

The Dynamics of Modern Congressional Elections



October 17, 2022

POLS 101: American Politics & Policy

Dr. Isaac Hale

Fall Semester, 2022

OXY Occidental
College

Outline

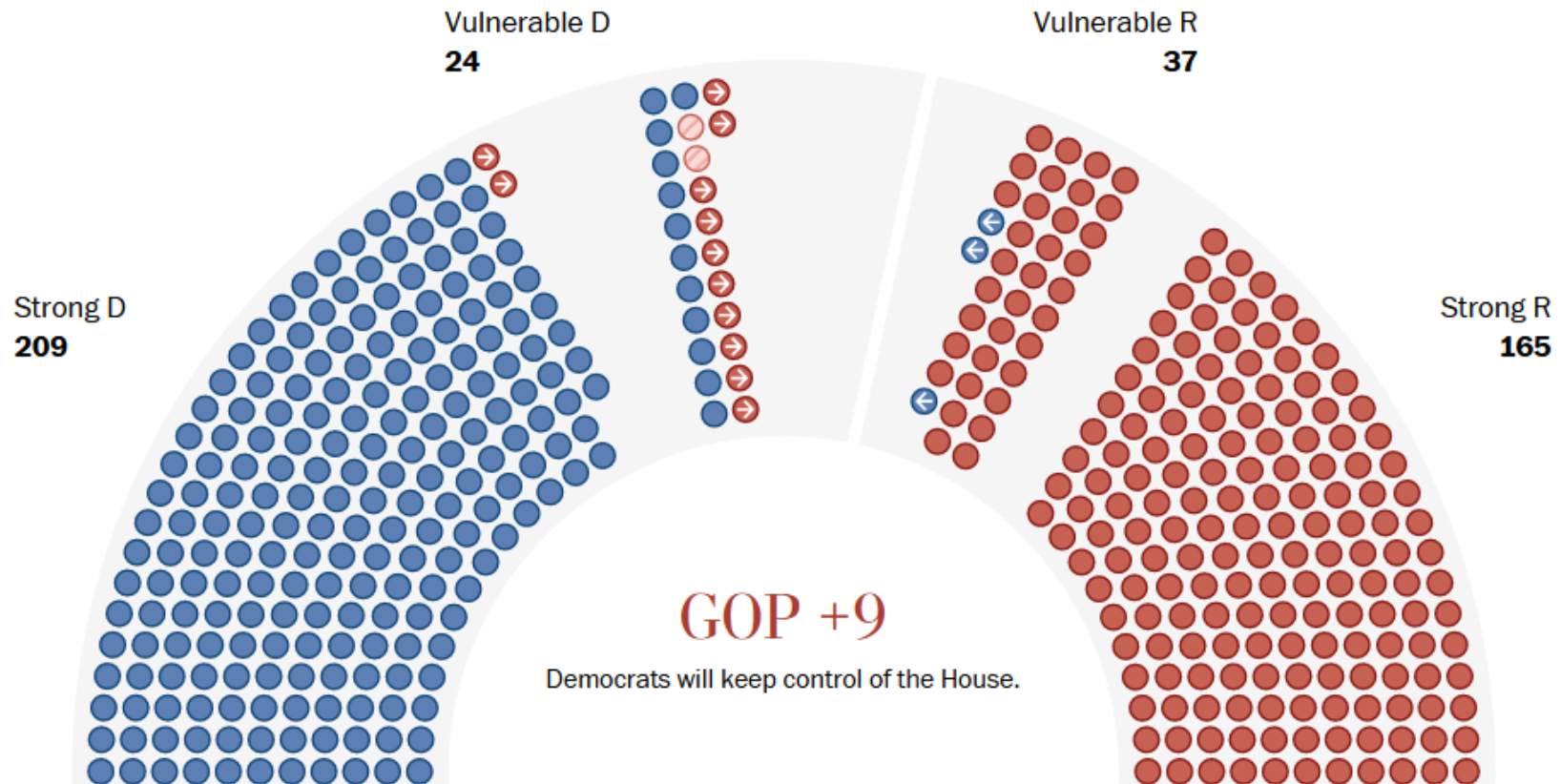
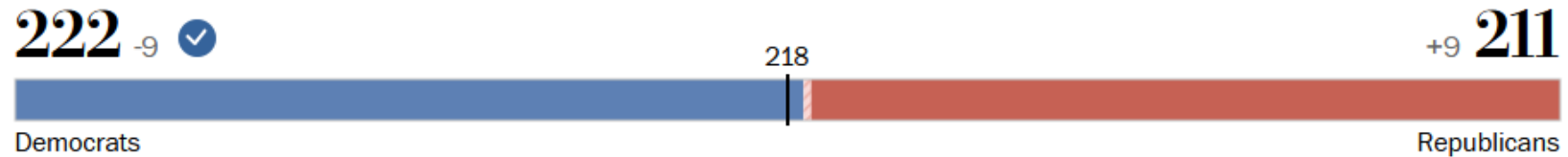
1. The 2020 congressional election
2. Modern congressional elections in context
3. The 2022 midterms
4. Electoral trends: incumbency & partisan voting
5. Applying our knowledge

Key Questions

1. How good is partisanship for predicting who wins congressional elections?
2. Does an individual candidate's ideology matter?
3. What predicts whether the president's party will win or lose seats in a congressional election?
4. How can we use data to predict what will happen in the 2022 election?

The 2020 Congressional Election

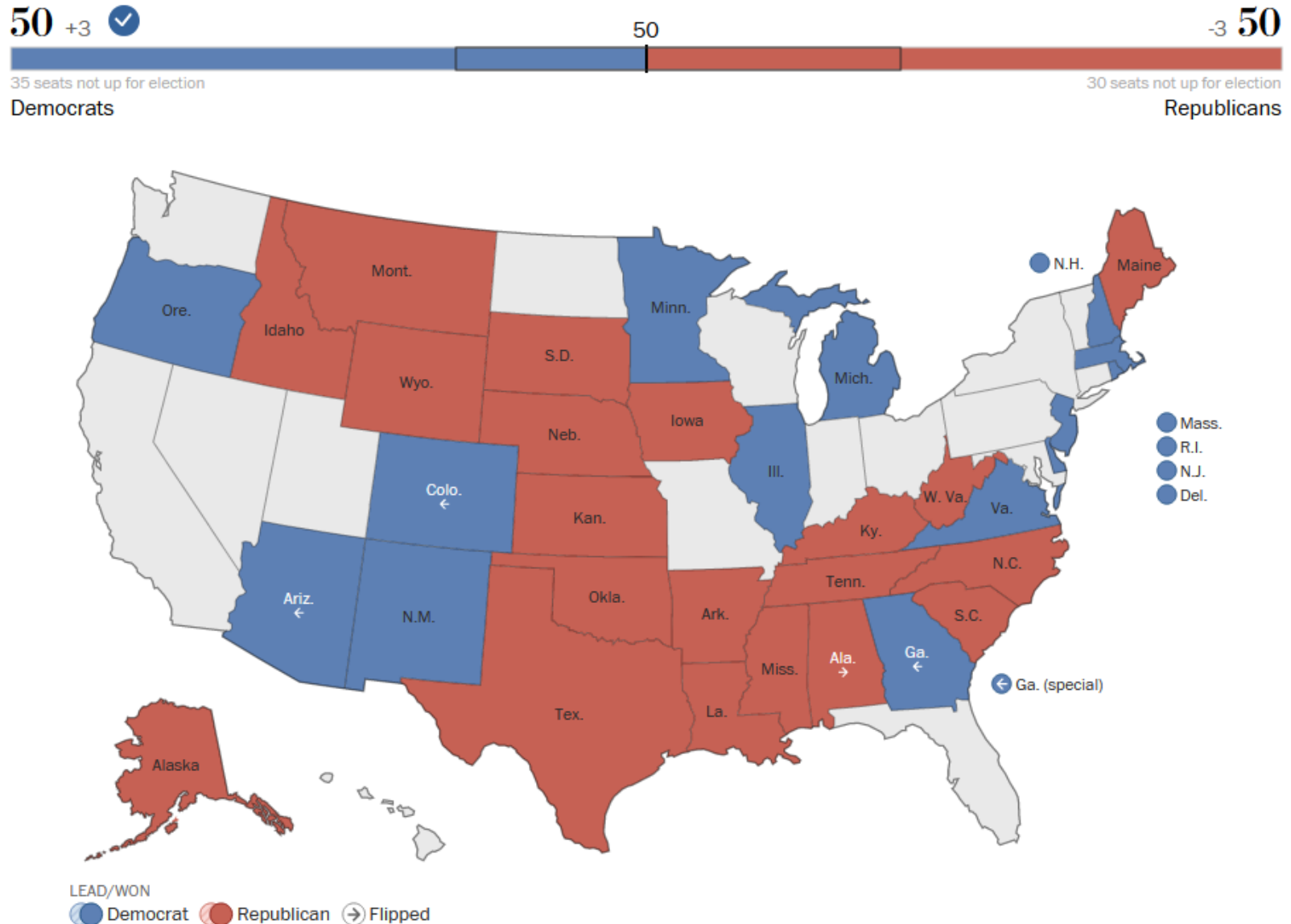
Democrats Lose Seats, But Keep the House



LEAD/WON

Democrat Republican → Flipped

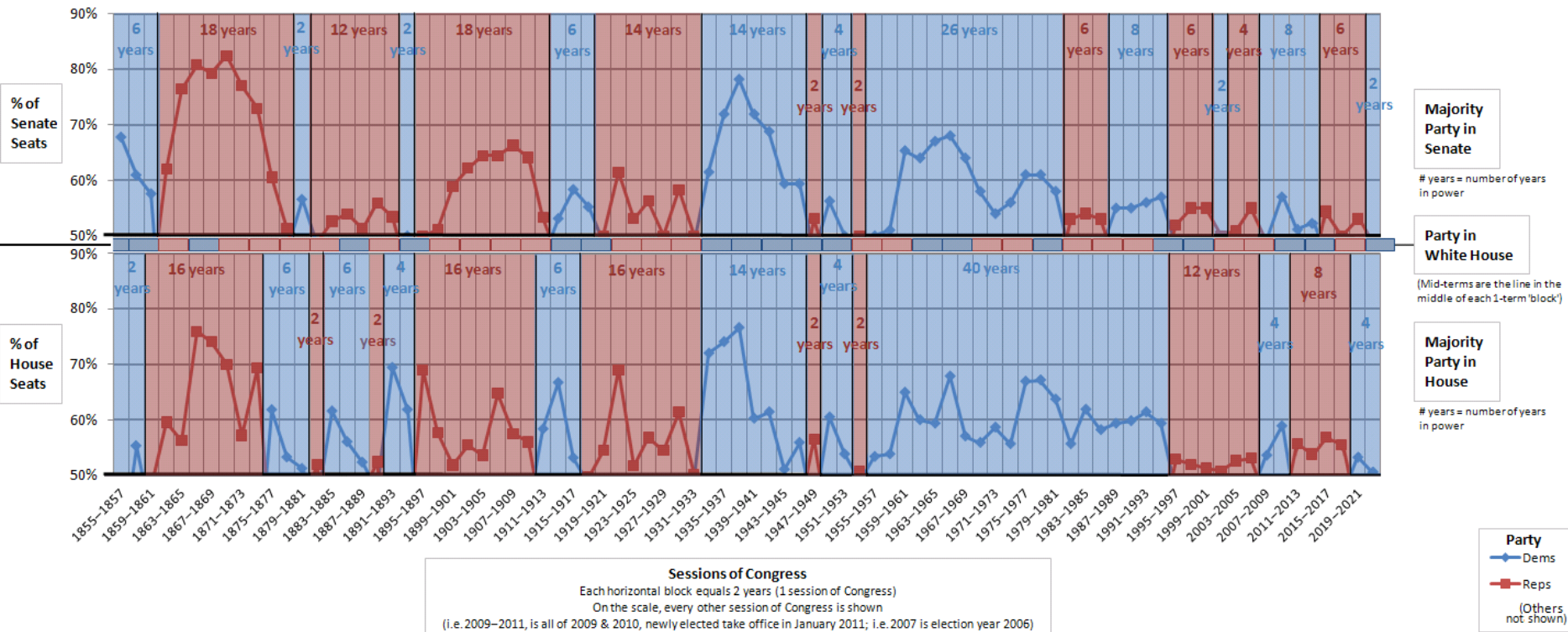
Democrats Win the Senate... Barely



Modern Congressional Elections In Context

Congress Used to Be Very Solidly Democratic

Control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives: 1855–2023



The Cyclical Nature of US Elections

- Modern American national elections are *cyclical*
- The party of the winning presidential candidate does well in Congress
- Midterms are often tough for the president's party
- Why?
- No coattails
- Negative voting

Election is a referendum on Bush presidency

NOV 3, 2006

2:10 AM

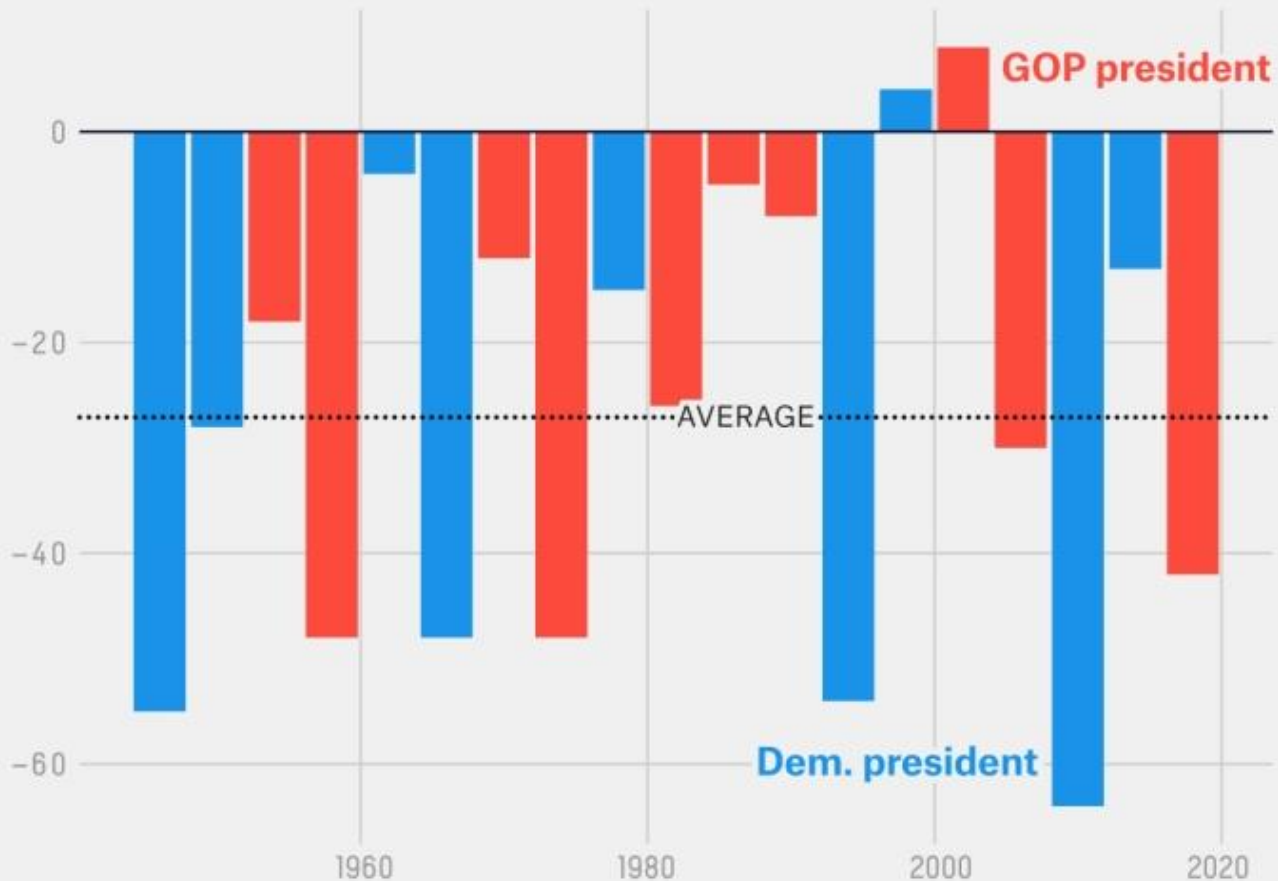
COMMENT NOVEMBER 5, 2018 ISSUE

THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS ARE A
REFERENDUM ON DONALD TRUMP
*BOTH PARTIES VIEW ELECTION
AS A TEST OF REAGAN POLICIES*

A midterm referendum on Obama

By EDWARD-ISAAC DOVERE | 11/04/2014 05:05 AM EST

Number of House seats gained or lost by the party that holds the presidency in midterm elections since the end of World War II



Data is based on the difference between the number of seats won by the president's party in that midterm election and the number of seats won by that party in the preceding general election. Because of vacancies and seats won by third parties, Republican losses are not always matched by a Democratic gain, or vice versa.

I'm Being Called Out 😞



ethan winter

@EthanBWinter

...

[political science professor with a lot of 'youth pastor' energy]: when you think about it, the midterm effect is sort of a 'vibe shift' (everyone starts booing)

1:46 PM · May 18, 2022 · Twitter Web App

3 Retweets 44 Likes

The 2022 Midterms

What Do You Think Will Happen?

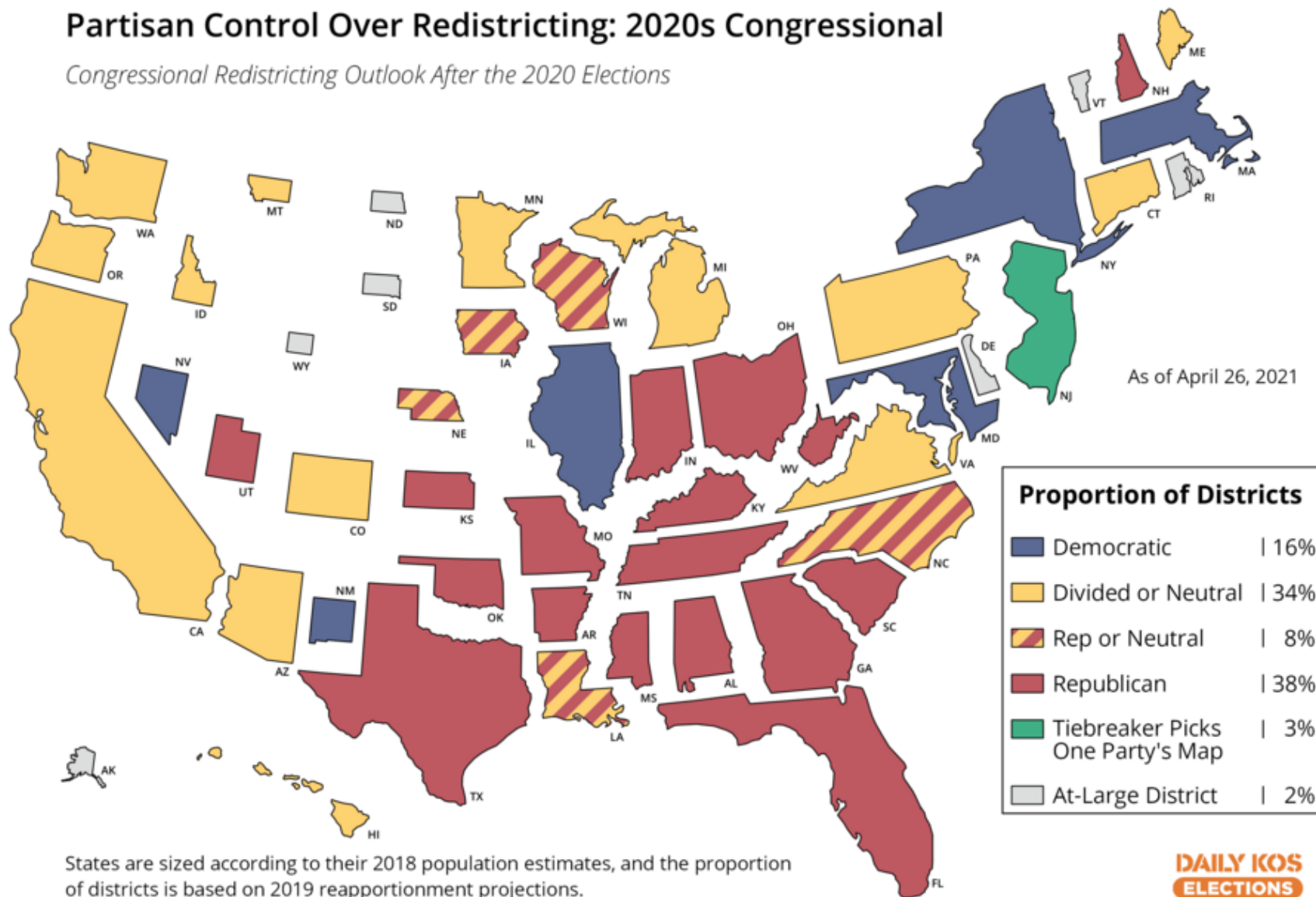


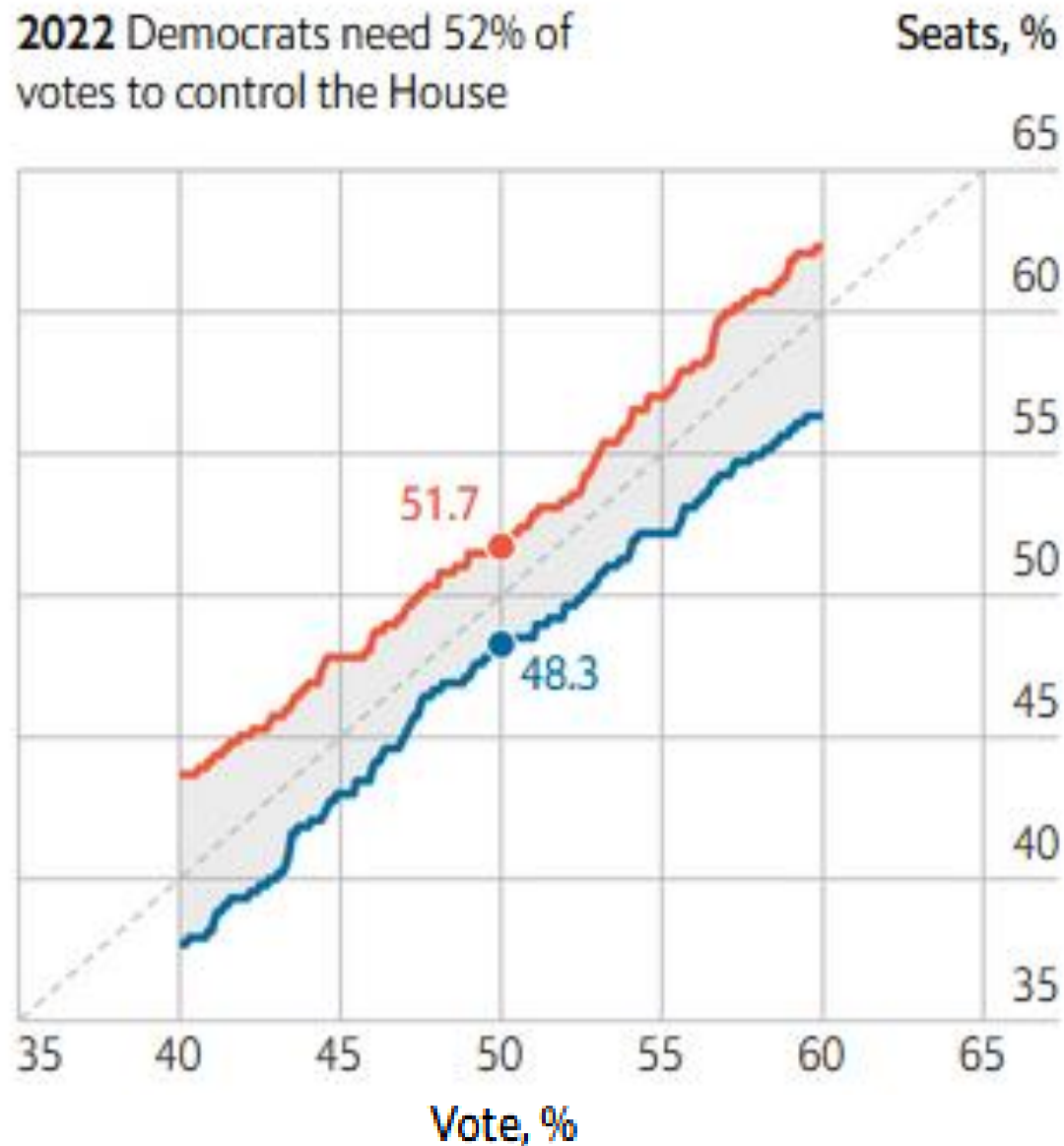
2022 House Expectations

- Democrats will likely lose seats in the House
- Democrats in Congress currently have 220 seats
 - 218 needed for a majority
- If losses for Democrats are in line with historic patterns, Democrats will lose the chamber
- The House map advantages the GOP
 - 208 districts are R+5 or redder
 - 187 districts are D+5 or bluer

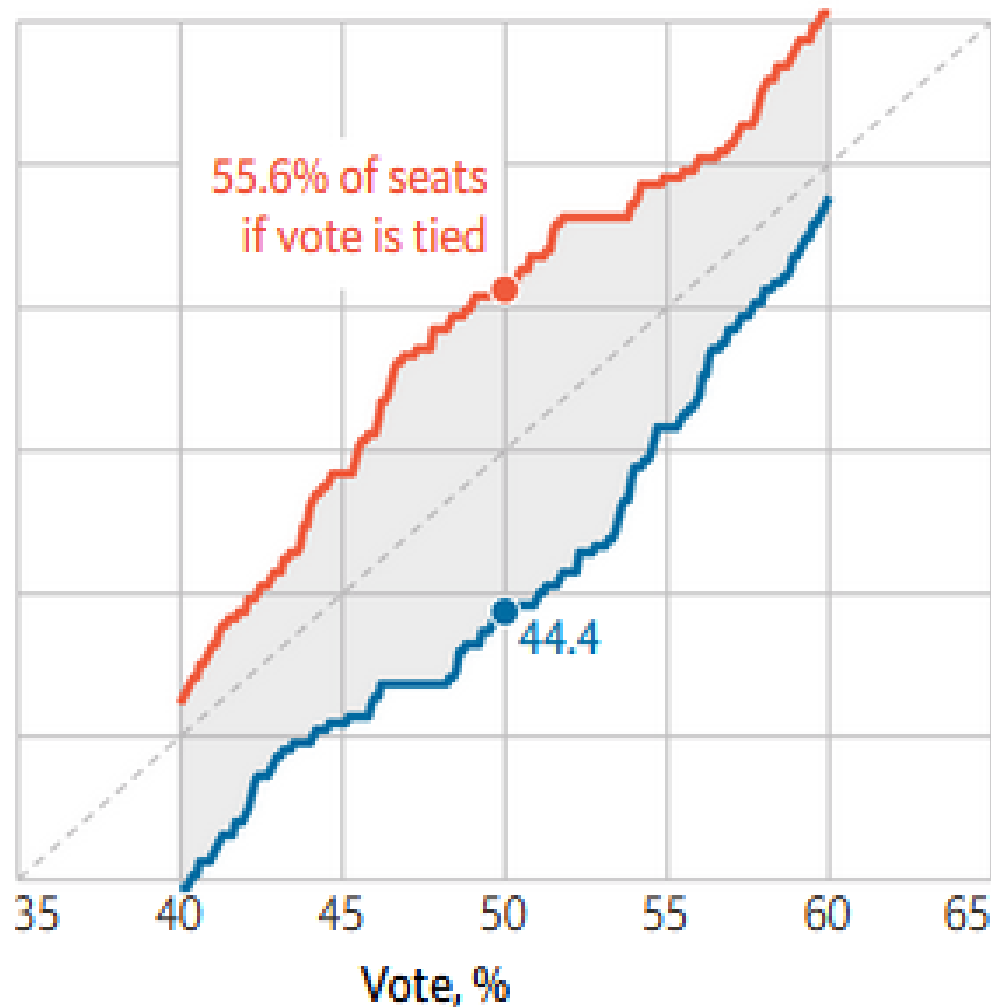
Partisan Control Over Redistricting: 2020s Congressional

Congressional Redistricting Outlook After the 2020 Elections





2012 Republican gerrymandering produced bias in their favour



Partisan District Bias Can Have Serious Effects

2012 United States House of Representatives elections



← 2010

November 6, 2012

2014 →

All 435 seats in the [United States House of Representatives](#)^[a]
218 seats needed for a majority

Turnout

52.0%^[1] ▲ 11.1 pp



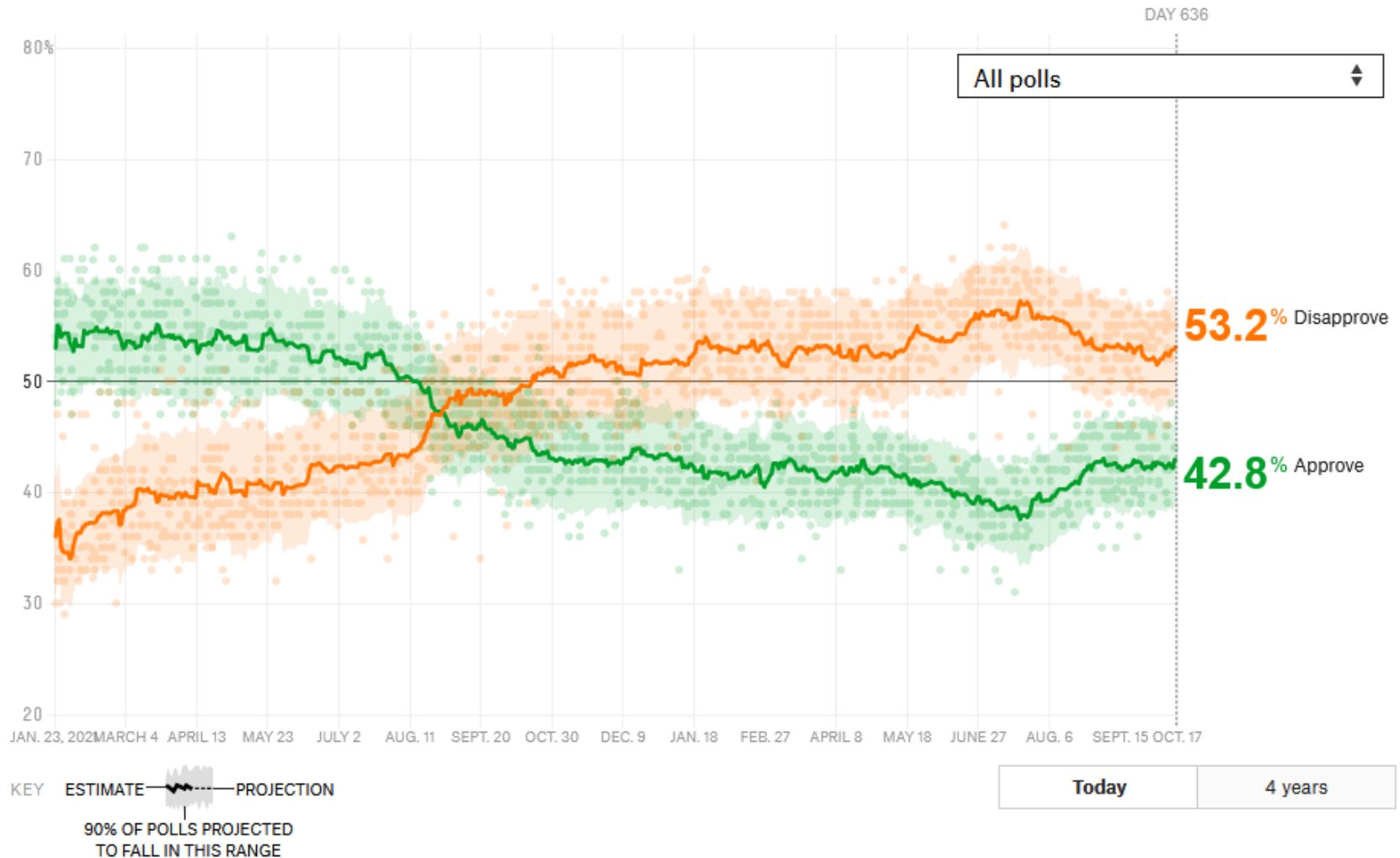


Leader	John Boehner	Nancy Pelosi
Party	Republican	Democratic
Leader since	January 3, 2007	January 3, 2003
Leader's seat	Ohio 8th	California 12th
Last election	242 seats, 51.7% ^[2]	193 seats, 44.9%
Seats won	234	201
Popular vote	58,283,314	59,645,531
Percentage	47.7%	48.8%
Swing	▼ 4.0%	▲ 3.9%

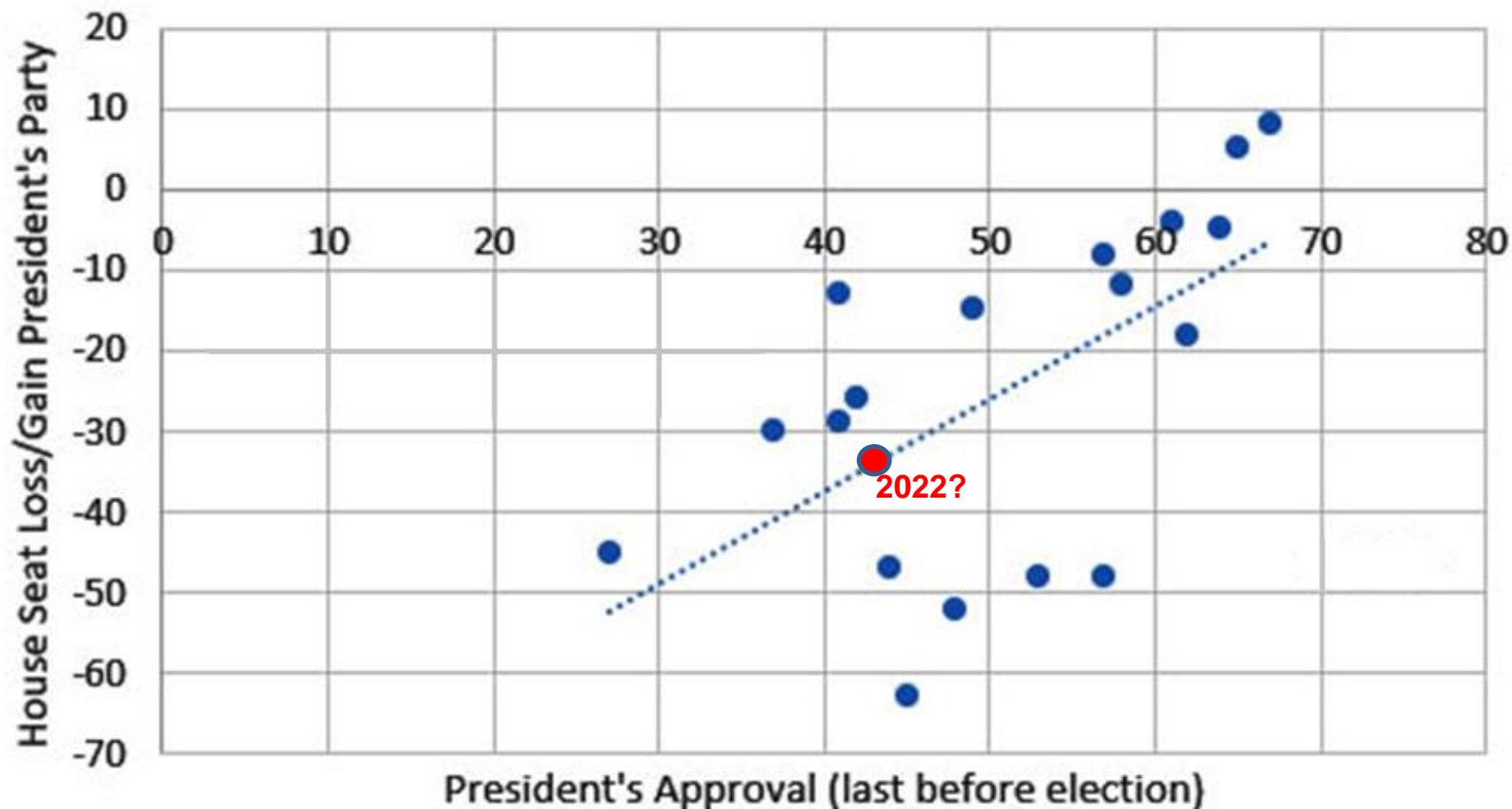
How Could Democrats Win?

- The president's party doesn't *always* lose seats
 - Democrats won seats in 1998
 - Republicans won seats in 2002
- What (historically) makes the difference?
- Presidential approval
 - Highly correlated with the economy!
- How many seats the president's party currently has

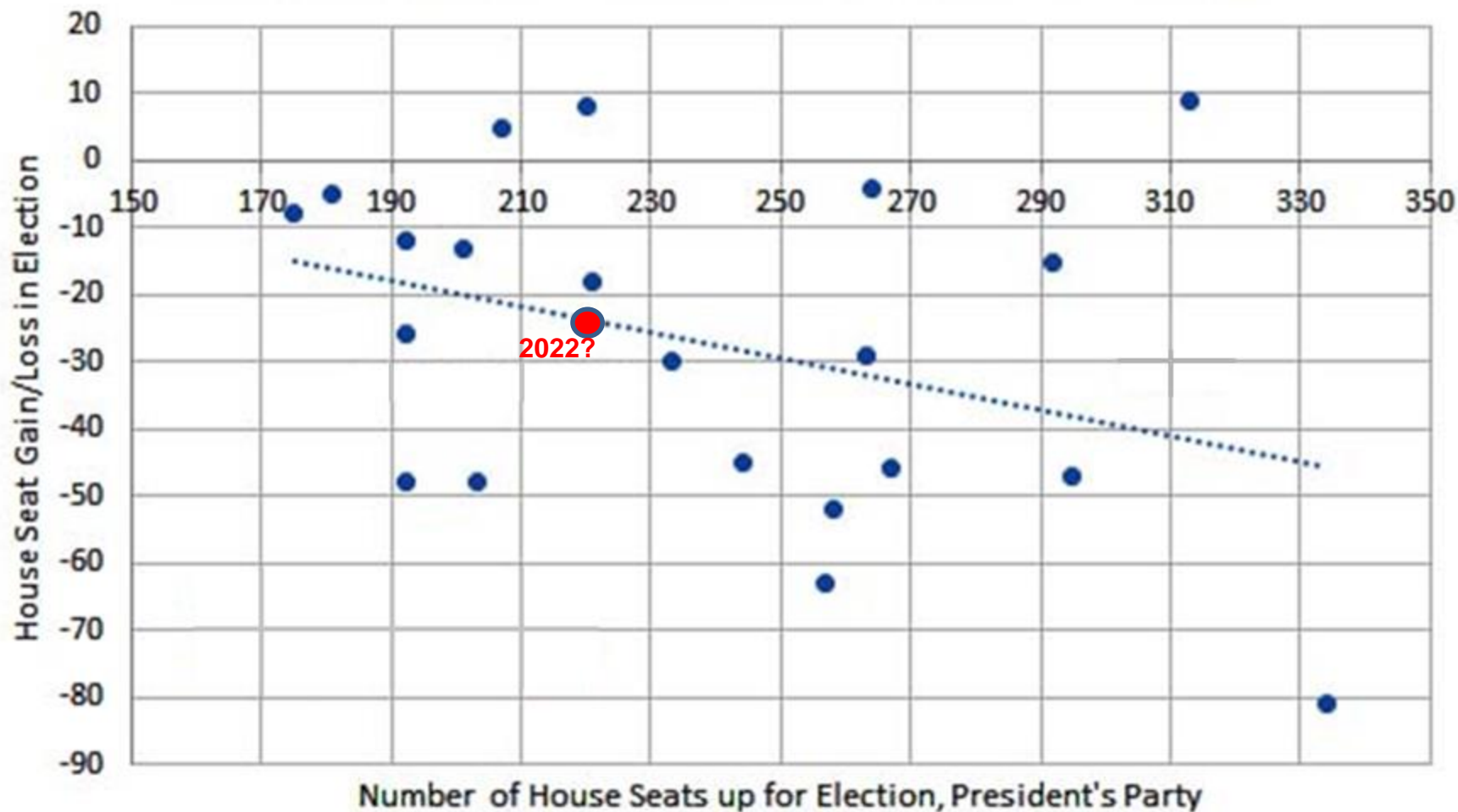
Biden's Approval Ratings



House Seats Loss or Gain by President's Party and the President's Approval (1946-2014)



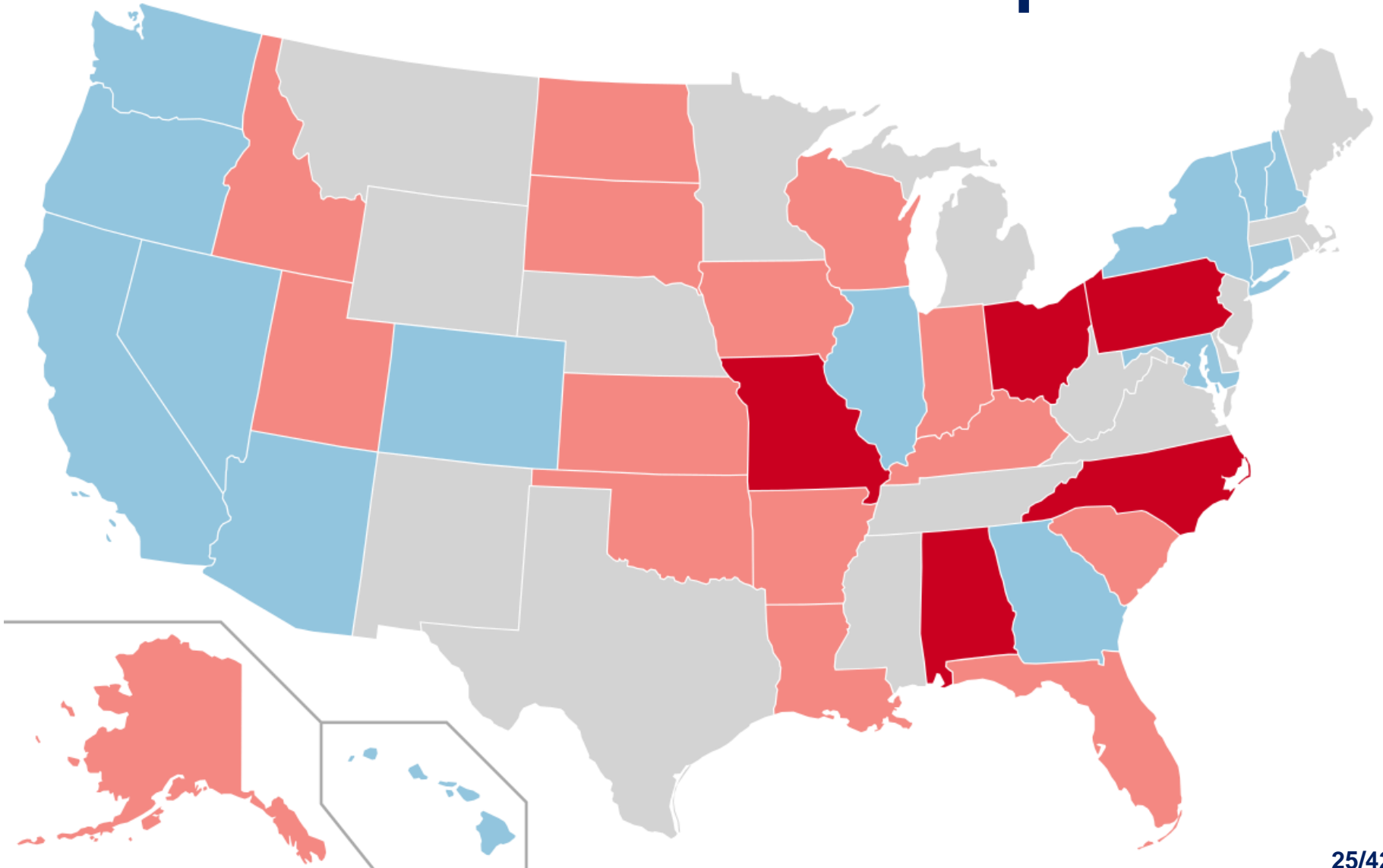
House Seats Gained or Lost by President's Party as Function of Party Seats up for Election (1934-2016)



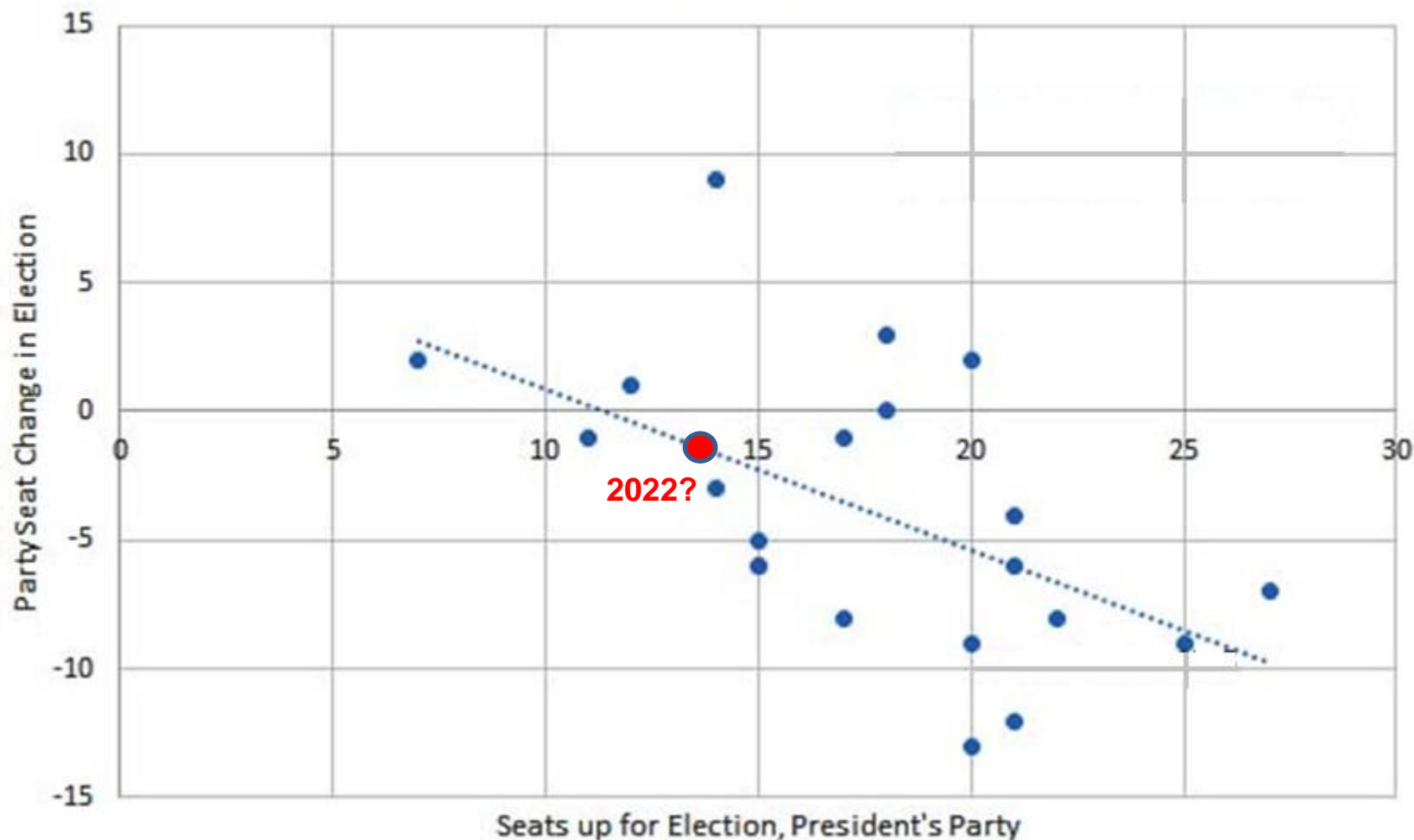
2022 Senate Expectations

- Remember: only 1/3 of Senate seats are up for election
- 2022 is perceived to be a favorable map for Democrats
- Why might that be the case?
 - 20 Republican seats up for election
 - Only 13 Democrats up for election
- However:
 - Republicans have a sizable *structural* Senate advantage
 - The president's party usually loses seats

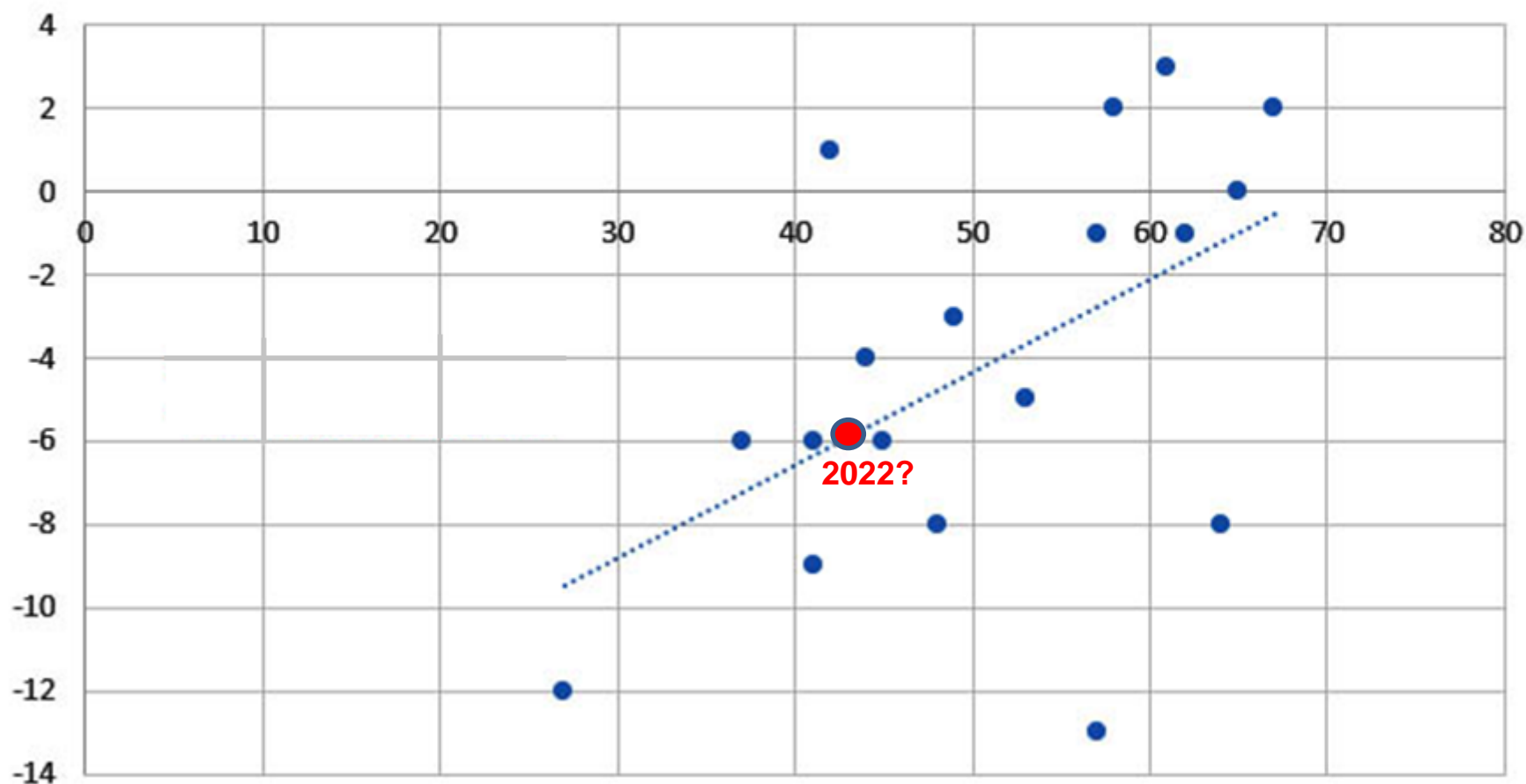
The 2022 Senate Map



Senate Seats Gained or Lost by president's Party as Function of Party Seats up for Election (1934-2016)




Senate Seat Loss or Gain by President's Party and Presidential Approval (1946-2014)

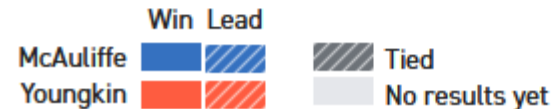
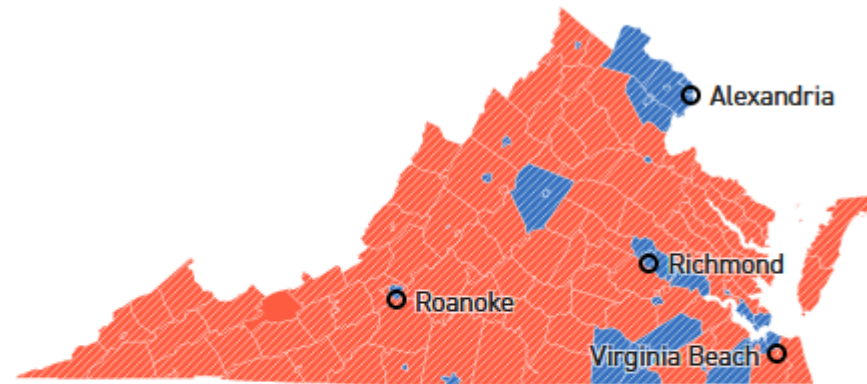


We Have Some Data For Predicting 2022!

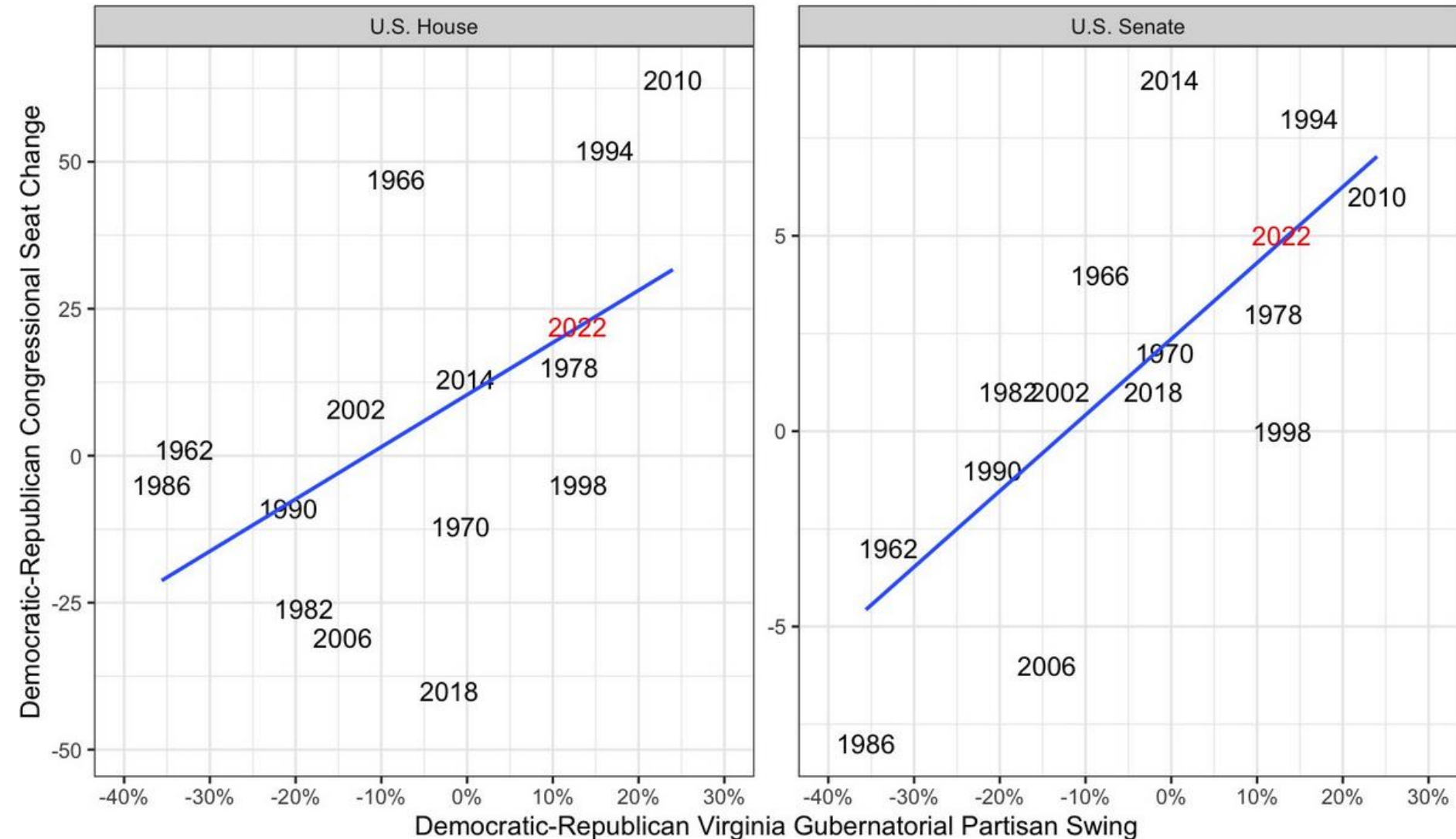
Virginia governor results

CANDIDATE		VOTES	PCT.
Glenn Youngkin	GOP ✓	1,658,691	50.9% 
Terry McAuliffe	DEM	1,579,403	48.4% 

99% of expected vote in

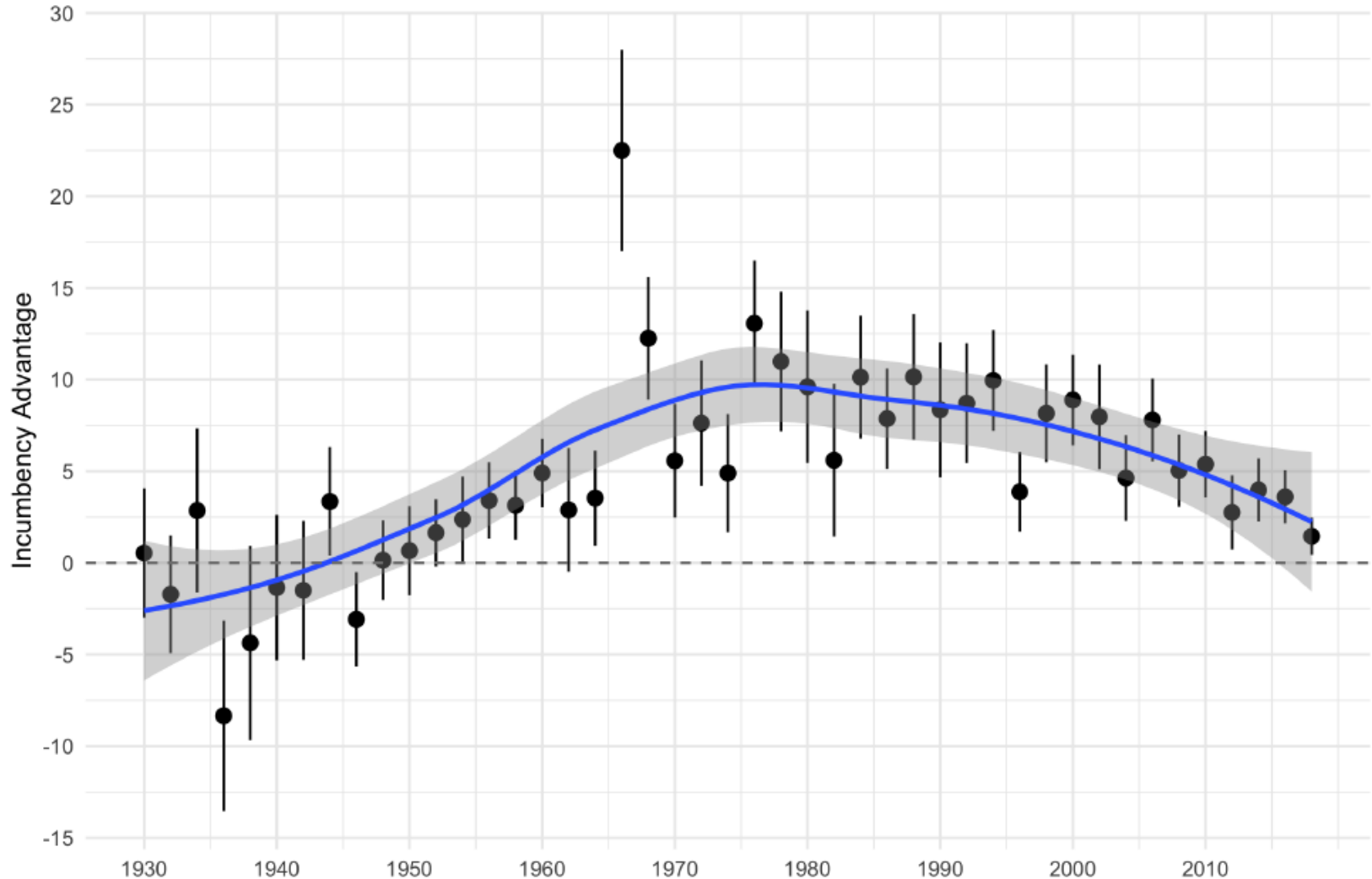


VA Results Predict Congressional Seat Changes

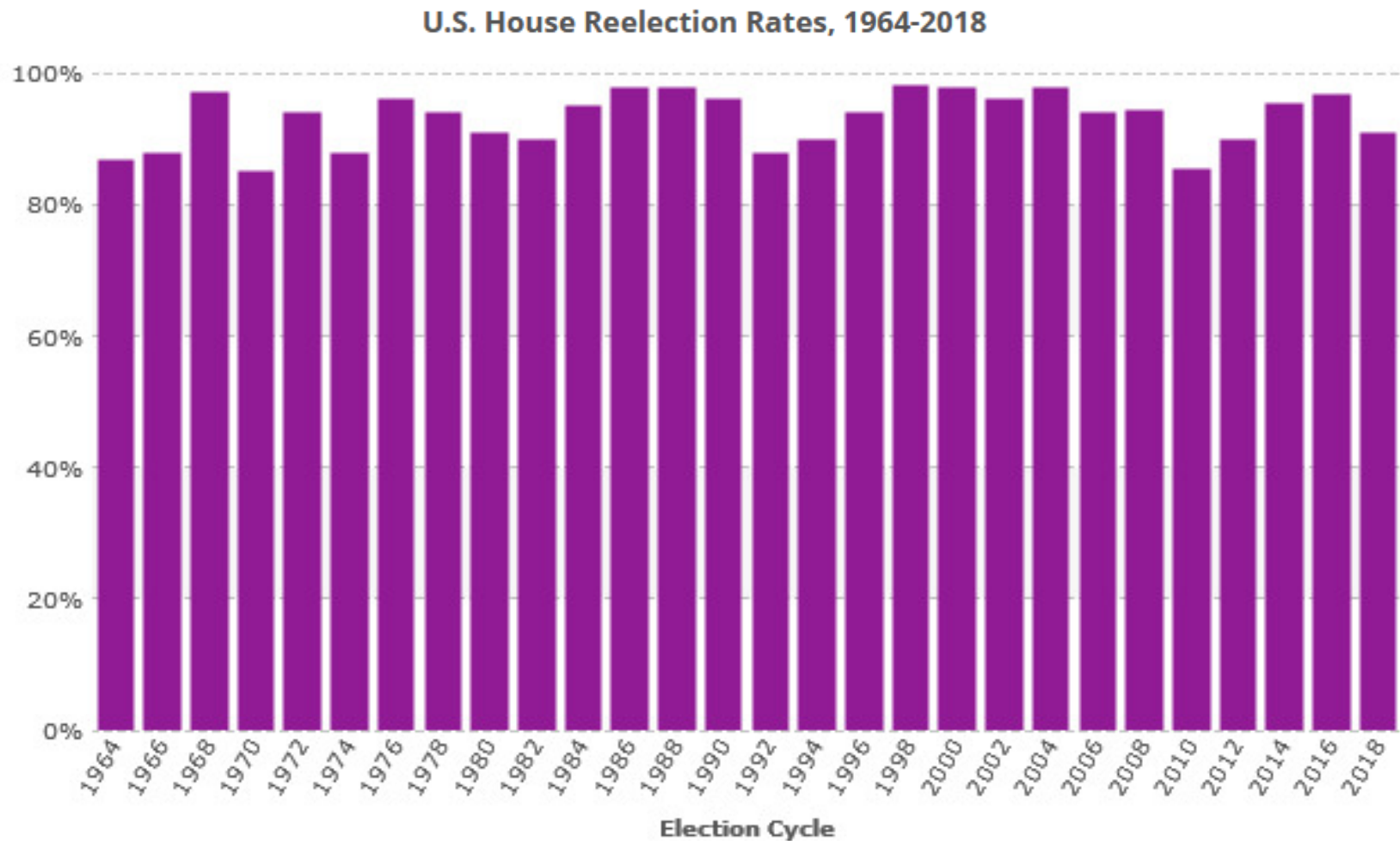


Electoral Trends: Incumbency & Partisan Voting

The Incumbency *Advantage* is Decreasing

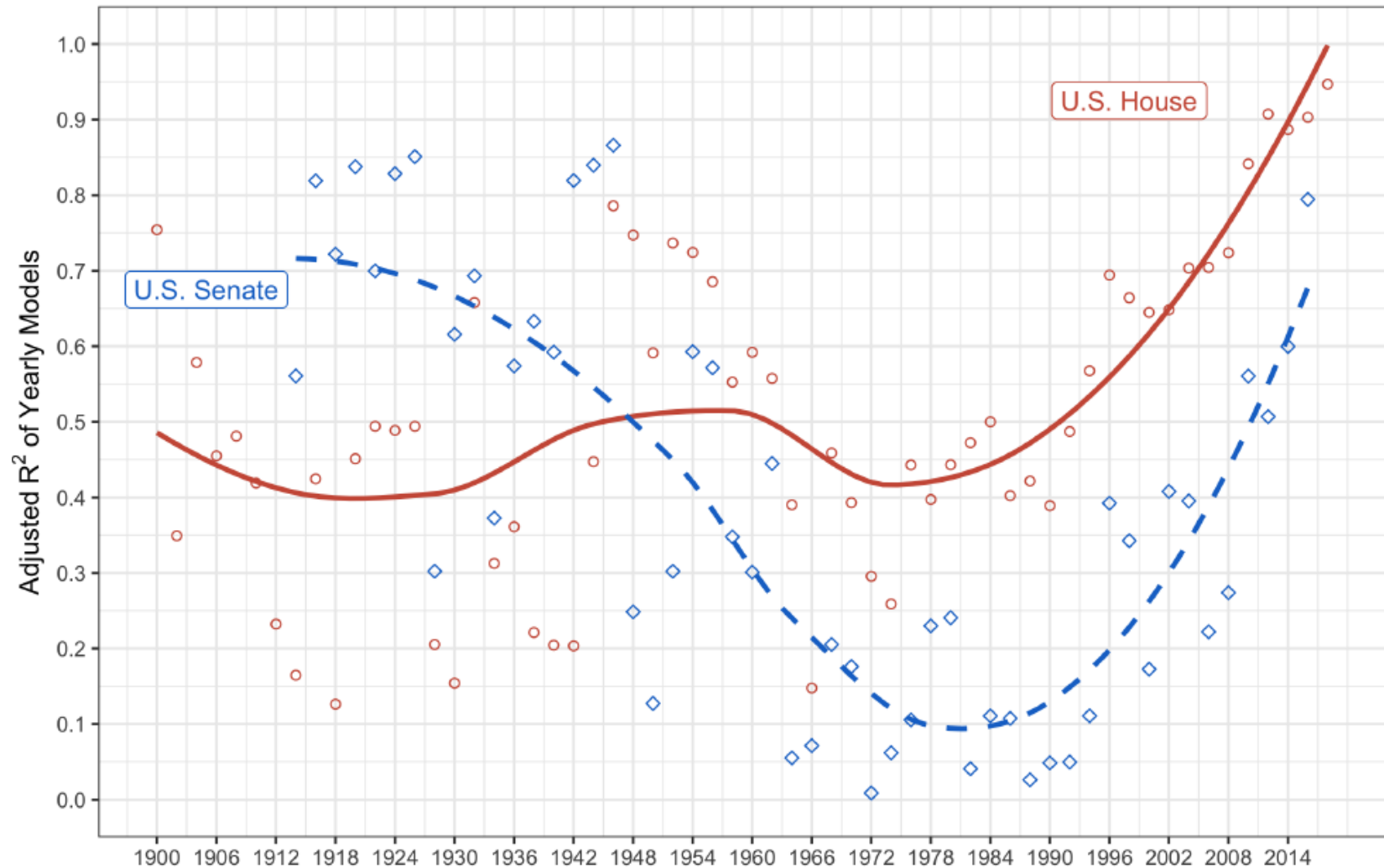


But Incumbency *Rates* Have Not Declined



Partisanship Is a Very Strong Force

Variance Explained by Partisanship in Congressional Election Outcomes, 1900-2018



Partisanship

- What are the implications of the rise of partisanship in voting behavior?
- Why might it increase incumbency rates?
- Does this make candidates' "personal brands" more or less important?
- The party of the candidate matters much more than it did previously

Does Moderation Help?

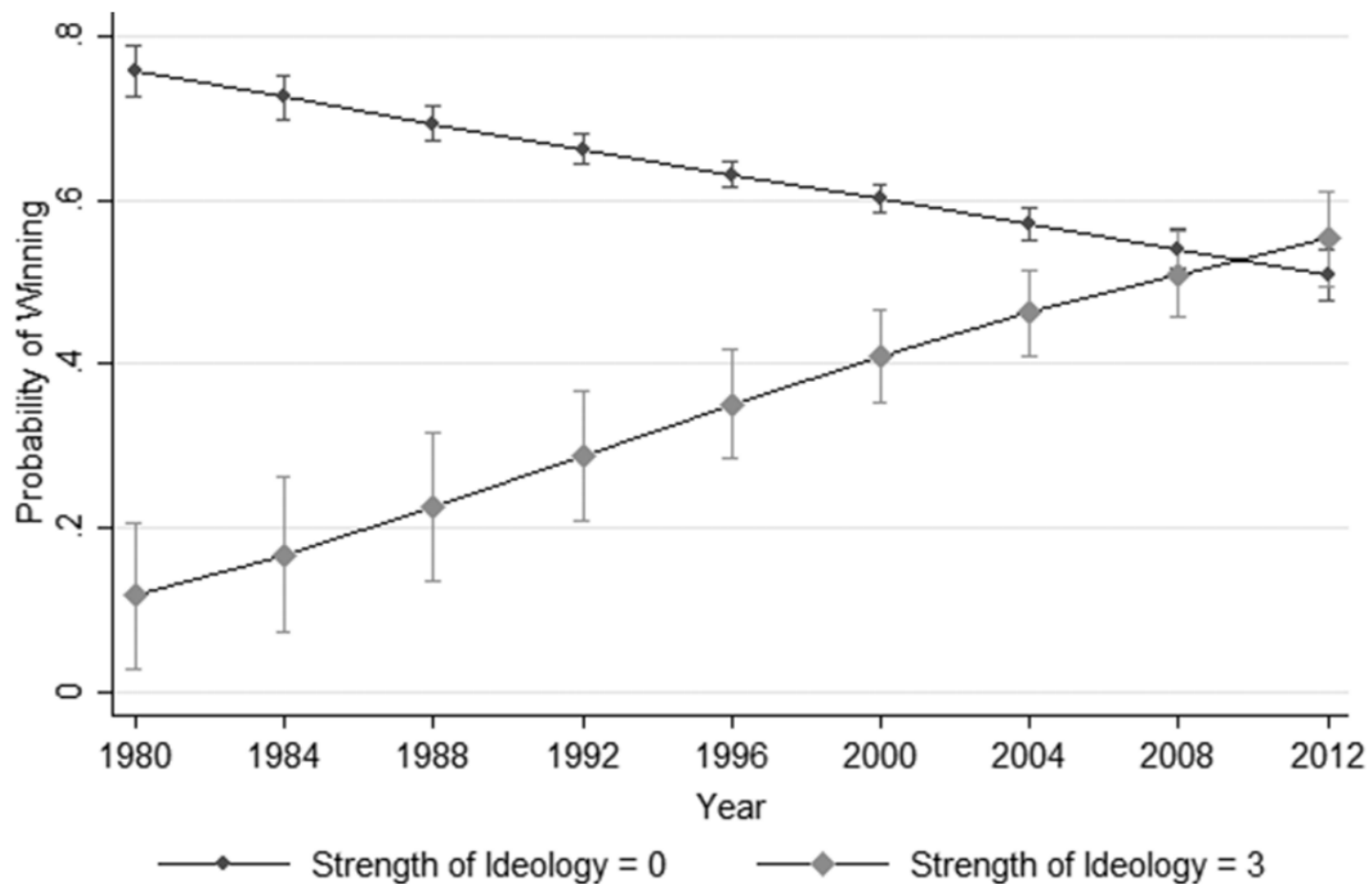


Figure 1. Ideology and electability, 1980–2012

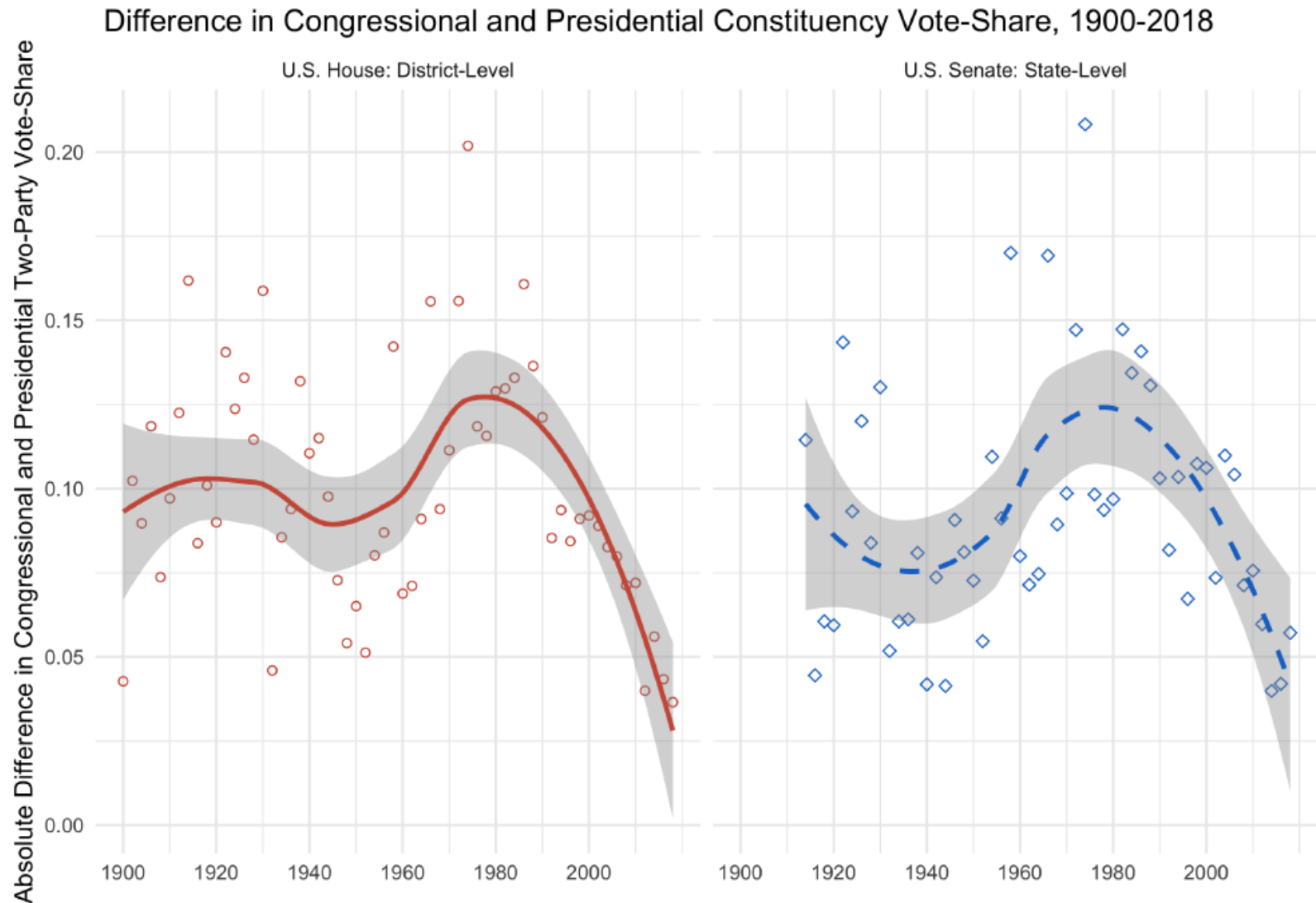
Joe Manchin Is an Exception! A 2012 Ad:



Manchin Defying the Party Again in 2018



But Manchin Is the Exception to the Rule



Applying Our Knowledge

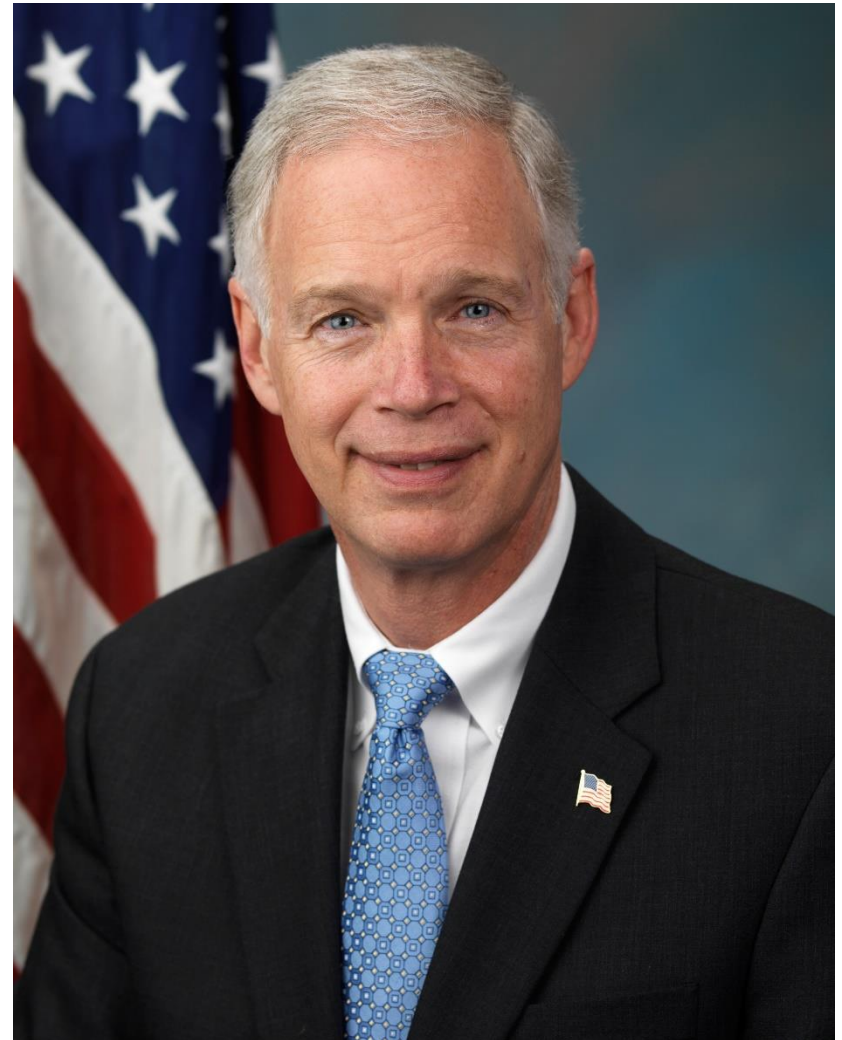
Applying Our Knowledge

- Imagine you are advising President Biden
- How would your knowledge of midterm elections affect your policymaking advice for him?



Applying Our Knowledge

- Imagine you are advising Ron Johnson, a vulnerable **Republican** Senator from Wisconsin up for reelection in 2022
- Would you advise him to vote for popular parts of Biden's agenda?
 - Why or why not?



Applying Our Knowledge

- Imagine you are advising Catherine Cortez Masto, a vulnerable **Democratic** Senator from Nevada up for reelection in 2022
- Would you advise her to oppose parts of Biden's agenda to create a "moderate" image with Nevada voters?



Q&A