

# Electoral Dynamics: The Role of Campaign Context in Voting Choice

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# Agenda

- 1 Incumbency
- 2 Partisanship
- 3 Campaign Resources
- 4 Collective Responsibility

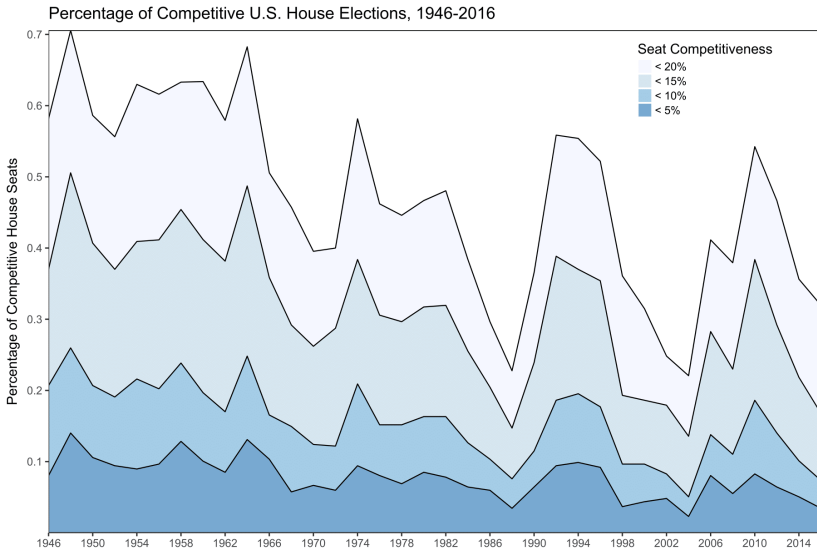
### *Models of Electoral Control*

<i>Heuristic</i>	Vote-Choice Model	Implications for Representatives	Analytical Purposes
Ideology	Spatial/Proximity Voting	Responsive to Median Voter	Representation & Candidate Positioning
Partisanship	Michigan Model	Responsive to Partisan Base	Explaining vote choice/partisan bias
Valence	Retrospective Model/Valence Rule	Develop reputation, (honesty/integrity), monitor economy	Explaining electoral outcomes, pres. forecasting

*Note: Partisanship & ideology are generally prospective models.*

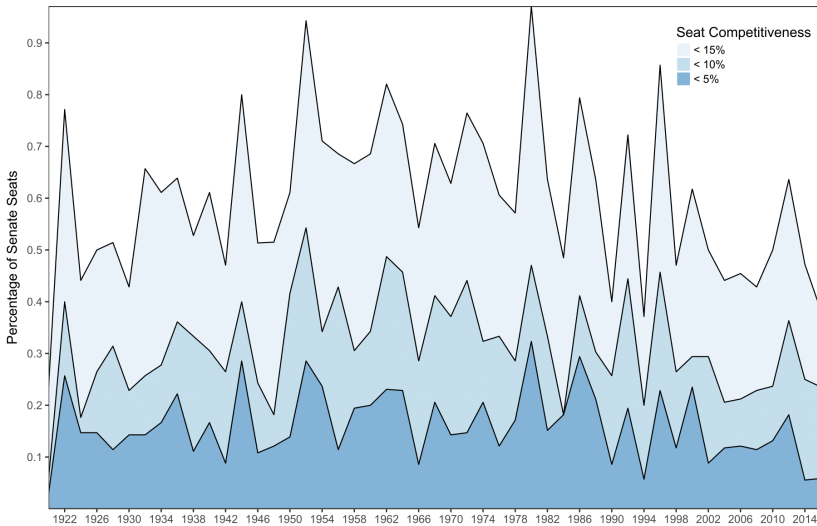
- ▶ Opening Question: Which model of electoral choice do you think reduces the information cost of voting the *most*? What is one potential pitfall for the model of your choice?

# Decline in Competition in House Elections

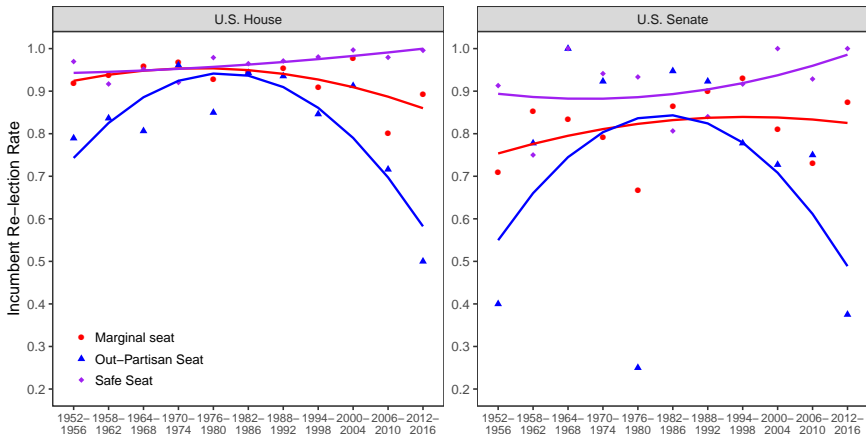


# Decline in Competition in Senate Elections

Percentage of Competitive U.S. Senate Elections, 1920-2016



# High Re-election Rates by Seat-Type

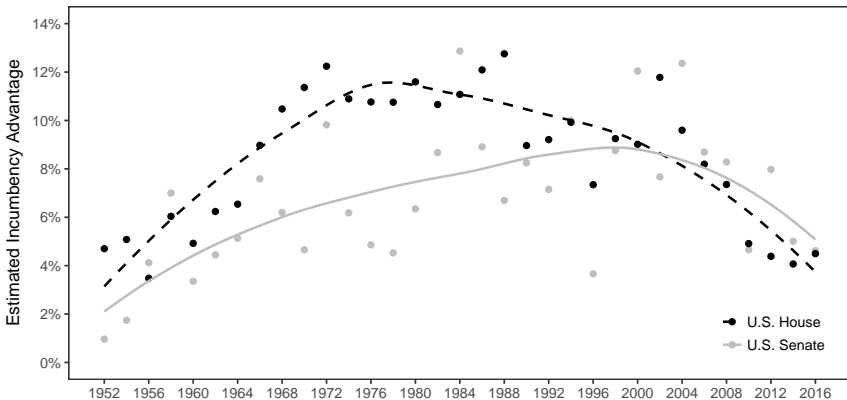


Smoothed lowest regression curve illustrated to show trend in incumbent re-election by seat-type over cycle.

# Importance of an Incumbency Advantage

- ▶ Why do you think American elections are so noncompetitive?
- ▶ *Abramowitz et al.*: Decline in competition in House elections in last 50 years
- ▶ What is the puzzle *Abramowitz et al.* want to explain and how does incumbency factor in?
- ▶ Interested in evaluating three hypotheses explaining decline: *redistricting*, *incumbency*, and *partisanship*.
- ▶ Sources of an incumbency advantage (direct & indirect effect):
  - ▶ Name recognition (constituency service, past campaigns, etc.)
  - ▶ “Perks of office” such as service & committee membership
  - ▶ Ability to scare potential quality challengers
- ▶ Incumbency advantage congruent with *candidate-centered* elections with relatively *autonomous* candidates

# Declining Worth of Incumbency in Congressional Elections





# Incumbency Continued

- ▶ What do *Abramowitz et al.* find with respect to the relationship between incumbency & decline in competition?
- ▶ Non-open seats more competitive than incumbent re-elections, why?

# Open Seats & Variation in Campaign Spending

**TABLE 2** Competition in Marginal House Districts by Type of Contest, 2002–2004

Winner's % of House Vote	Type of Contest	
	Open Seat	Running Incumbent
Uncontested		
or 70+	3%	20%
60–70	29	55
55–60	23	19
50–55	45	5
Total	100%	100%
(n)	(31)	(197)

*Note:* Marginal districts are those in which Democratic presidential candidate's percentage of major party vote is within 5 points of national percentage.

*Source:* Data compiled by authors.

**TABLE 3** Competition in High-Risk Incumbent Districts by Challenger Spending, 1998–2002

Challenger's % of Vote	Challenger Spending		
	\$0–499,999	\$500,000–999,999	\$1,000,000+
LT 30	16%	0%	0%
30–40	48	25	3
40–45	29	29	21
45+	7	46	76
Winners	0%	14%	27%
(n)	(132)	(28)	(33)

*Note:* Risky districts are those in which percentage of major party vote for presidential candidate of incumbent's party is less than national percentage.

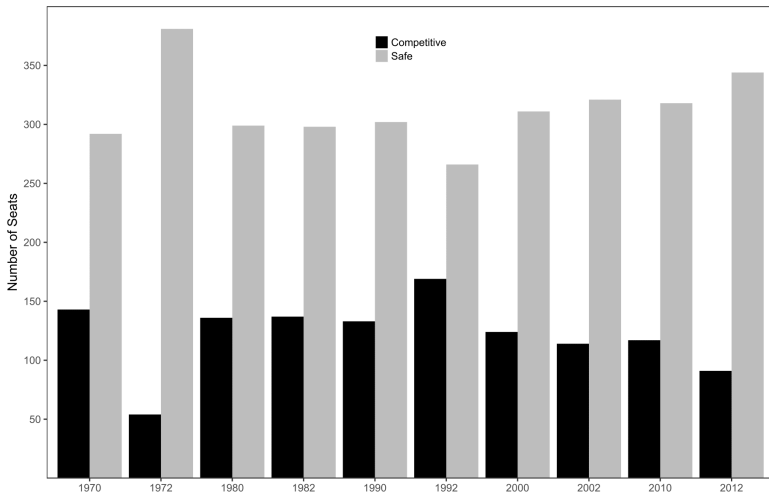
*Source:* Data compiled by authors.

# Incumbency Continued

- ▶ What do *Abramowitz et al.* find with respect to the relationship between incumbency & decline in competition?
- ▶ Non-open seats more competitive than incumbent re-elections, why?
- ▶ Experienced quality candidates more likely to emerge in open seat races
- ▶ Why are experience candidates desirable for parties & why are they strategic?
- ▶ What about support for gerrymandering hypotheses (i.e. redistricting)?

# Lack of support for the *Redistricting* Hypothesis

Numbers of Safe & Competitive Districts Before & After Redistricting, 1970–2012



## Salience of Redistricting as an explanation

- ▶ No support for the hypothesis: redistricting → ↓ competitive
- ▶ David Broder (The New York Times, 2004):

“both parties have succeeded in drawing district lines in ways that cement their current power by eliminating contested elections . . . most states were drawn to protect incumbents from *the inconvenience of competition*”

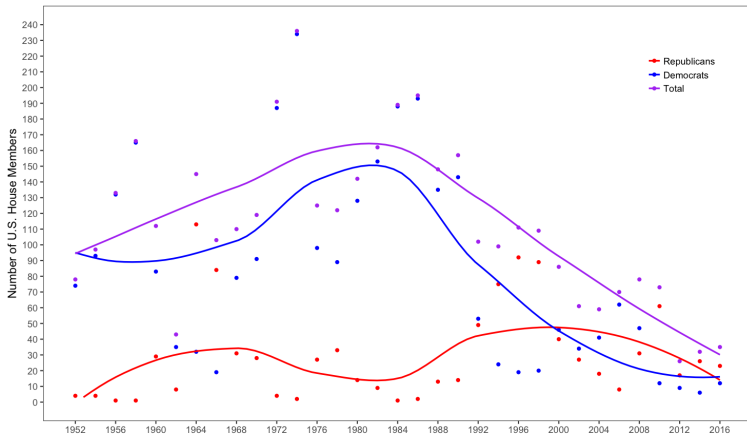
- ▶ Why would redistricting not have an effect on competition in House elections?
- ▶ Increased salience of the partisan model in congressional elections
- ▶ Similar trends in the Senate, fixed districts

# Flexing the Muscle of Partisanship

- ▶ Do *Abramowitz et al.* find support for the “partisan polarization” hypothesis?
- ▶ Less ticket splitting in contemporary congressional elections

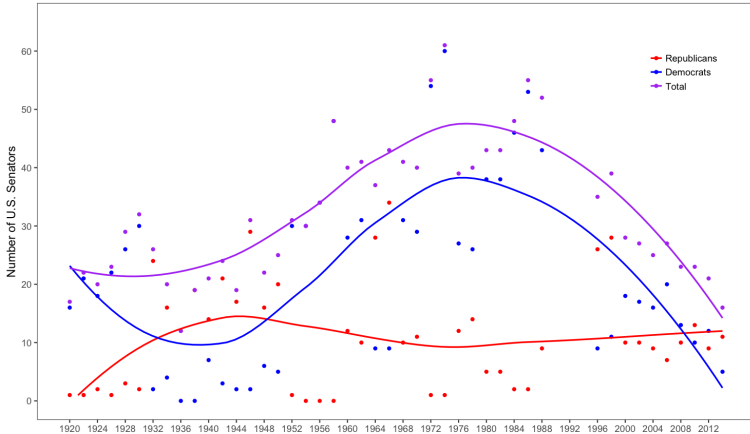
# Decline of Split-Ticket Voting in Congressional Elections

Number of House Members Representing Districts Won by Opposing Party's Presidential Nominee, 1952-2016



# Decline of Split-Ticket Voting in Congressional Elections

Number of Senators Representing States  
Won by Opposing Party's Presidential Nominee, 1920-2014

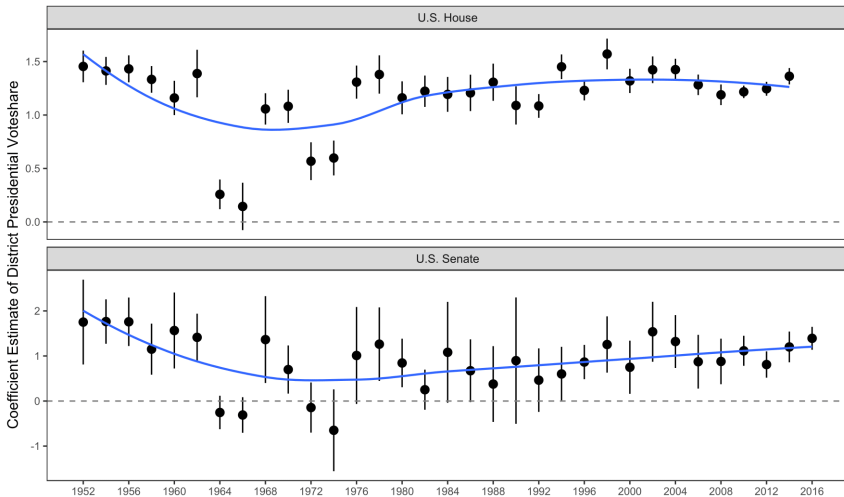




## Flexing the *Muscle* of Partisanship

- ▶ Do *Abramowitz et al.* find support for the “partisan polarization” hypothesis?
- ▶ Less ticket splitting in contemporary congressional elections
- ▶ What are the implications of increased partisanship for the voting models discussed?
- ▶ More weight on candidate partisanship & ideological preferences
- ▶ Is there a trade-off between partisanship & incumbency effects in congressional elections?
- ▶ Potential implications of ↑ partisanship effect in election outcomes on valence model of vote choice?

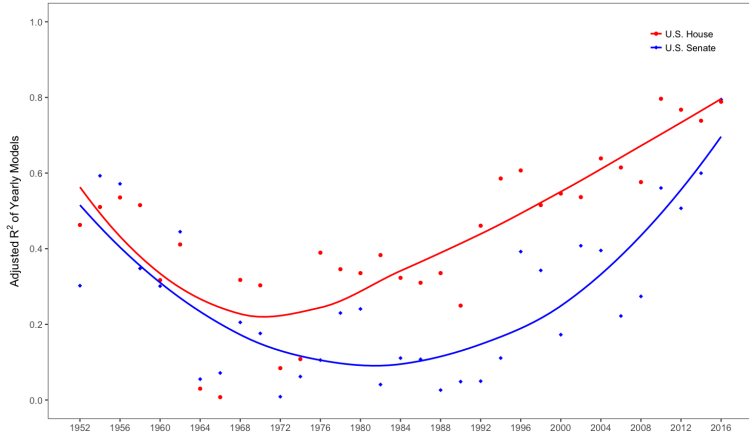
## Relationship between District Election Outcomes &amp; District Presidential Results, 1952-2016



Smoothed lowess regression curve fitted to illustrate trend in coefficient estimate across yearly models. Bivariate district-level OLS model specified:  $DemVote \sim DemPresVote$

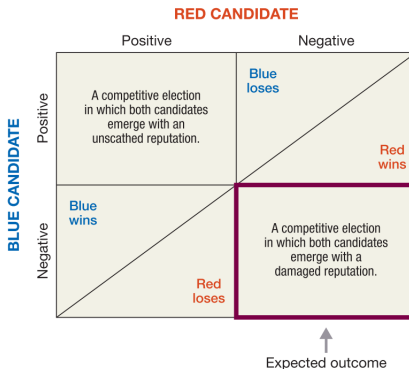
# Growing Strength of Partisan Explanation

Variance in Congressional Election Outcomes accounted for by District Presidential Outcomes, 1952-2016



# Campaign Spending

- ▶ Consider the following Prisoner's Dilemma  
Choosing Negative Advertisements:  
A Prisoner's Dilemma

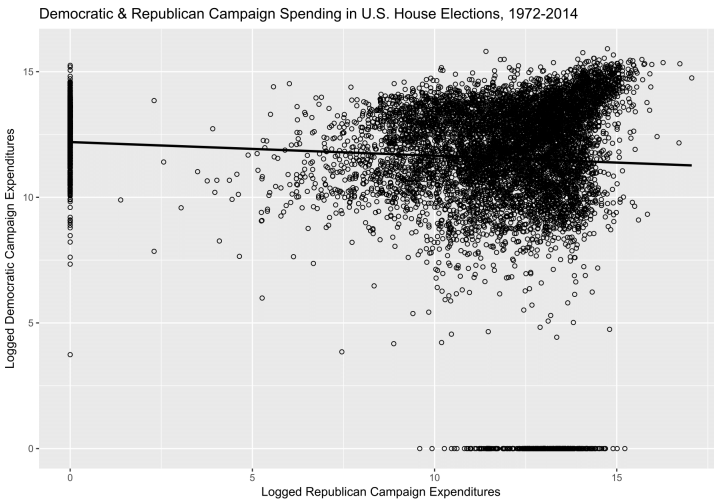


- ▶ What's the logic behind the game? Can you apply this to campaign spending generally?

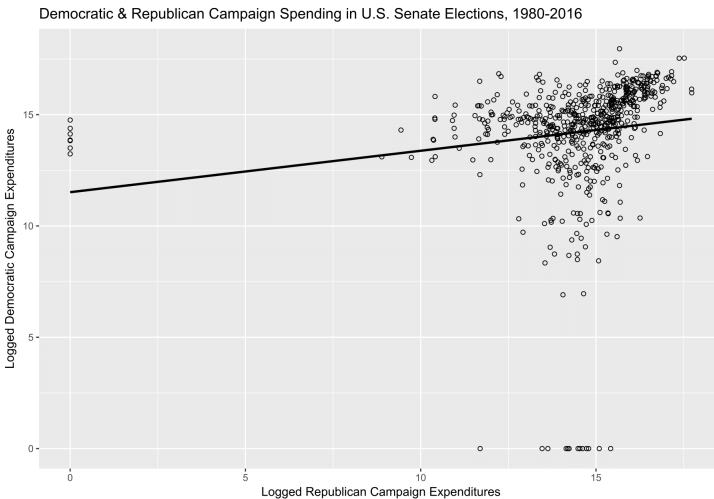
## Campaign Spending Cont.

- ▶ Campaign funds from individuals & PACS allow candidates to invest in campaign infrastructure, boost name recognition (ads), project policy positions, and define opponent (valence & policy positions)
- ▶ Campaign spending in election *dynamic*, both sides adhere to the “arms-race” model
- ▶ Minimal (if any) independent on election outcomes
- ▶ Post *Citizens United* campaigns are getting more expensive on both sides but differential still approaching 0.
- ▶ Campaign resources used primarily for *mobilization* rather than *conversion* given precancel of partisan & spatial models in explaining vote-choice

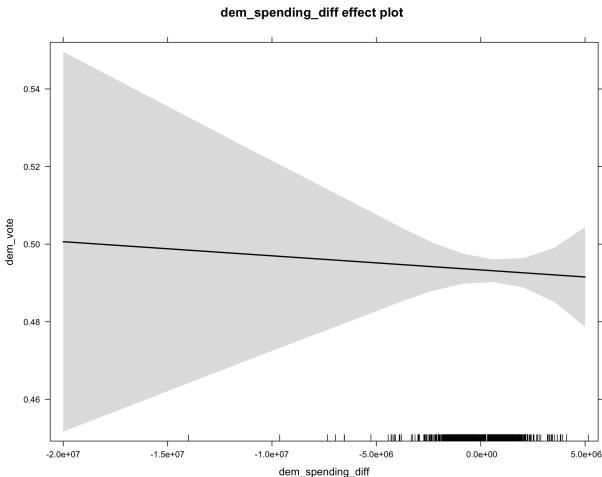
# Distribution of Campaign Spending, U.S. House



# Distribution of Campaign Spending, U.S. Senate



## Independent Effect of Campaign Spending on Elections

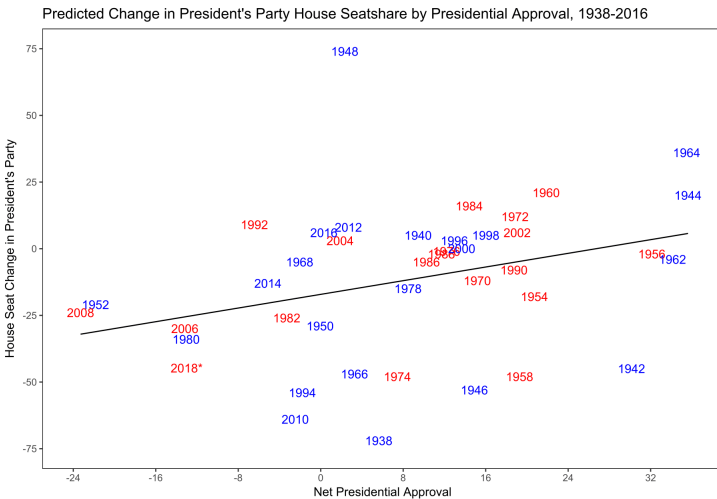




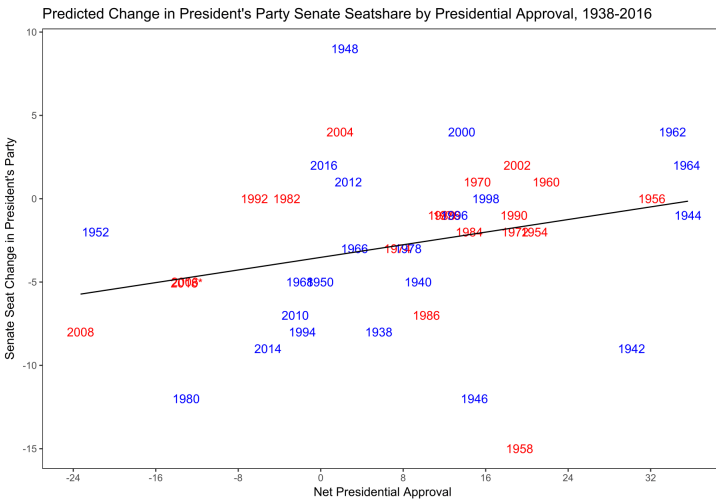
# Increased Nationalization of Congressional Elections

- ▶ What evidence that congressional elections are becoming less *local* and more *nationalized*?
- ▶ Partisanship explaining more & more variation in election outcomes
- ▶ However, midterm *slump* for president's party still a consistent pattern. Why?
- ▶ Out-party partisans more likely to vote & motivated by low presidential approval, thermostatic response to policy change & incumbents forced to take tough votes (ACA)
- ▶ Testing the relationship between presidential approval & president's party (in-party) election performance
- ▶ If correlated, evidence for *collective accountability* & increased 'presidentialization' of congressional elections

# Punishing the President's Party in Congress



# Punishing the President's Party in the Senate



## Key Points:

- ▶ Congressional elections becoming *less* competitive
- ▶ Safe & marginal seats are becoming safer for parties while seats that favor other party are becoming more precarious
- ▶ Incumbents still hold an advantage, but shrinking as elections become more partisan
- ▶ Redistricting plays *very* marginal role in shaping campaign context
- ▶ Partisanship effect on electoral outcomes increasing in congressional elections
- ▶ Campaign spending *dynamic* in nature, thus canceling out as effect on election outcomes
- ▶ President's party generally fares poorly in midterm elections, function of approval.
- ▶ Consider if Madison would have a problem with role of campaign context in vote-choice