

The Electoral Connection



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POL 105: The Legislative Process

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UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Outline

1. The Electoral Connection
2. The Power of Incumbency
3. The Nationalization of Congressional Elections
4. Q&A

Mayhew: The Electoral Connection

The Electoral Connection

- What is the primary assumption Mayhew makes about members of Congress (MCs)?
- What about policy goals? Do those matter too?
- Two models of electoral accountability:
 - Collective accountability
 - Individual accountability
- Which model describes Mayhew's observations?

The Electoral Connection

- MCs have a strong incentive to cultivate a *personal vote*
- MCs have three main methods for building a *personal vote*
- *Political Advertising*
- *Credit-Claiming*
- *Position-Taking*

Political Advertising

- How does Mayhew define advertising?
- “It helps a congressman to be known. In the main, recognition carries a positive valence; to be perceived at all is to be perceived favorably.”
- MCs utilize *franking privileges*, including town halls, mailers, social media, etc.
- MCs are able to use their status and position to gain publicity for their advertising

Getting Your Name Out There!

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“
I am very pleased that
President Obama
has signed into law
the Survivors' Bill of
Rights – legislation I co-
sponsored to protect the
victims of sexual assault.
”



**Darrell
Issa**

It's Extra Sweet When You Get to Use Taxpayer Money!

CONGRESSMAN GERRY CONNOLLY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

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PRSRST STD

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Congressman Gerry Connolly works to ensure equal opportunity for women.

Congressman Connolly discusses equal pay and workplace fairness.

Ensuring Equal Pay for Equal Work
Congressman Gerry Connolly helped pass the Lilly Ledbetter Act that made it illegal for employers to pay women less than men who do the same work. Now he's working to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act that will help women hold employers accountable when they are in violation of equal pay laws.

Providing Paid Parental Leave
It is always a challenge to balance the responsibilities of work and family. We should join other developed nations in offering parents paid leave upon the birth or adoption of a child. Congressman Connolly has cosponsored legislation (H.R. 1022) that would allow federal employees six weeks of paid parental leave.

Protecting Planned Parenthood
Planned Parenthood provides primary care and reproductive health services at 650 affiliate health centers across the nation. Connolly supports funding for Planned Parenthood because he believes women and their families should be able to make family planning decisions without government intrusion.

This mailing was prepared, published, and mailed at taxpayer expense.
It is provided as a service to residents of the 11th Congressional District of Virginia.

Position-Taking

- How does Mayhew define position-taking?
- “Public enunciation of a judgmental statement on anything likely to be of interest to political actors. This statement may take the form of a roll call vote.”
- What is an example of position-taking in Congress?
- Are these *policy* or *valence* positions?

Manchin Position-Taking



Manchin Position-Taking... 6 Years Later!



Position-Taking Can Be Opportunistic!

Running for fifth term, Feinstein now says capital punishment is unfair and ineffective

In many ways, her support for the death penalty was pivotal to Feinstein's initial bid for higher office. When Feinstein ran for governor in 1990 — a time of higher crime and more Republican voters in California — she used her support of capital punishment to draw a distinction between herself and the Democratic Party base, which at that time was more left-leaning than the overall state population.

“Yes, I support the death penalty. It is an issue that cannot be fudged or hedged,” [Feinstein said then in her address to delegates](#). It prompted a wave of boos and cost her the party endorsement.

She used footage of the speech in campaign ads to showcase her moderate views and appeal to liberal Republicans. And it became a key part of her stump speech.

Credit-Claiming

- “Defined here as acting so as to generate a belief in a relative political actor (or actors) that one is personally responsible for causing the government to do something that the actor (or actors) considers desirable”
- The focus is on an **individual** MC’s ability to provide a *particularized benefit*
- Particularized benefits are those to a particular group or geographic area where the benefit is distributed.
 - Examples?

Voters Want Me, Fish Fear Me



Hey, Another Montana Ad



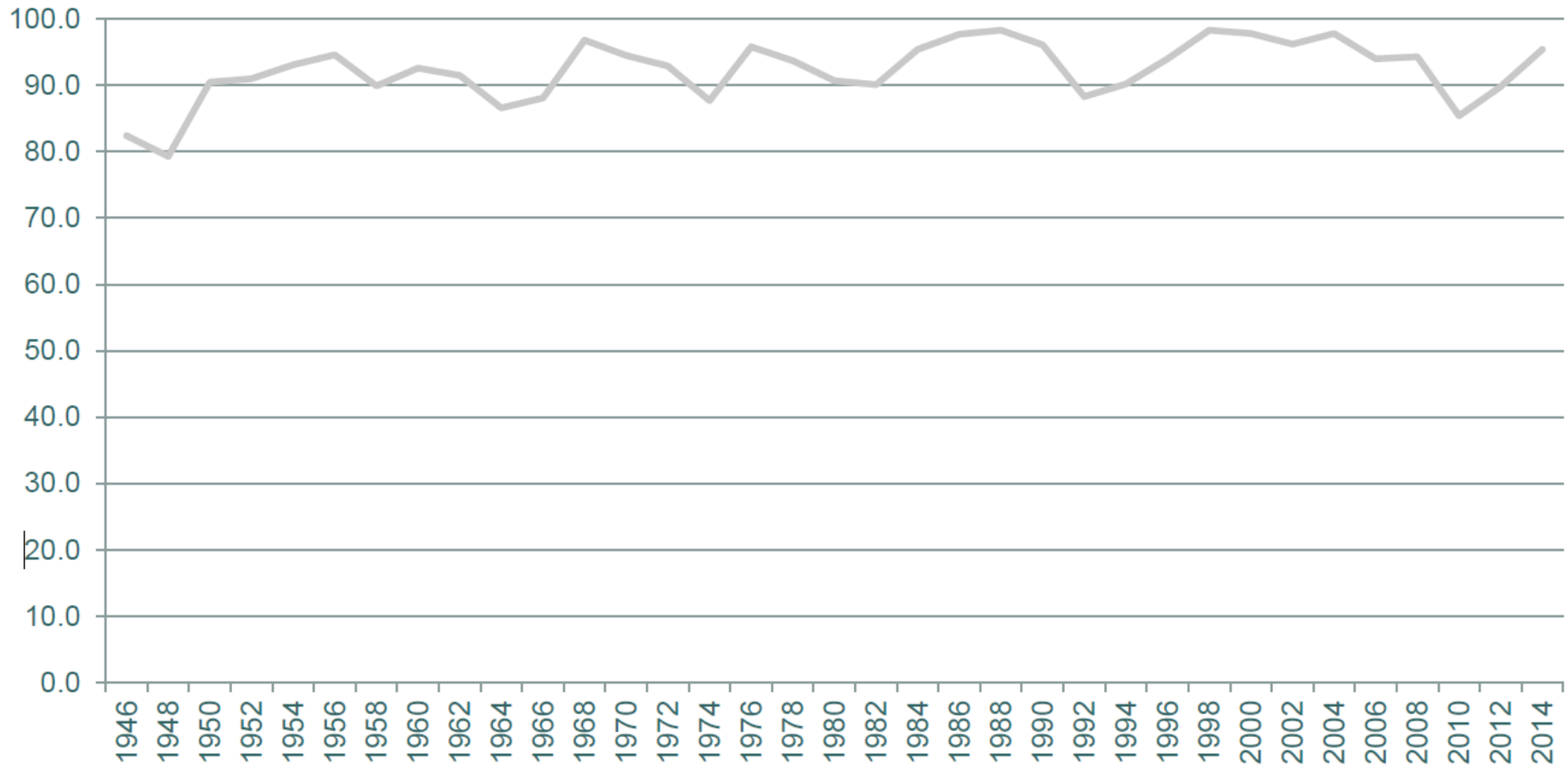
Credit-Claiming (cont.)

- The credit-claiming must be *credible* in order to work in the MC's favor
- Why might a benefit that is **not** particularized not be credible for credit-claiming?
- Can we think of an example?

The Incumbency Advantage

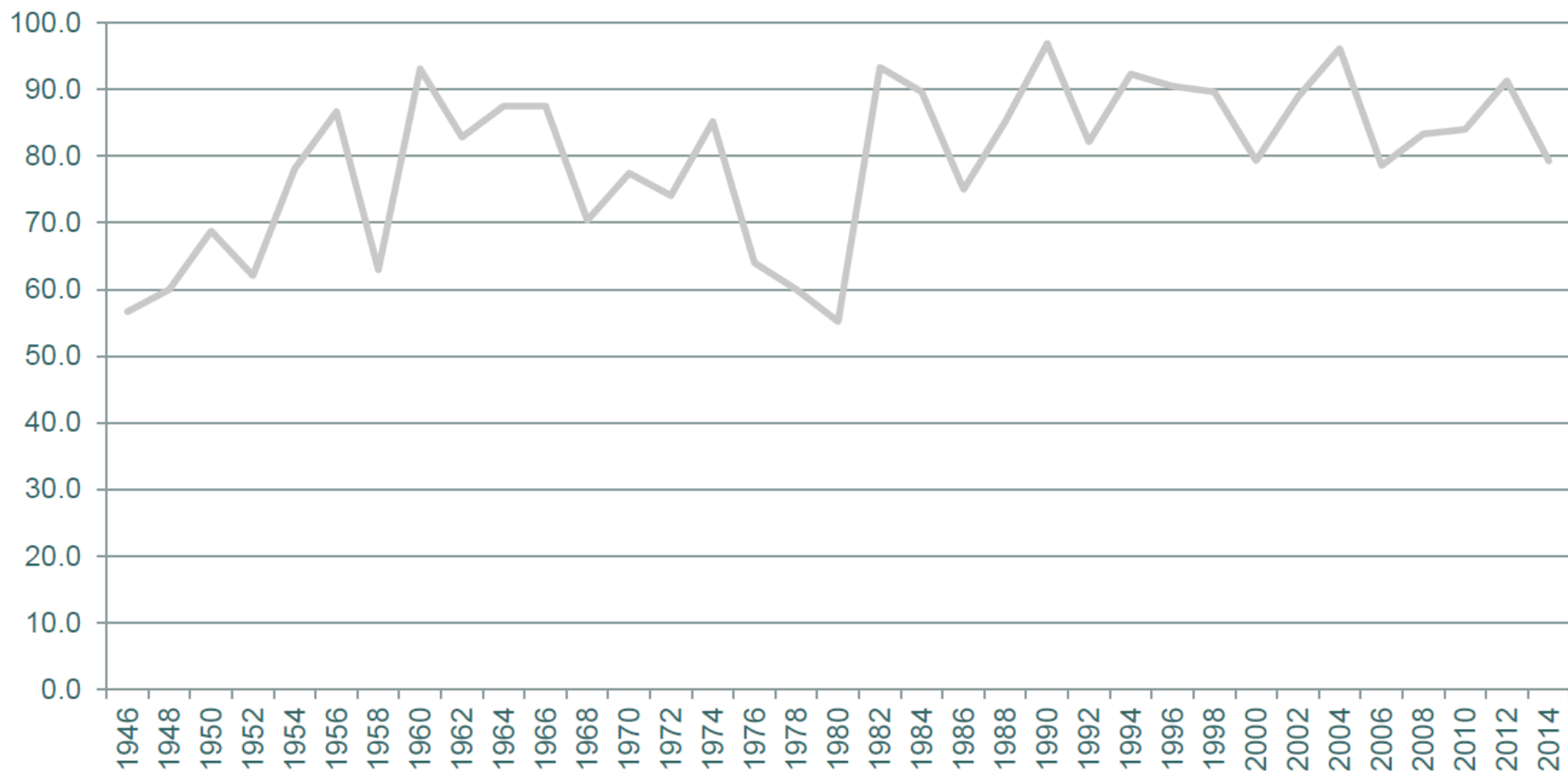
House Incumbents Win Reelection at *Very High Rates*

U.S. House Reelection Rates (among those seeking reelection)



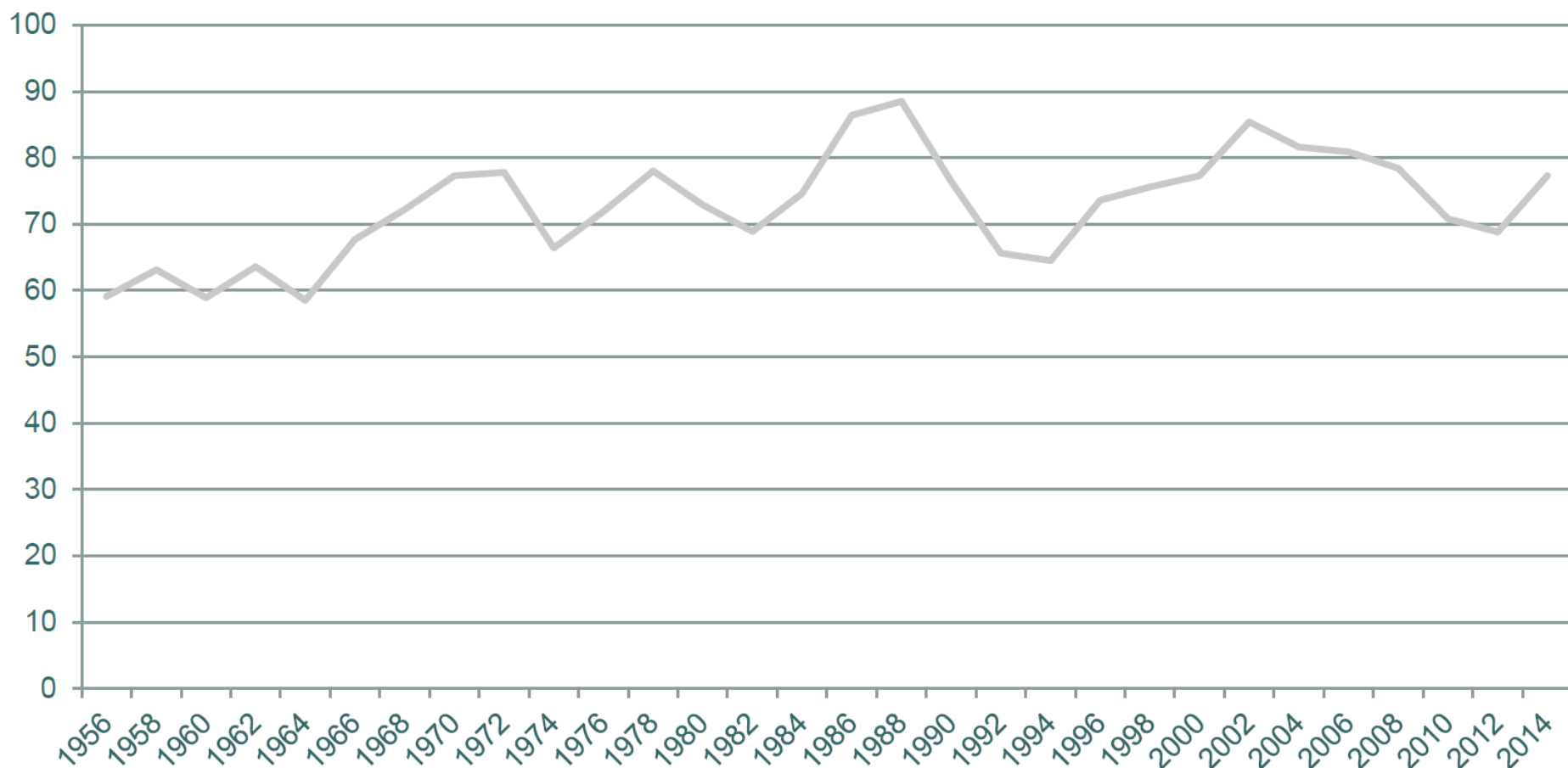
So Do Senators, But There Is More Variation

U.S. Senate Reelection Rates (Among those seeking reelection)



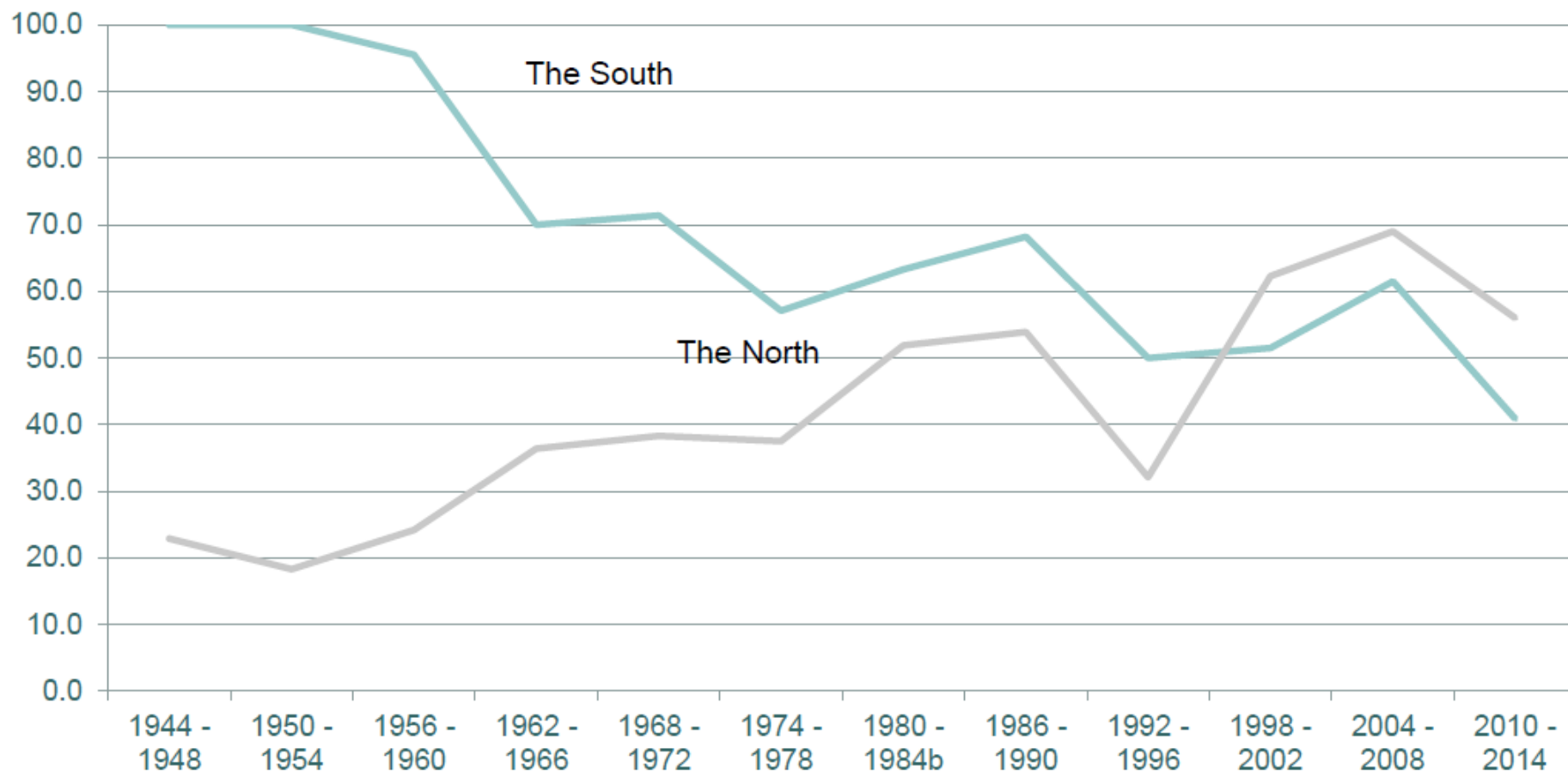
House Incumbents Tend to Win By a Lot

Percentage of incumbents reelected with at least 60 percent of the major party vote



But Senate Races Tend to Be Closer

Percentage of Senate Incumbents Elected with 60% or more of the vote

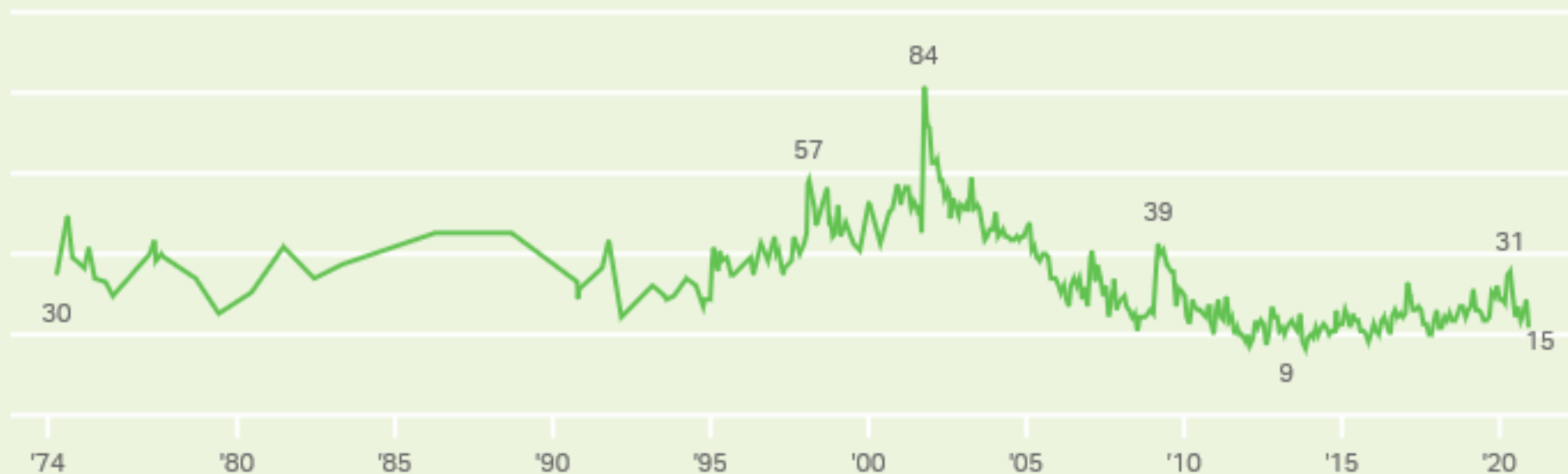


Puzzle: Congressional Job Approval is Low

Congressional Job Approval

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

■ % Approve

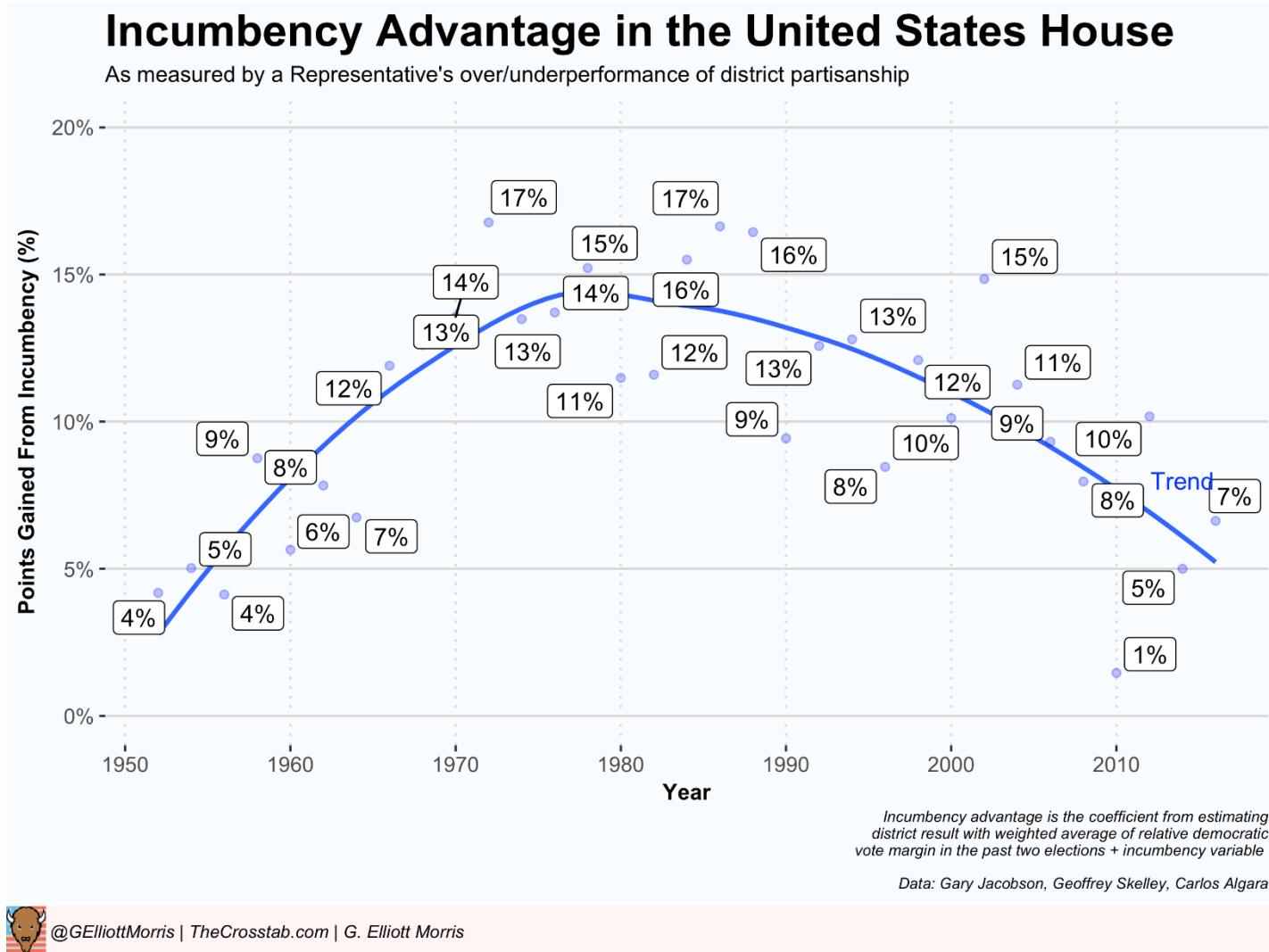


GALLUP

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
- These combine to create what we call the “incumbency advantage”
- Why do you think congressional races are so uncompetitive?

The Incumbency Advantage is Declining

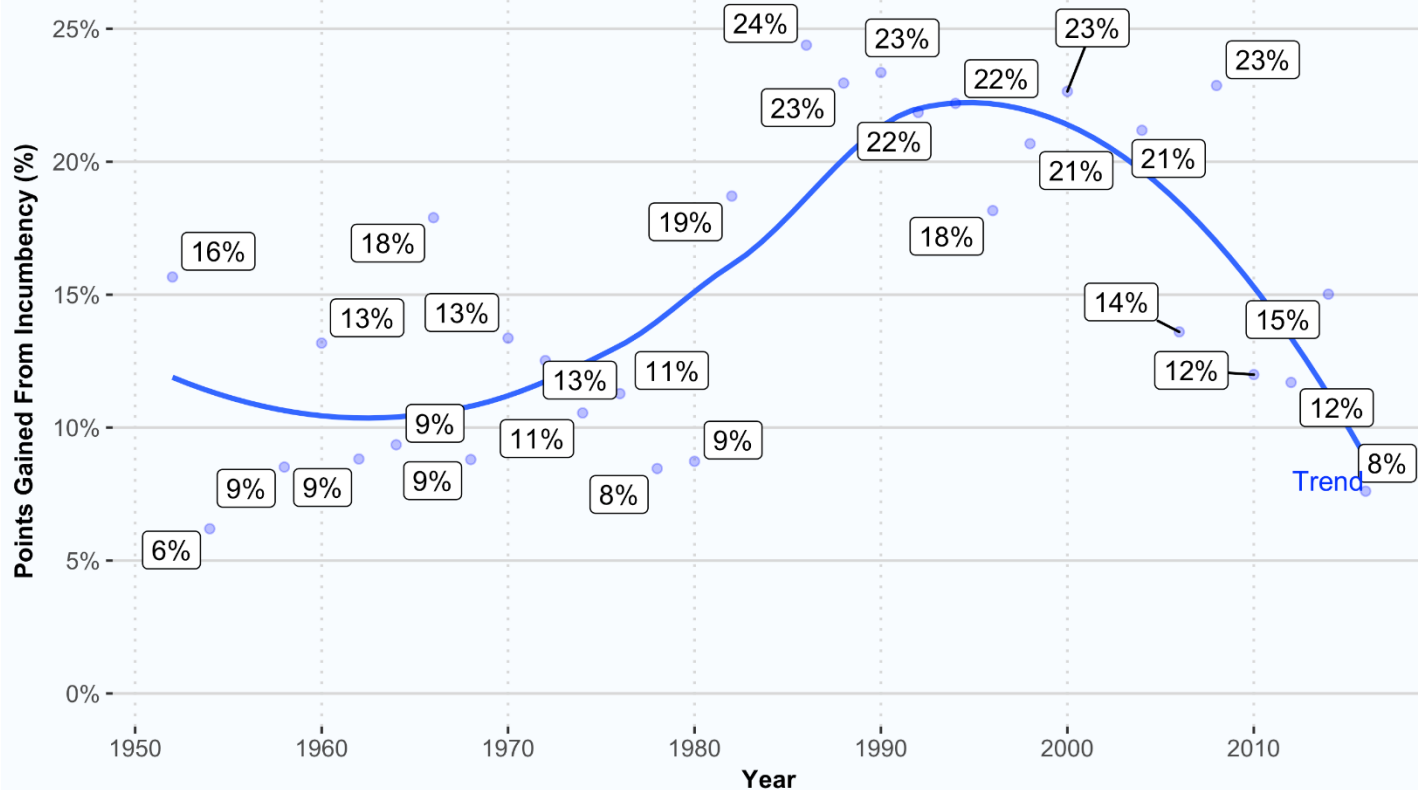


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The Incumbency Advantage is Declining

Incumbency Advantage in the United States Senate

As measured by a representative's overperformance of district partisanship



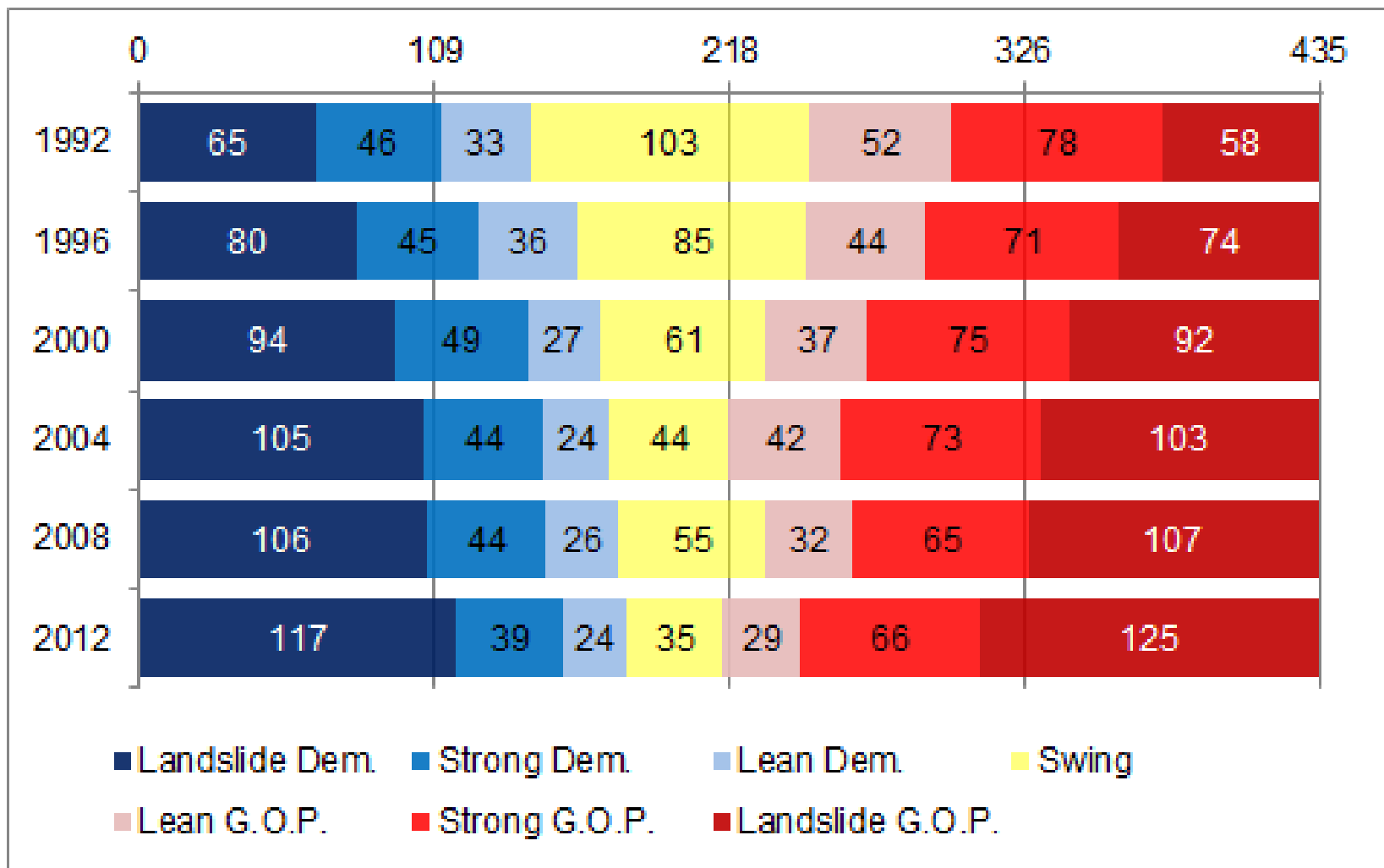
Incumbency advantage is the coefficient from estimating district result with weighted average of relative democratic vote margin in the past two elections + incumbency variable

Data: Gary Jacobson, Geoffrey Skelley, Carlos Algara

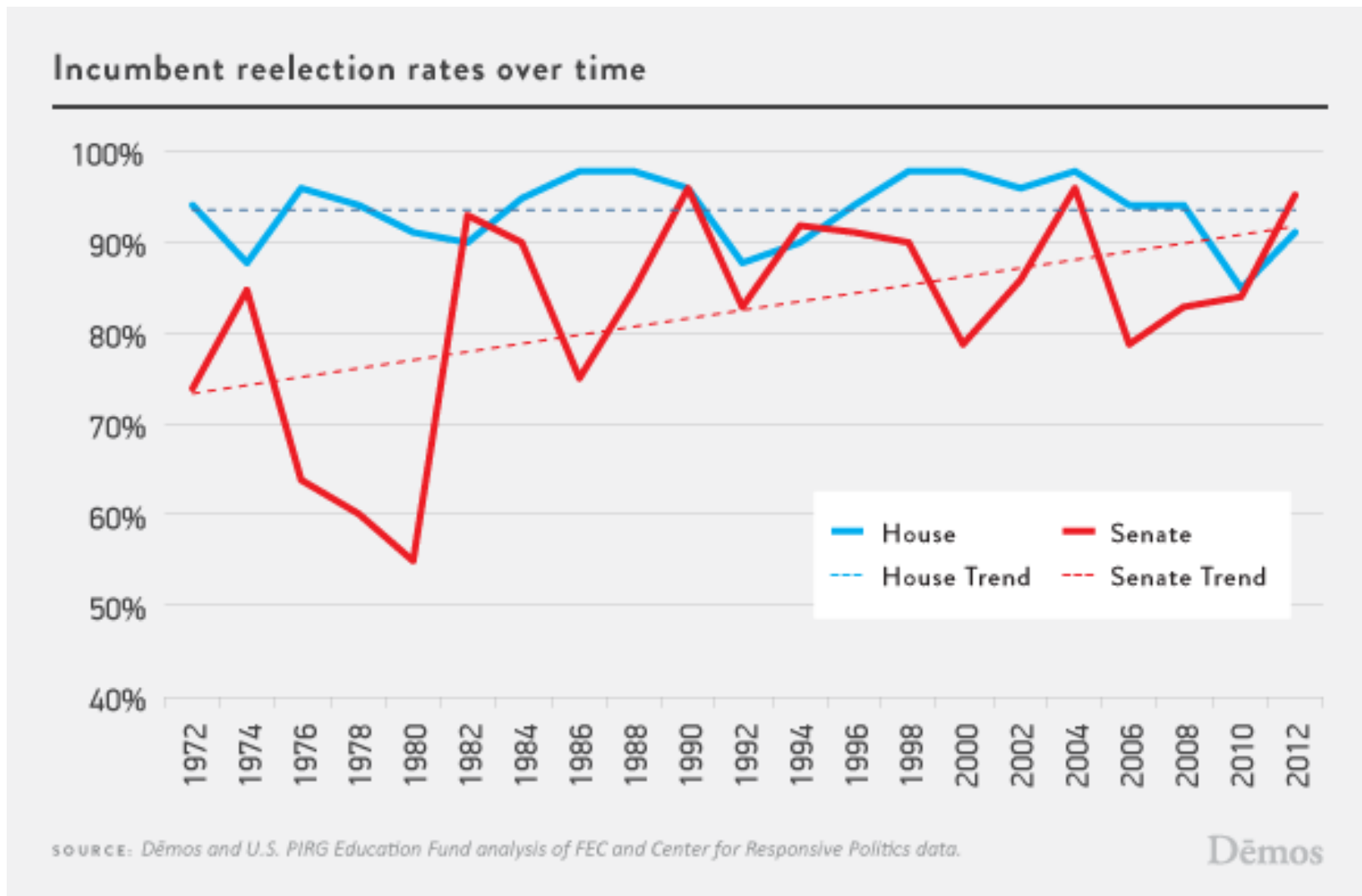


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... But Fewer House Races Are Competitive



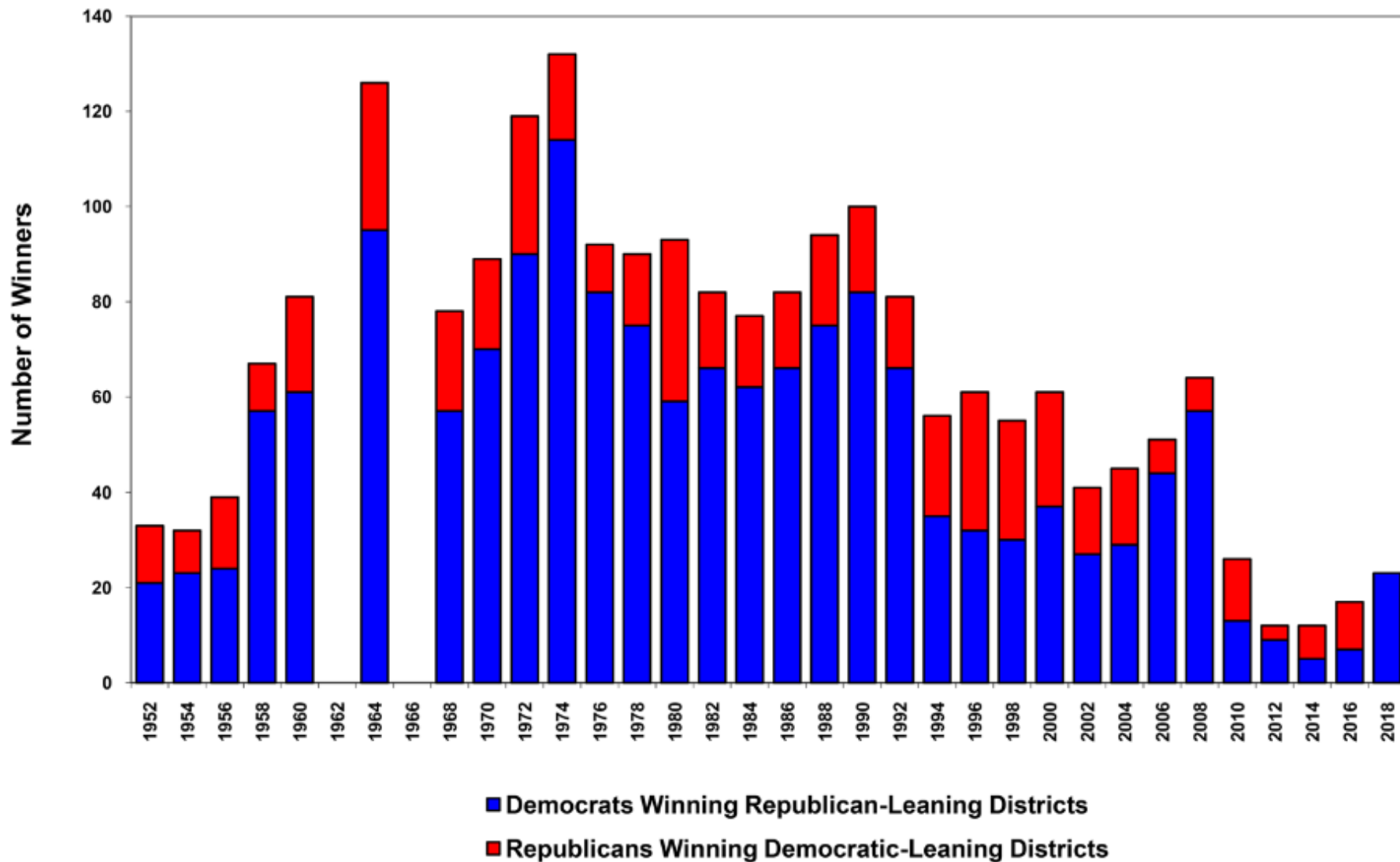
...And a Decline In Senate Race Competition!



The Puzzle of Incumbency

- Wait a minute, something doesn't add up...
- I just told you:
 - Congress is very unpopular
 - The incumbency *advantage* is declining
- But:
 - Congressional elections are getting less competitive
 - The incumbency *rate* remains high
- Can someone explain this mystery to me?

House Candidates Winning Against the Partisan Grain, 1952–2018



Source: Compiled by author.

The Nationalization of Campaigns

The Conditions for the Electoral Connection Model

There are four conditions that must be met for the Electoral Connection model to hold:

1. *Ambition*: MCs must desire reelection
2. *Autonomy*: MCs must be able to run for reelection and run their own campaigns
3. *Responsiveness*: MCs can bring benefits to constituents via advertising, credit-claiming, and position-taking.
4. *Accountability*: voters (principals) must be able to sanction MCs (agents) when they are unpopular

A Unique Slice of History

“Modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties” - E.E. Schattschneider (1942)

“No theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytic units will go very far.” – David Mayhew (1974)

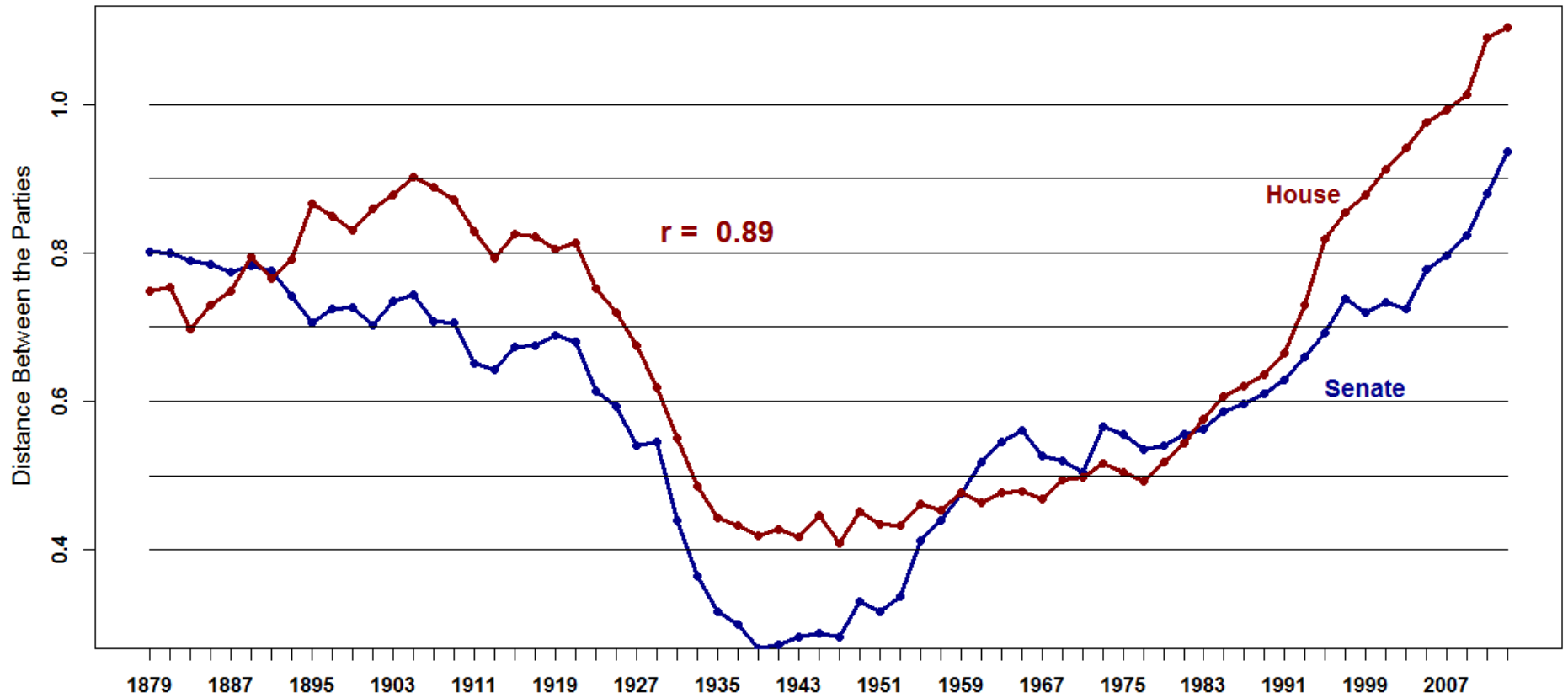
- *Collective accountability* is extremely diminished in Mayhew’s vision of American politics
- Which political scientist do you think is right?

Does Mayhew Hold Up?

- Do we think the Electoral Connection model holds today?
- Politics are very different than in the period Mayhew describes (50s-70s)
- Many political scientists argue that the politics Mayhew observed are historically atypical
- In fact, in the 19th century (prior to the secret ballot and other progressive reforms), *collective* accountability **not** *individual* accountability was the norm.

Mayhew's Congressional Parties Are Historically De-polarized

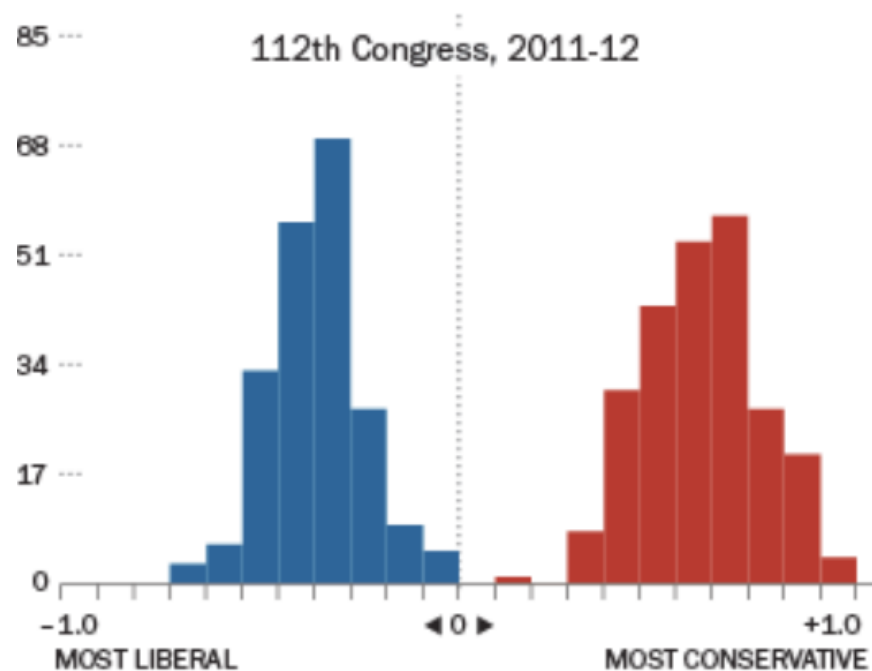
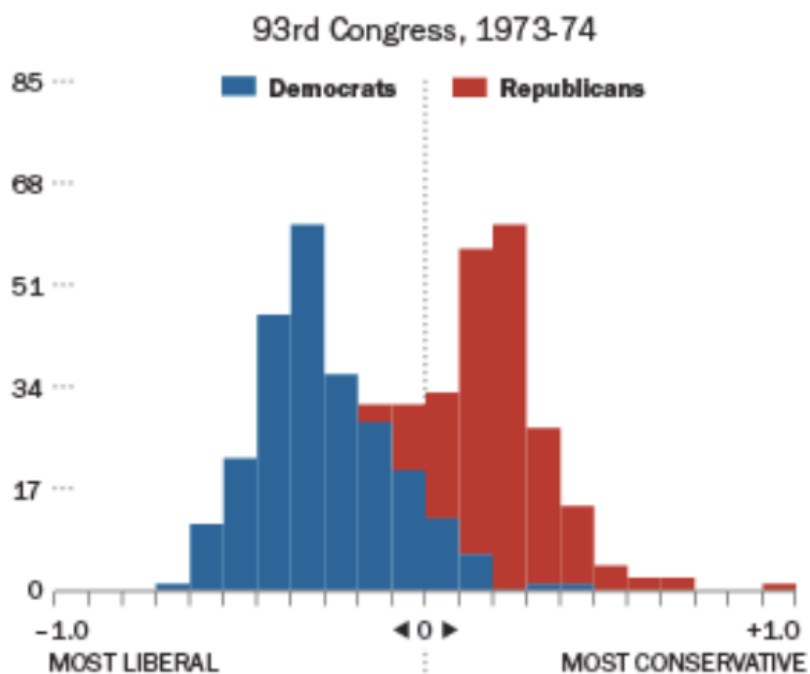
Party Polarization 1879-2013
Distance Between the Parties First Dimension



Polarized America / voteview.com

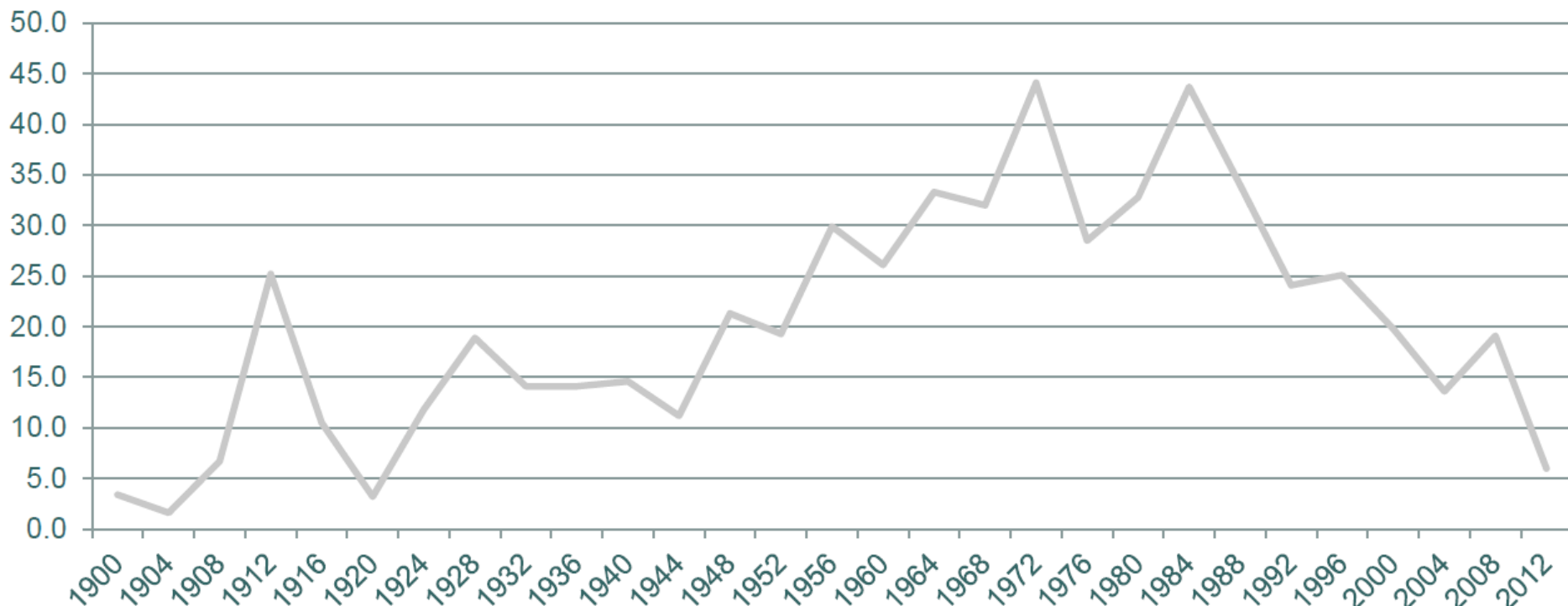
The Congressional Parties No Longer Ideologically Overlap

Number of Representatives



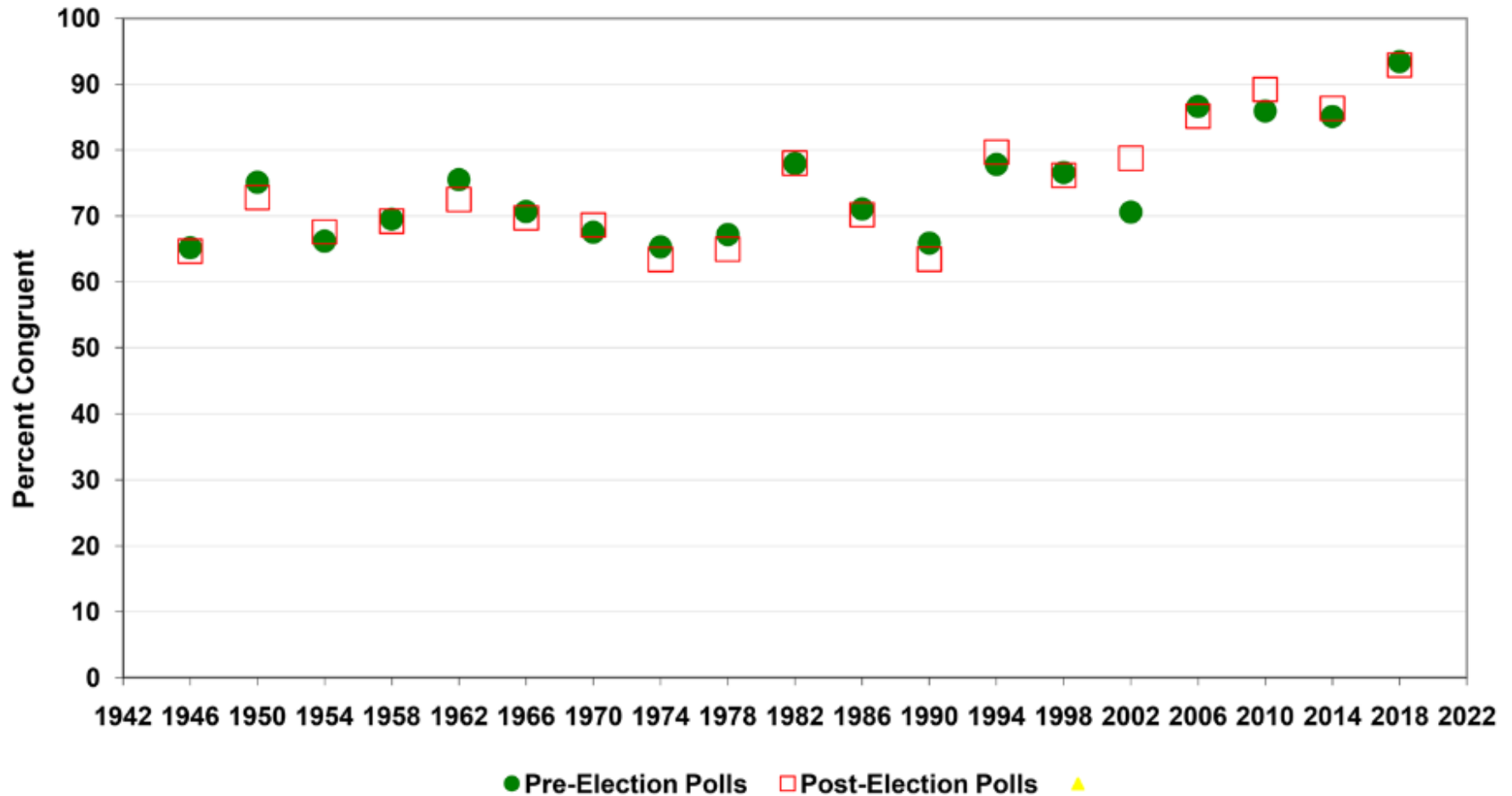
Congressional Races Are More Nationalized & Partisan

The Percentage of Split Party Results in House Districts (i.e., where one party wins the district Presidential vote and the other party wins the House vote) has declined since the 1980s



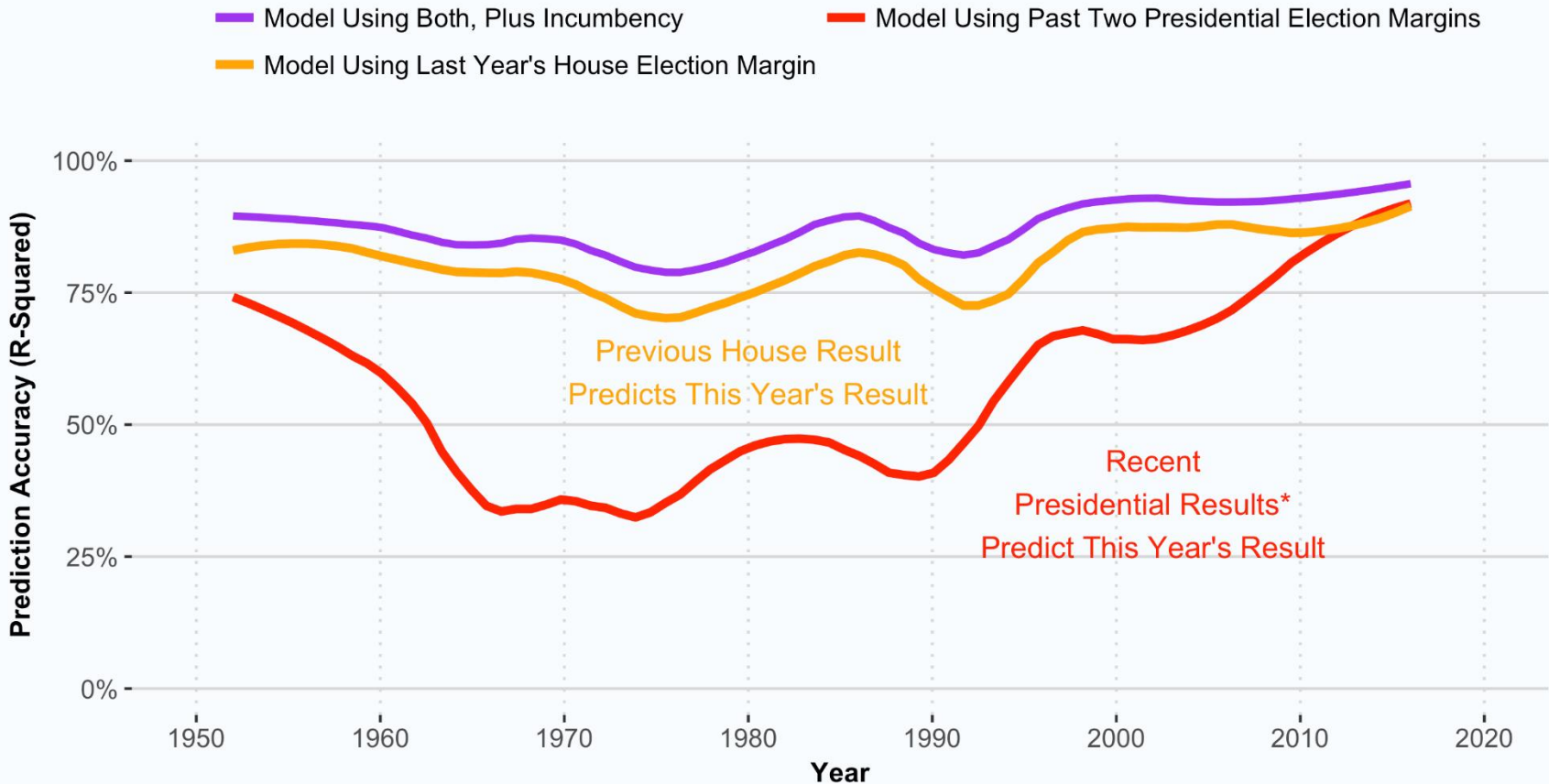
House Races Are Very Nationalized

Congruence between Presidential Approval and the House Vote in Midterm Election Polls, 1946–2018



House Elections Are Becoming More Stable and More Partisan

Comparing different methods for predicting outcomes among elections to the US House where two major-party candidates ran.



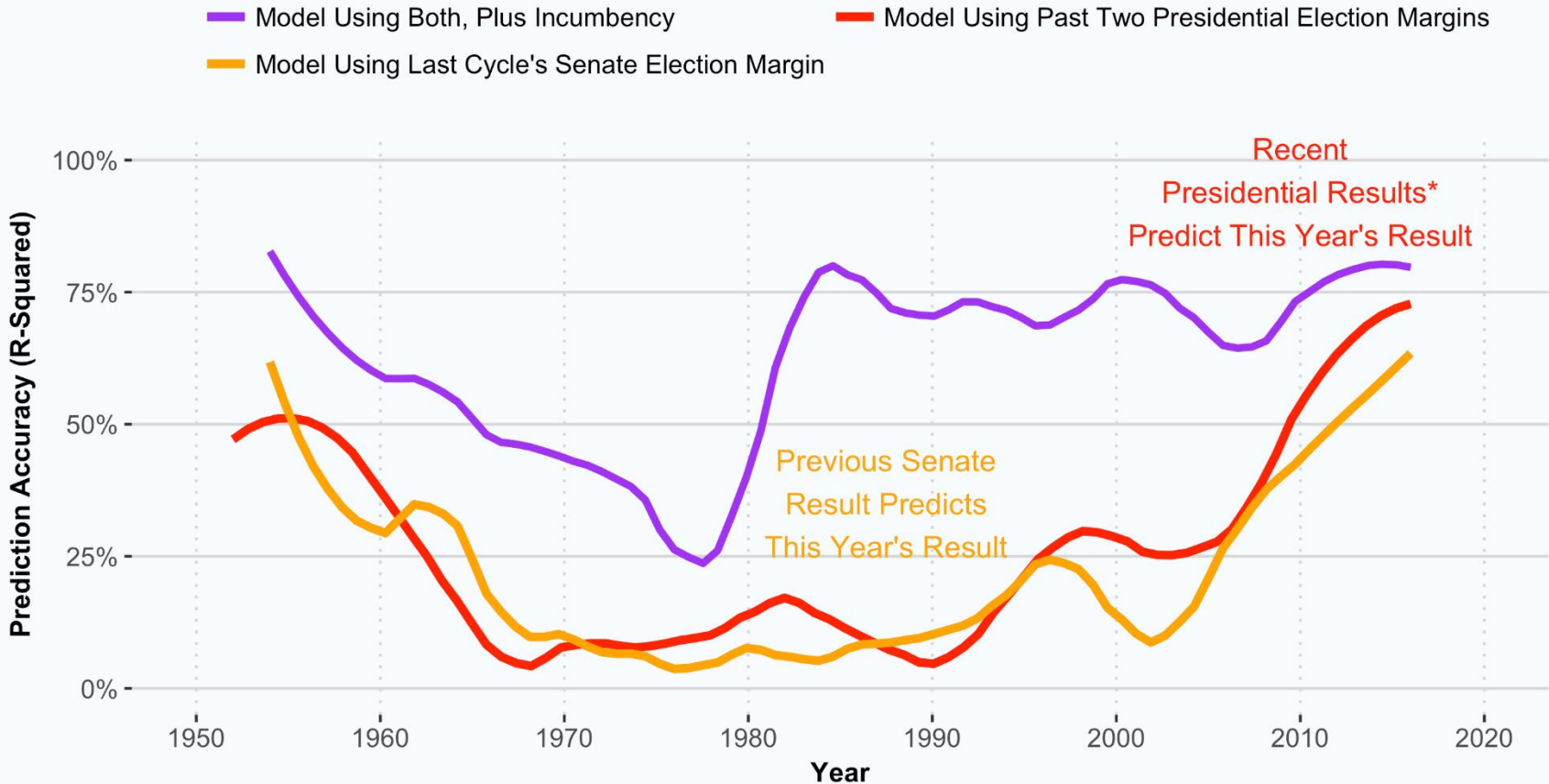
*Note: Presidential results are 538's "benchmark," a weighted average of the Democrat's relative presidential election margin in each congressional district for the past two elections

Data: Gary Jacobson



Senate Elections Are Becoming More Stable and More Partisan

Comparing different methods for predicting outcomes among elections to the US Senate where two major-party candidates ran.

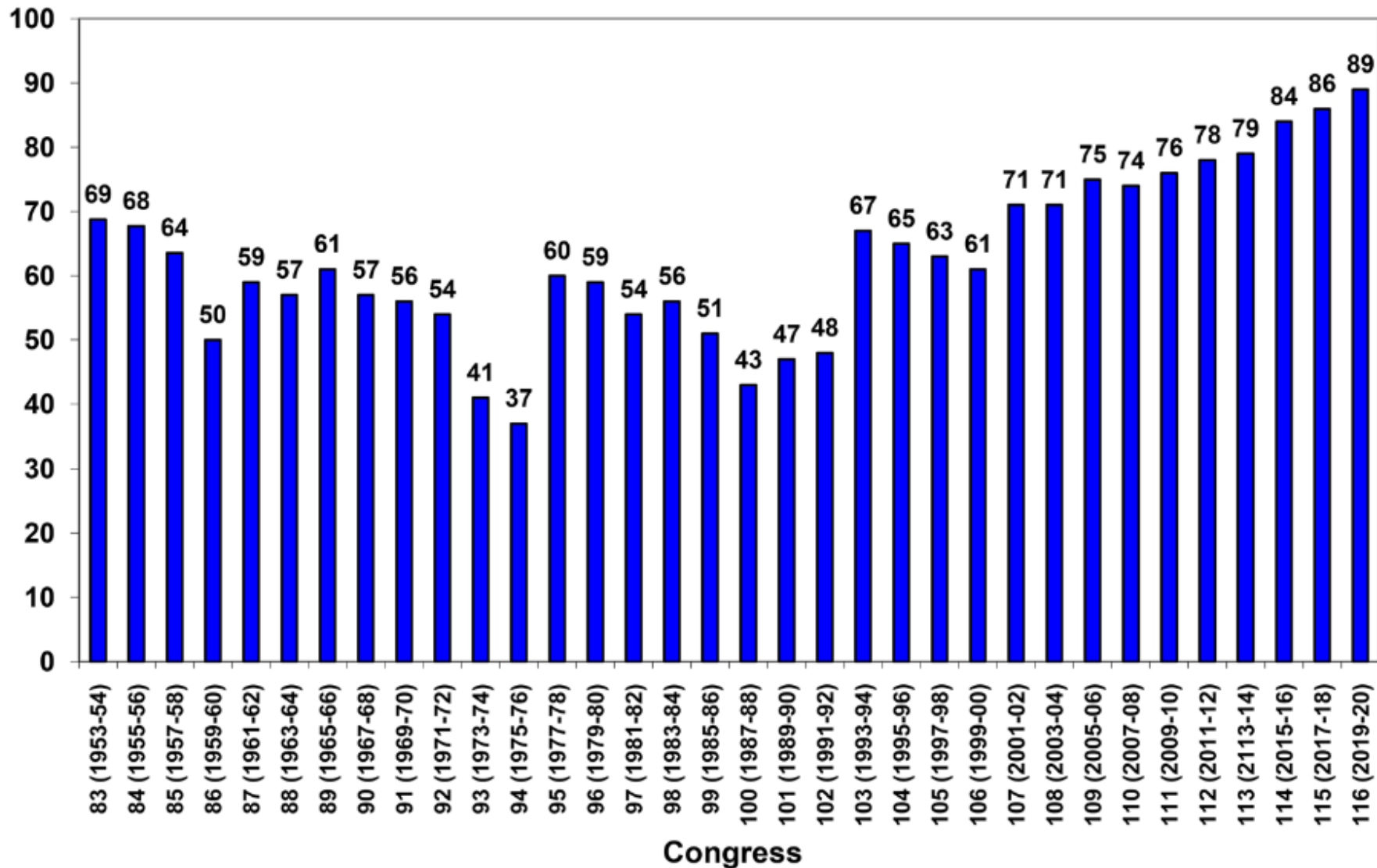


*Note: Presidential results are 538's "benchmark," a weighted average of the Democrat's relative presidential election margin in each state for the past two elections

Data: Gary Jacobson, Geoffrey Skelley, Carlos Algara



Senate Seats Held by the Party Winning the State in the Most Recent Presidential Election, 1952–2018



So Now What?

- In the coming weeks we will examine alternate models for MC behavior
- We can see that party matters more than it used to
- This doesn't mean that Mayhew was totally wrong -- legislators are clearly motivated by reelection
 - Think about Joe Manchin trying to advertise, position-take, and credit claim against his own party's leaders
- But it does mean that Mayhew's vision isn't the whole story

Q&A