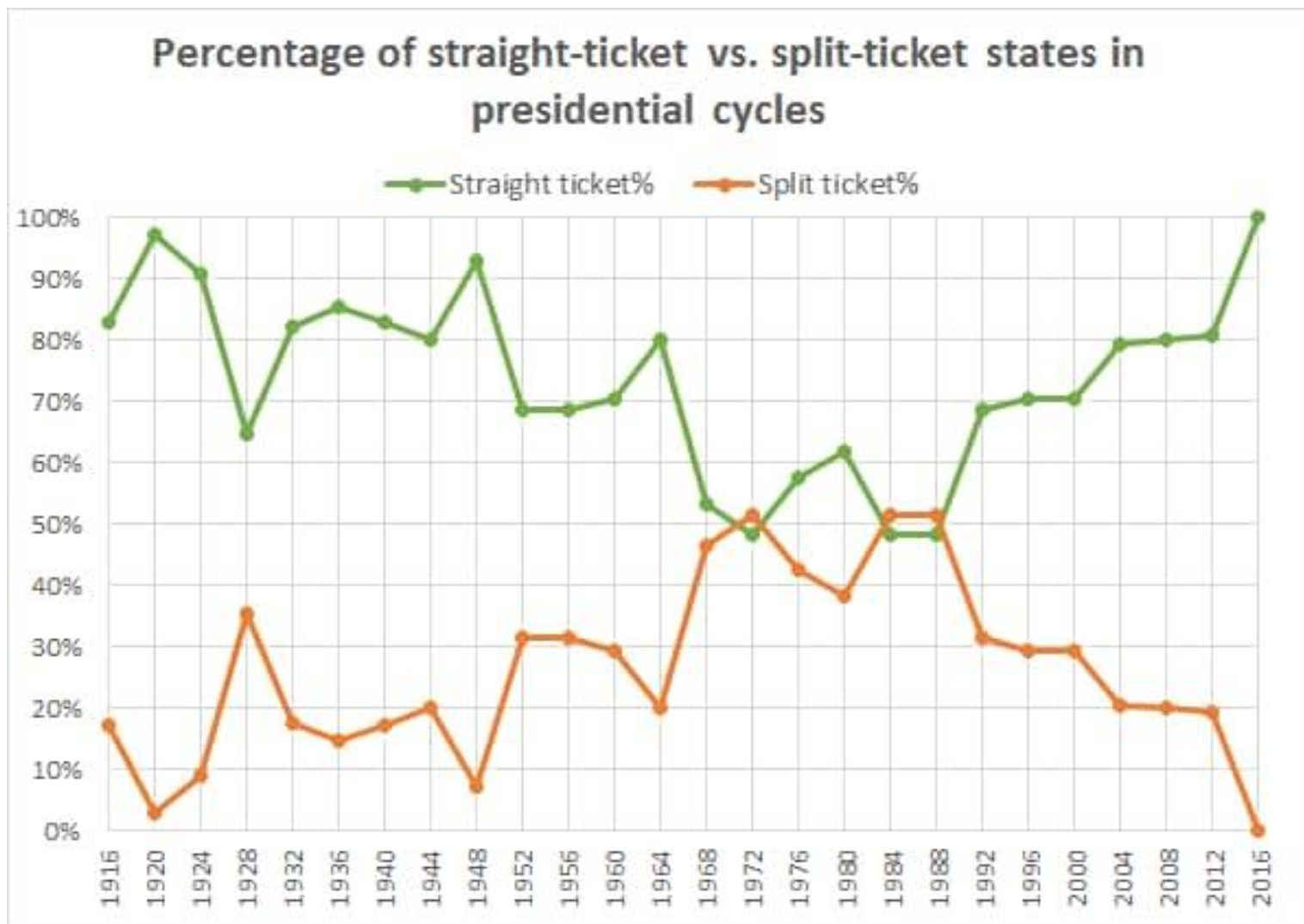
When Senate votes matched the most recent presidential election. Data from U.S. Election Atlas.

■ SENATE/PRESIDENT VOTES MATCH

■ SPLIT VOTE



# Split-Ticket Voting Is Disappearing

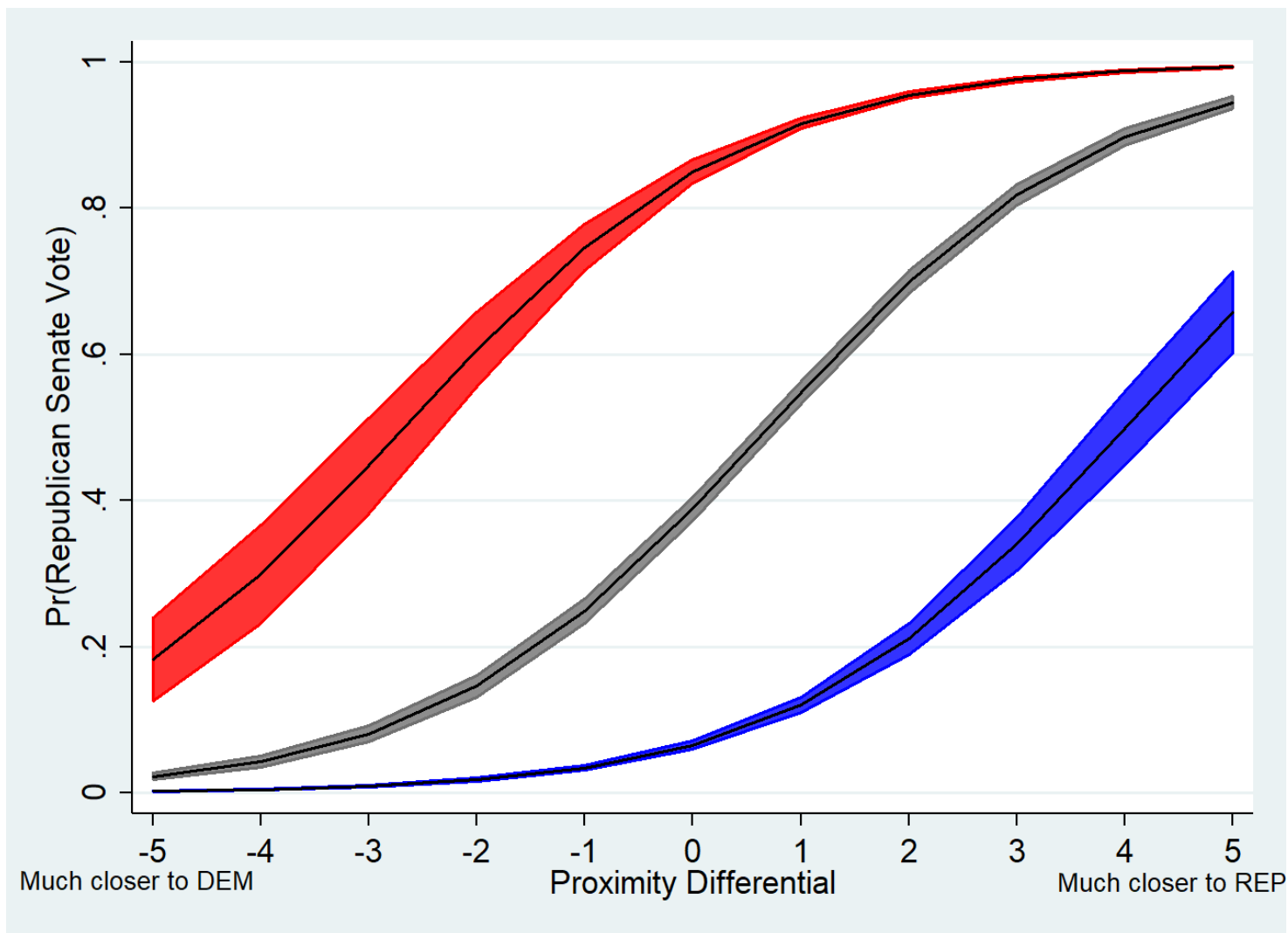




# Partisanship

- What are the implications of the rise of partisanship on voting behavior?
- How might it affect incumbency rates?
- The party of the candidate matters much more than it did previously
  - Cannot be easily overcome by higher valence
  - Provides a challenge to the median voter theorem

# Recall: Partisanship Is a Very Strong Force



# Campaign Spending

# Consider the Following Prisoner's Dilemma

## A Political Campaign Prisoner's Dilemma

		Candidate B	
		No TV ads	Run TV ads
Candidate A	No TV ads	Cheap toss-up / Cheap toss-up	Expensive win / Cheap loss
	Run TV ads	Expensive win / Cheap loss	Expensive toss-up / Expensive toss-up

# Campaign Spending Cancels Out

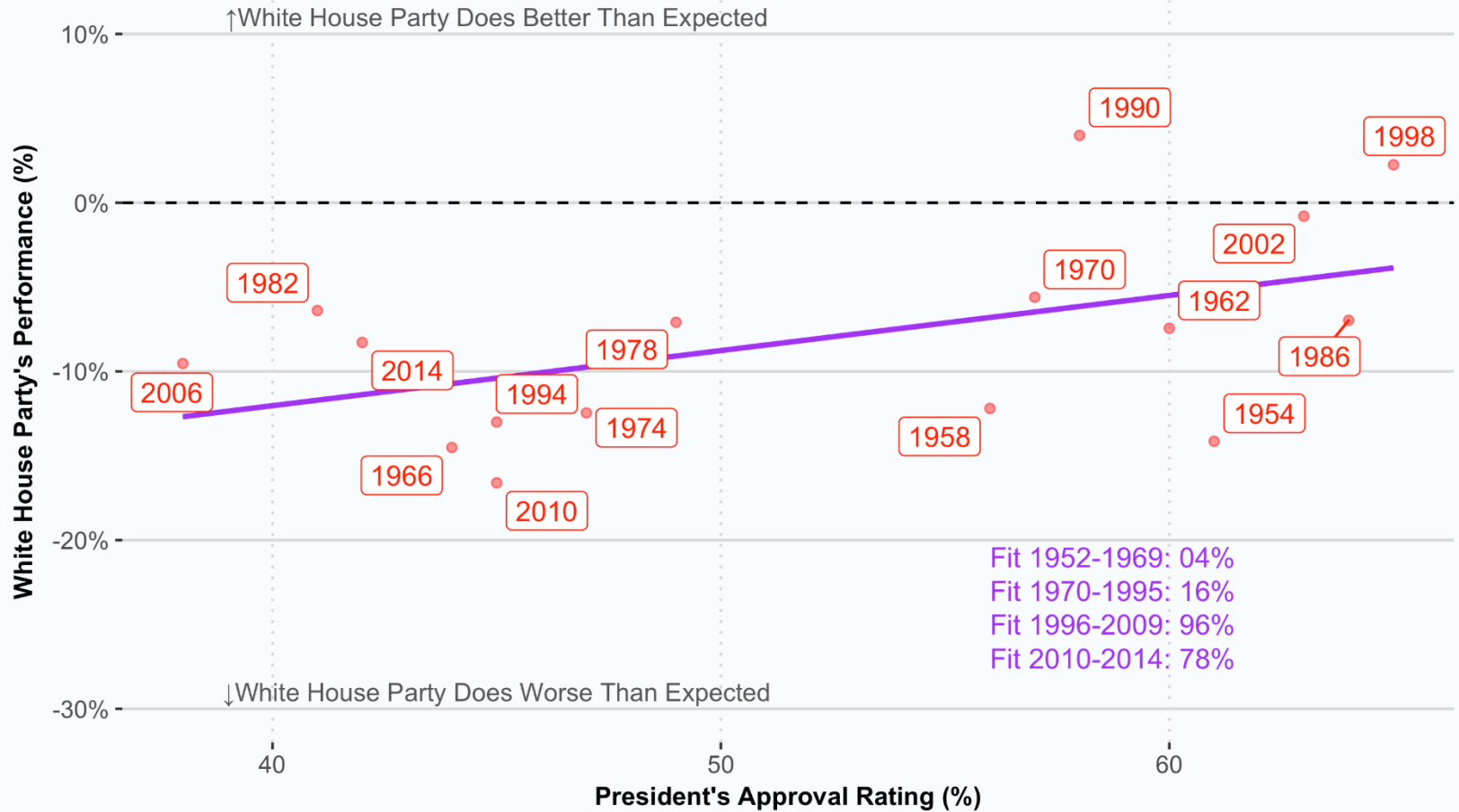
- Expand this dilemma to *all* campaign spending
- Both sides spend heavily in competitive elections
- Campaigns are becoming increasingly expensive, but little evidence of an effect on who wins
- Spending is important for voter mobilization, but perhaps has less ability to win over voters, given the effects of partisanship and ideology

# Nationalization of Elections

# Elections are Increasingly Nationalized

- Local factors matter less in congressional elections, whereas national politics matter more
- Partisanship is a much stronger predictor of congressional voting than it used to be
- BUT: the president's party still usually suffers in midterm elections. Why?
- Voters from the party out of power are more likely to vote, are motivated by dislike for the president, and dislike of policies pushed by the president

# The President's Approval Rating Roughly Predicts Their Party's Midterm Performance



\*Note: Presidential results are 538's "benchmark," a weighted average of the Democrat's relative presidential election margin in each district/state for the past two elections

Data: Gary Jacobson, Geoffrey Skelley, Carlos Algara



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## In Summary

- Congressional races are becoming less competitive
- Partisanship is a very strong predictor of congressional election outcomes, and it is still increasing
- Incumbency still matters, but partisanship is making it matter less
- Redistricting (gerrymandering) has little effect on the competitiveness of congressional elections

## In Summary

- The president's party tends to suffer in midterm elections
- Campaign spending cancels out, leaving little effect on election results
- Would Madison be bothered by the role of these various effects in election outcomes?
  - Why are elections important in the Madisonian framework?

# Q&A