

# Congressional Elections, Part 2

Michael Peress

SUNY-Stony Brook

September 11, 2020

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ When Obama won the presidency in 2008, a frequent argument made (by Obama surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was that Obama had to move quickly to get the most important parts of his agenda passed
- ▶ Why move quickly?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ When Obama won the presidency in 2008, a frequent argument made (by Obama surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was that Obama had to move quickly to get the most important parts of his agenda passed
- ▶ Why move quickly?
  - The Honeymoon period

# Congressional Elections

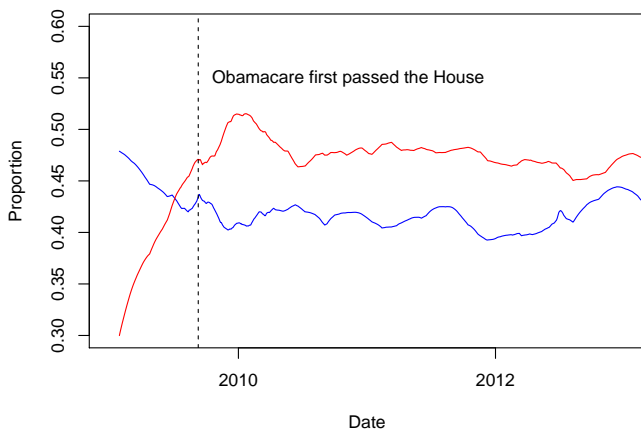
- ▶ When Obama won the presidency in 2008, a frequent argument made (by Obama surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was that Obama had to move quickly to get the most important parts of his agenda passed
- ▶ Why move quickly?
  - The Honeymoon period
  - The Midterm effect

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ When Obama won the presidency in 2008, a frequent argument made (by Obama surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was that Obama had to move quickly to get the most important parts of his agenda passed
- ▶ Why move quickly?
  - The Honeymoon period
  - The Midterm effect
- ▶ ...After the public turned against “Obamacare” and it looked like it might not pass:

# Congressional Elections

Support for Obama Health Care Law:



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ When Obama won the presidency in 2008, a frequent argument made (by Obama surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was that Obama had to move quickly to get the most important parts of his agenda passed
- ▶ Why move quickly?
  - The Honeymoon period
  - The Midterm effect
- ▶ ...After the public turned against “Obamacare” and it looked like it might not pass:
  - ‘If we don’t keep our campaign promise, the voters will punish us’

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ When Obama won the presidency in 2008, a frequent argument made (by Obama surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was that Obama had to move quickly to get the most important parts of his agenda passed
- ▶ Why move quickly?
  - The Honeymoon period
  - The Midterm effect
- ▶ ...After the public turned against “Obamacare” and it looked like it might not pass:
  - ‘If we don’t keep our campaign promise, the voters will punish us’
  - ‘We already started... if we fail, the voters will punish us for failure’

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ When Obama won the presidency in 2008, a frequent argument made (by Obama surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was that Obama had to move quickly to get the most important parts of his agenda passed
- ▶ Why move quickly?
  - The Honeymoon period
  - The Midterm effect
- ▶ ...After the public turned against “Obamacare” and it looked like it might not pass:
  - ‘If we don’t keep our campaign promise, the voters will punish us’
  - ‘We already started... if we fail, the voters will punish us for failure’
  - ‘Everybody hates entitlements that don’t exist and loves them once they are in effect’

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ During the debate over “Trumpcare”, it became clear early on that voters did not support the various GOPs bills

# Congressional Elections

A number of polls collected by *FiveThirtyEight* in March, 2017:

## The Republicans' health care bill isn't popular at all

POLLSTER	SUPPORT/FAVORABLE	OPPOSE/UNFAVORABLE	NET SUPPORT
Fox News	34%	54%	-20
Morning Consult	46	35	+11
Public Policy Polling	24	49	-25
SurveyMonkey	42	55	-13
YouGov/CBS News	12	41	-29
YouGov/Huff. Post	24	45	-21
<b>Average</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>-16</b>

# Congressional Elections

*CBS* polls looking for support for repealing Obamacare:

	<b>The 2010 Affordable Care Act ...</b>			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Dem</b>	<b>Inds</b>
Should be kept in place as is	12%	4%	19%	11%
Needs some changes	61	50	72	59
Needs to be repealed and replaced	24	44	6	26

# Congressional Elections

*CBS* polls looking for support for repealing Obamacare:

## The 2010 Affordable Care Act ...

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Reps</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Inds</u>
Should be kept in place as is	12%	4%	19%	11%
Needs some changes	61	50	72	59
Needs to be repealed and replaced	24	44	6	26

## The 2010 Affordable Care Act Needs to Be Repealed Entirely

<u>Now</u>	<u>3/2017</u>	<u>12/2016</u>	<u>1/2016</u>	<u>2/2015</u>	<u>2/2014</u>	<u>11/2013</u>
24%	23%	25%	35%	32%	42%	43%

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ During the debate over “Trumpcare”, it became clear early on that voters did not support the various GOPs bills
- ▶ A frequent argument made (by Trump surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was:
  - If we don't repeal Obamacare, the voters will punish us for failing to keep our promises

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ During the debate over “Trumpcare”, it became clear early on that voters did not support the various GOPs bills
- ▶ A frequent argument made (by Trump surrogates or friendly opinion writers) was:
  - If we don't repeal Obamacare, the voters will punish us for failing to keep our promises
  - We already started... if we fail, the voters will punish us for failure

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?
- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to keep campaign promises to enact legislation they don't want enacted?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?
- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to keep campaign promises to enact legislation they don't want enacted?
- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?

# Congressional Elections

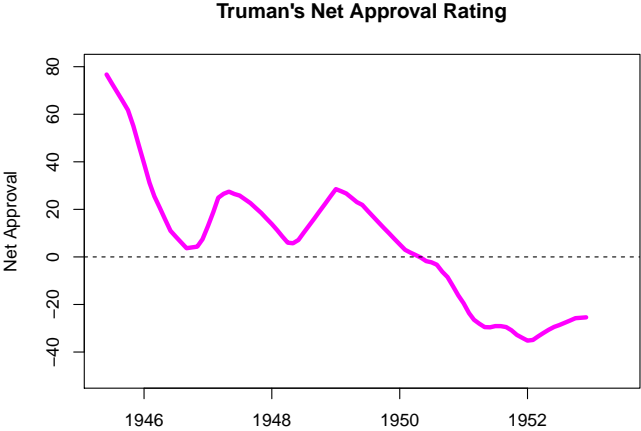
- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?
- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to keep campaign promises to enact legislation they don't want enacted?
- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?
- ▶ Do voters start to like entitlements once they are in effect?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
  - The Honeymoon period: Presidential approval tends to start high and decline over time

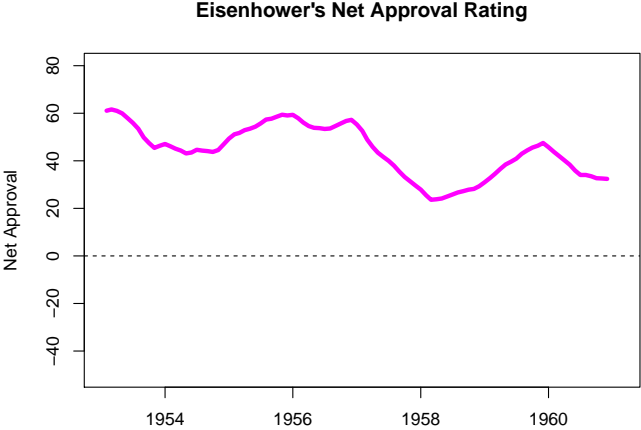
# Congressional Elections

Truman:



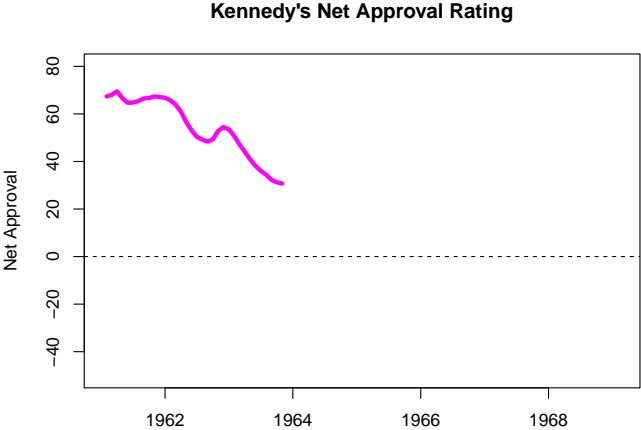
# Congressional Elections

Eisenhower:



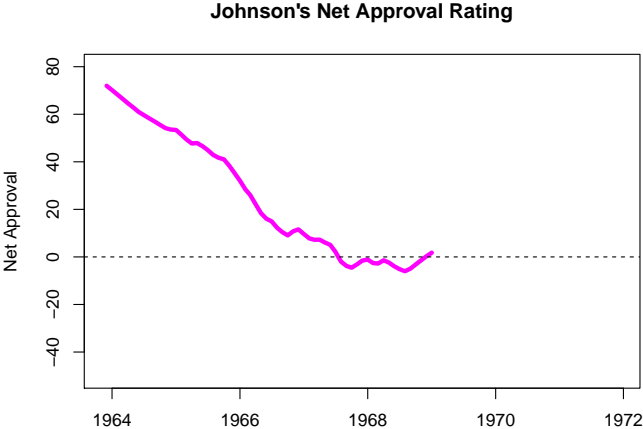
# Congressional Elections

Kennedy:



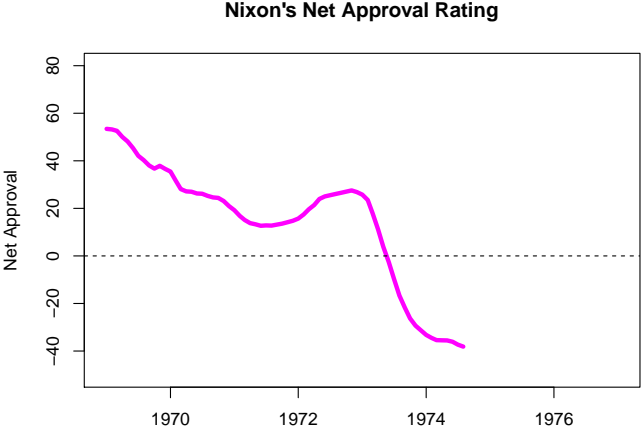
# Congressional Elections

Johnson:



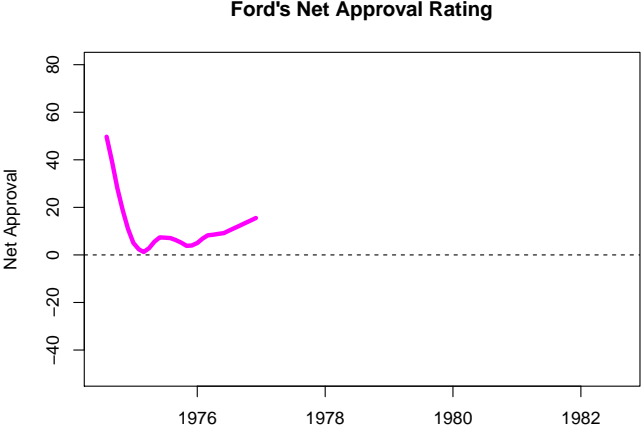
# Congressional Elections

Nixon:



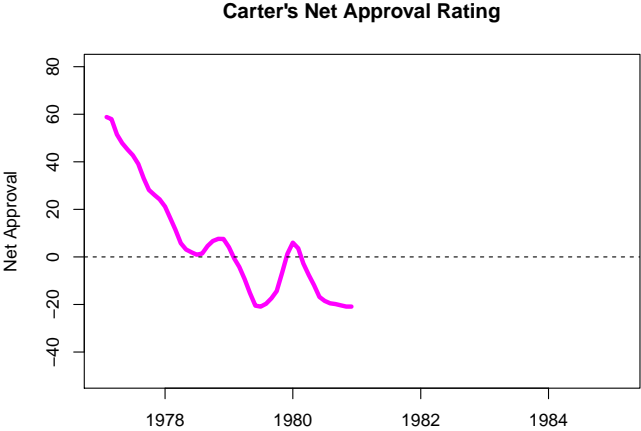
# Congressional Elections

Ford:



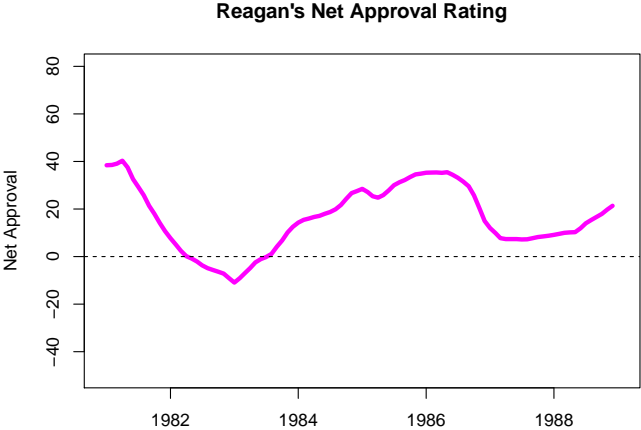
# Congressional Elections

Carter:



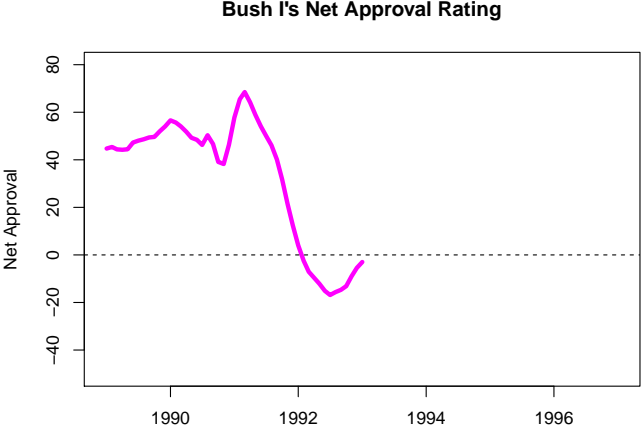
# Congressional Elections

Reagan:



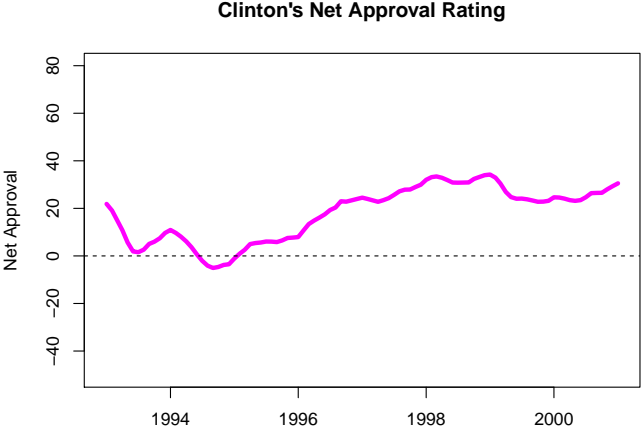
# Congressional Elections

Bush:



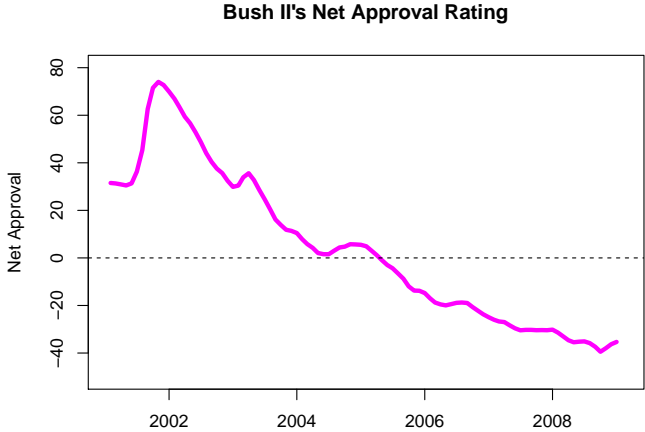
# Congressional Elections

Clinton:



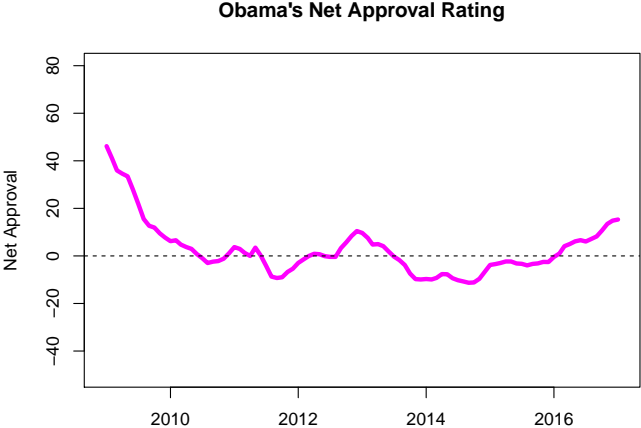
# Congressional Elections

W. Bush:



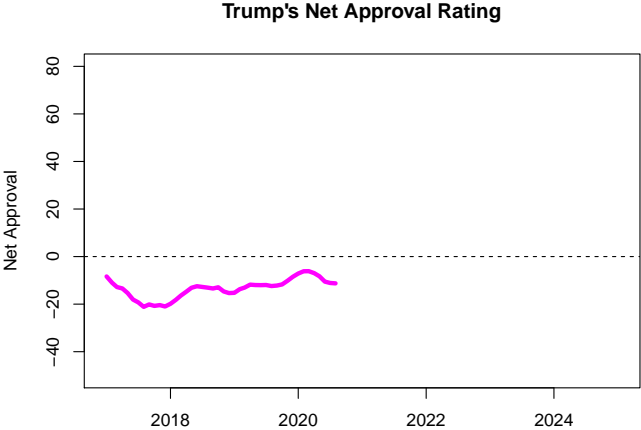
# Congressional Elections

Obama:



# Congressional Elections

Trump:



# Congressional Elections

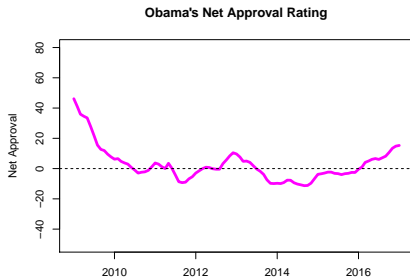
- ▶ Presidential approval tends to start high and decline over time

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Presidential approval tends to start high and decline over time
- ▶ Presidential approval declined for different presidents at different times, suggesting the possibility that the declines are due to actions by the President that the voters view unfavorably

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Presidential approval tends to start high and decline over time
- ▶ Presidential approval declined for different presidents at different times, suggesting the possibility that the declines are due to actions by the President that the voters view unfavorably
- ▶ In Obama's case, it appears that the "Honeymoon" was over before the Obamacare push started



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
  - The Honeymoon period: Presidential approval tends to start high and decline over time
  - Are members of congress are more likely to support the President's agenda when voters approve of the president?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?
  - The Midterm Effect: The President's party tends to lose seats in midterm elections

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Coattails withdrawn
  - Presidential Coattails: Characteristics of the presidential candidates may influence voters in House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The ideological positions of the presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Coattails withdrawn
  - Presidential Coattails: Characteristics of the presidential candidates may influence voters in House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The ideological positions of the presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The attractiveness of presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Coattails withdrawn
  - Presidential Coattails: Characteristics of the presidential candidates may influence voters in House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The ideological positions of the presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The attractiveness of presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The state of the economy (for which the President is most likely to be blamed) may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ etc.

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Coattails withdrawn
  - Presidential Coattails: Characteristics of the presidential candidates may influence voters in House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The ideological positions of the presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The attractiveness of presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The state of the economy (for which the President is most likely to be blamed) may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ etc.
  - In midterm elections, coattails may not be present

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Coattails withdrawn
  - Presidential Coattails: Characteristics of the presidential candidates may influence voters in House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The ideological positions of the presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The attractiveness of presidential candidates may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ The state of the economy (for which the President is most likely to be blamed) may effect House and Senate elections
    - ▶ etc.
  - In midterm elections, coattails may not be present
    - ▶ Example: the Democrats gain seats in the House in 2008 because voters love Obama
    - ▶ Example: in the 2010 midterms, voters aren't thinking about Obama, so the House/Senate vote returns to normal

# Congressional Elections

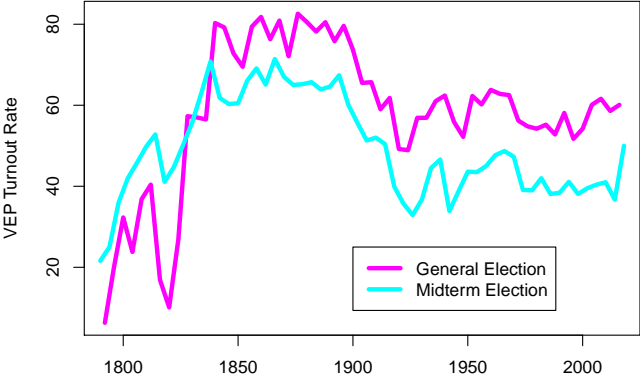
- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Surge and Decline
  - Easily confused with coattails withdrawn...

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Surge and Decline
  - Easily confused with coattails withdrawn...
  - Turnout is higher during Presidential elections

# Congressional Elections

Turnout in Presidential and Midterm Elections:

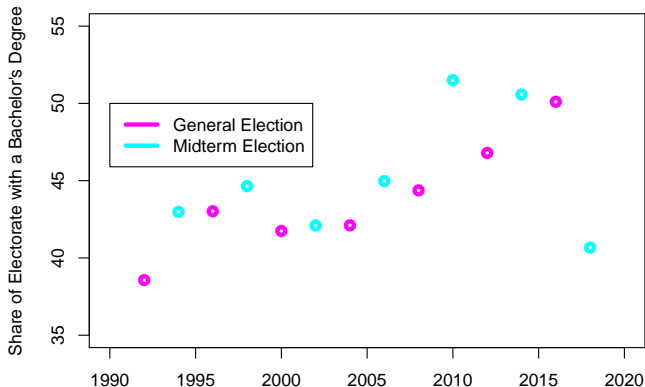


# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Surge and Decline
  - Easily confused with coattails withdrawn...
  - Turnout is higher during Presidential elections
  - The electorate is different in midterm elections

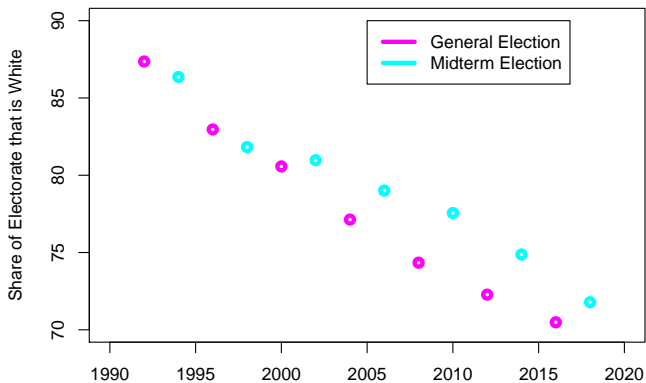
# Congressional Elections

The midterm electorate has tended to be more highly educated (with 2018 a possible exception):



# Congressional Elections

The midterm electorate has tended to be more white:



# Congressional Elections

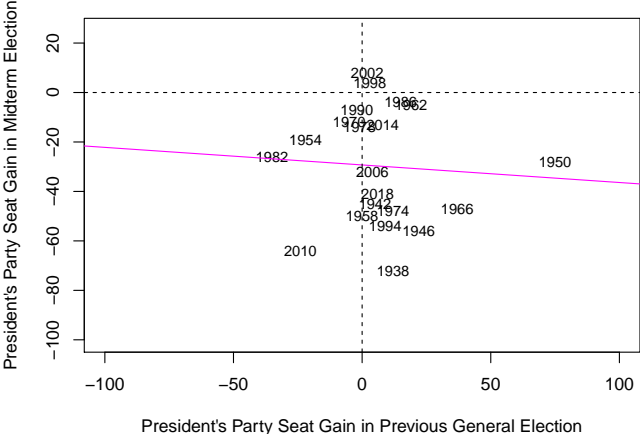
- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Surge and Decline
  - Easily confused with coattails withdrawn...
  - Turnout is higher during Presidential elections
  - The electorate is different in midterm elections
  - Lower turnout means that midterm elections feature more partisan voters
  - Partisan voters less affected by presidential characteristics

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ According to Coattails Withdrawn and Surge and Decline:
  - Things return to normal during midterm elections leading the President's party to loose seats
  - Prediction: the more the President's party gained during the Presidential election, the more they should lose during the Midterm

# Congressional Elections

Midterm Seat Gain vs. Seat Gain in Last Presidential Election:



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Referendum theory
  - Midterm elections are a referendum on the President
  - If the president is doing poorly, his party will lose seats

# Congressional Elections

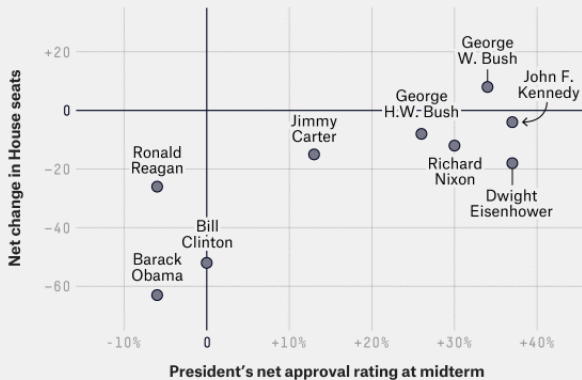
- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Referendum theory
  - Midterm elections are a referendum on the President
  - If the president is doing poorly, his party will lose seats
  - Presidents often do poorly

# Congressional Elections

From *FiveThirtyEight*:

## Unpopular presidents drag their parties down

Net change in U.S. House seats for president's party after his first midterm elections vs. president's net approval rating



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Presidential Penalty (Erikson, 1988):

*Midterm Loss as a Presidential Penalty.* To these three possible explanations of midterm loss we can add a fourth, which was introduced above: the seemingly “punitive” response of an electorate that penalizes the presidential party regardless of the quality of its performance or standing with the electorate. If midterm electorates punish the presidential party for being the party in power, this would handily account for midterm loss. But why would midterm electorates behave in such a manner?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Presidential Penalty (Erikson, 1988):
  - Balancing:

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Presidential Penalty (Erikson, 1988):
  - Balancing:
    - ▶ Voters like divided government
    - ▶ During presidential elections, they don't know who will win the presidency, so the desire to have divided government doesn't guide them in a particular direction

# Congressional Elections

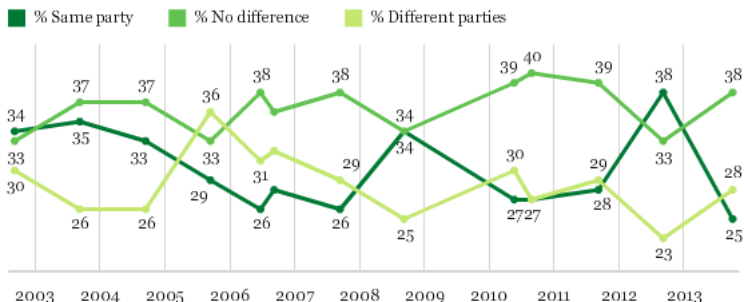
- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Presidential Penalty (Erikson, 1988):
  - Balancing:
    - ▶ Voters like divided government
    - ▶ During presidential elections, they don't know who will win the presidency, so the desire to have divided government doesn't guide them in a particular direction
    - ▶ During midterm elections, they know who will be president, so the best way to ensure divided government is to vote for the other guy (hence the President's party loses seats)

# Congressional Elections

## The preference for divided government (*Gallup*)

### *Preference for Same Party Control vs. Divided Government*

Do you think it is better for the country [ROTATED: to have a president who comes from the same political party that controls Congress -- does it make no difference either way, or do you think it is better -- to have a president from one political party and Congress controlled by another]?



# Congressional Elections

The preference for divided government (Lacy and Paolino):

Table 2: Support for Divided Government by Presidential Vote

Year	Vote	Unified	Divided	Doesn't Matter	N
1992 ANES	Bush	31.9	45.6	22.5	542
	Clinton	38.0	35.5	26.5	773
2000 ANES	Bush	25.0	57.5	17.6	517
	Gore	27.2	54.6	18.1	579
2004 ANES	Bush	31.8	52.0	16.2	402
	Kerry	19.4	65.0	15.6	391
2012 ANES	Romney	23.7	55.3	21.0	1860
	Obama	33.3	44.7	22.0	2161

# Congressional Elections

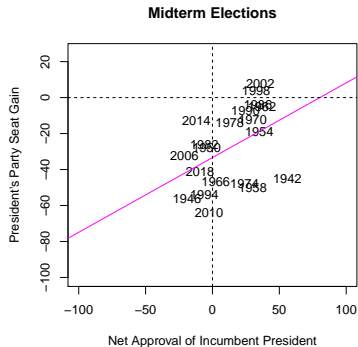
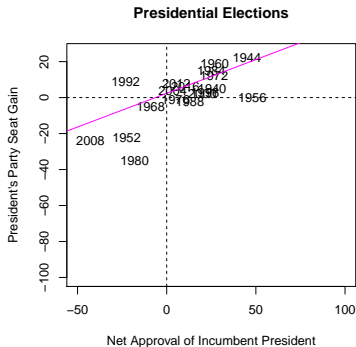
- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Presidential Penalty
  - Balancing:
    - ▶ Voters like divided government
    - ▶ During presidential elections, they don't know who will win the presidency, so the desire to have divided government doesn't guide them in a particular direction
    - ▶ During midterm elections, they know who will be president, so the best way to ensure divided government is to vote for the other guy (hence the President's party loses seats)
  - Negative Voting:
    - ▶ Voters are just excessively negative in midterm elections

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Theories of the Midterm Effect: Presidential Penalty
  - Balancing:
    - ▶ Voters like divided government
    - ▶ During presidential elections, they don't know who will win the presidency, so the desire to have divided government doesn't guide them in a particular direction
    - ▶ During midterm elections, they know who will be president, so the best way to ensure divided government is to vote for the other guy (hence the President's party loses seats)
  - Negative Voting:
    - ▶ Voters are just excessively negative in midterm elections (in their congressional votes, but not their approval)

# Congressional Elections

Presidential vs. Midterm Elections:



# Congressional Elections

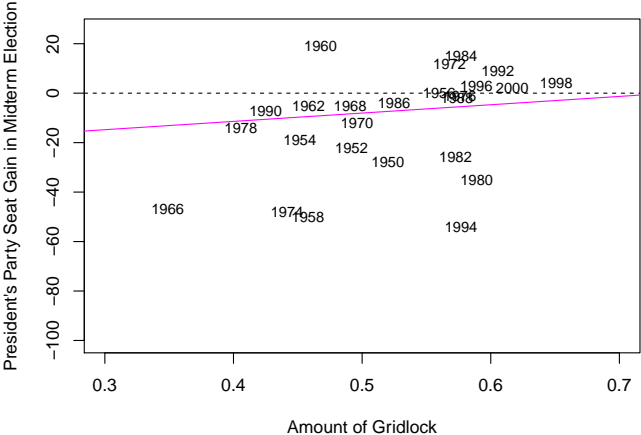
- ▶ The Midterm effect:
  - The President's party is very likely to be punished in the midterm

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The Midterm effect:
  - The President's party is very likely to be punished in the midterm
  - The President's party will be punished more when the President is judged to have performed poorly

# Congressional Elections

Midterm loss vs. level of gridlock:



# Congressional Elections

Did voters eventually start to like Obamacare?



# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
  - Presidential popularity tends to decline over time, but the decline does not always happen at the same time

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
  - Presidential popularity tends to decline over time, but the decline does not always happen at the same time
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
  - Presidential popularity tends to decline over time, but the decline does not always happen at the same time
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?
  - The President's party will tend to lose seats no matter what, but midterm loss will be worse when the president is judged to have performed poorly

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
  - Presidential popularity tends to decline over time, but the decline does not always happen at the same time
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?
  - The President's party will tend to lose seats no matter what, but midterm loss will be worse when the president is judged to have performed poorly
- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to keep campaign promises to enact legislation they don't want enacted?

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Is there a short window of time where members of Congress are more willing to cooperate with the President?
  - Presidential popularity tends to decline over time, but the decline does not always happen at the same time
- ▶ Should a party quickly pass legislation during the beginning of the presidential term in anticipation of losing seats at Midterm?
  - The President's party will tend to lose seats no matter what, but midterm loss will be worse when the president is judged to have performed poorly
- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to keep campaign promises to enact legislation they don't want enacted?
  - No evidence for this—in fact, it seems that midterm effects are smaller when gridlock is high

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?
  - No evidence for this—in fact, it seems that midterm effects are smaller when gridlock is high

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?
  - No evidence for this—in fact, it seems that midterm effects are smaller when gridlock is high
- ▶ Do voters start to like entitlements once they are in effect?

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?
  - No evidence for this—in fact, it seems that midterm effects are smaller when gridlock is high
- ▶ Do voters start to like entitlements once they are in effect?
  - Very hard to say in general, but voters increasingly support Obamacare

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?
  - No evidence for this—in fact, it seems that midterm effects are smaller when gridlock is high
- ▶ Do voters start to like entitlements once they are in effect?
  - Very hard to say in general, but voters increasingly support Obamacare
- ▶ Why do Democrats and Republicans believe these things? (or at least, say they believe them?)

# Congressional Elections

Returning to the five questions:

- ▶ Do voters punish politicians for failing to pass legislation they don't want enacted?
  - No evidence for this—in fact, it seems that midterm effects are smaller when gridlock is high
- ▶ Do voters start to like entitlements once they are in effect?
  - Very hard to say in general, but voters increasingly support Obamacare
- ▶ Why do Democrats and Republicans believe these things? (or at least, say they believe them?)
  - Because they want to believe them

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Were the Democrats smart to push through Obamacare in 2010?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Were the Democrats smart to push through Obamacare in 2010?
  - Obamacare may stay in effect, but there were severe electoral consequences for passing Obamacare

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Were the Democrats smart to push through Obamacare in 2010?
  - Obamacare may stay in effect, but there were severe electoral consequences for passing Obamacare
- ▶ Should the Republicans have tried to pass “Trumpcare”?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Were the Democrats smart to push through Obamacare in 2010?
  - Obamacare may stay in effect, but there were severe electoral consequences for passing Obamacare
- ▶ Should the Republicans have tried to pass “Trumpcare”?
  - The midterm effect means that Republicans were likely to lose seats in the House regardless, but passing or trying to pass Trumpcare likely led to more severe losses

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The incumbency advantage: the tendency of incumbent candidates to perform better than challengers

# Congressional Elections

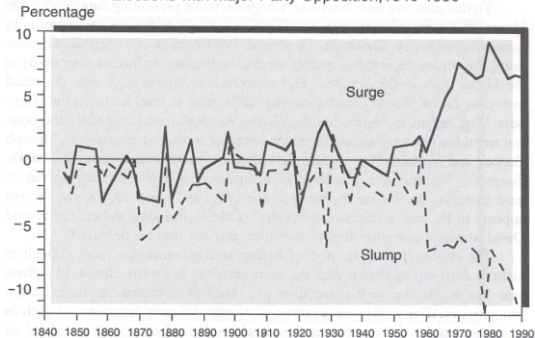
- ▶ The incumbency advantage: the tendency of incumbent candidates to perform better than challengers
  - Sophomore surge: the average increase in vote share between when a candidate was first elected to office and the candidates second election

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The incumbency advantage: the tendency of incumbent candidates to perform better than challengers
  - Sophomore surge: the average increase in vote share between when a candidate was first elected to office and the candidate's second election
  - Retirement slump: the average decrease in a party's vote share between having an incumbent running and not having an incumbent running

# Congressional Elections

**Figure 6-3** Sophomore Surge and Retirement Slump, All House Elections with Major-Party Opposition, 1846-1990



Source: Computed by the authors from *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), and *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, various issues.

Note: No data are shown for election years ending in 2 or 4.

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Sources of the incumbency advantage:

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Sources of the incumbency advantage:
  - The advantages of holding office:
    - ▶ Paid travel
    - ▶ Paid staff
    - ▶ Franking privileges
    - ▶ Claiming credit for spending
  - The media
    - ▶ Name recognition
  - Financial advantages (donors give more money to incumbents)
  - Selection effects
    - ▶ The tendency of weak candidates to never win elections in the first place
    - ▶ Incumbents attract weak challengers

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:

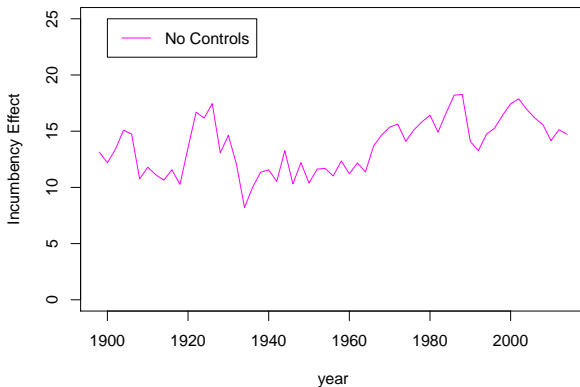
<hr/> <hr/>	
	Incumbency Advantage
Basic	13.6%

---

---

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:

---

---

	Incumbency Advantage
Basic	13.6%
Controlling for District Ideology	11.4%

---

---

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:

---

---

	Incumbency Advantage
Basic	13.6%
Controlling for District Ideology	11.4%
Controlling for Positions	8.3%

---

---

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:

---

---

	Incumbency Advantage
Basic	13.6%
Controlling for District Ideology	11.4%
Controlling for Positions	8.3%
Controlling for Expenditures	6.3%

---

---

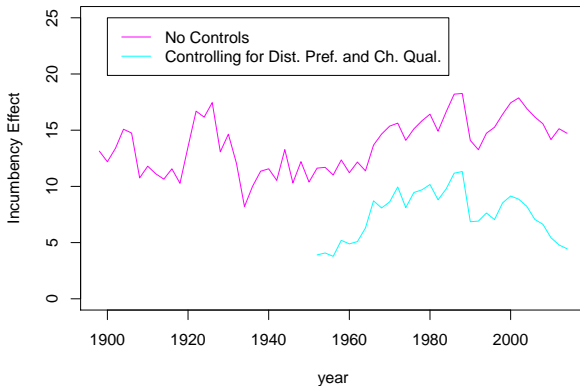
# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:

	Incumbency Advantage
Basic	13.6%
Controlling for District Ideology	11.4%
Controlling for Positions	8.3%
Controlling for Expenditures	6.3%
Controlling for Challenger Quality	4.9%

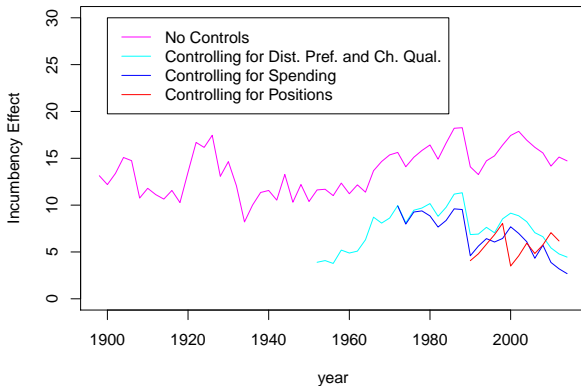
# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Linear regression approach to measuring the incumbency advantage:



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Attracting weak challengers:

	Against Incumbent	Open Seats
Democratic Quality Challenger	23%	47%
Republican Quality Challenger	17%	43%

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ A large part of the incumbency advantage is due to...
  - the incumbent being well suited to the district
  - the incumbent being able to raise more money
  - incumbents attracting weak challengers

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ A large part of the incumbency advantage is due to...
  - the incumbent being well suited to the district
  - the incumbent being able to raise more money
  - incumbents attracting weak challengers
- ▶ The raw incumbency advantage may have increased over time, but a good part of this increase is due to increasingly strategic behavior by the parties

# Congressional Elections

## ► Scandals:

- Peters and Welch (1980)—Between 1968 and 1978, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 11 points due to scandals
- Welch and Hibbing (1997)—Between 1982 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 13 points
- Levitt (1994)—Between 1972 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 5 points
- Long (2012)—Between 1992 and 2000, House candidates lost an average of 3 points
- Abramowitz (1988)—Between 1974 and 1986, Senate candidates lost an average of 7 points

# Congressional Elections

## ► Scandals:

- Peters and Welch (1980)—Between 1968 and 1978, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 11 points due to scandals
- Welch and Hibbing (1997)—Between 1982 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 13 points
- Levitt (1994)—Between 1972 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 5 points
- Long (2012)—Between 1992 and 2000, House candidates lost an average of 3 points
- Abramowitz (1988)—Between 1974 and 1986, Senate candidates lost an average of 7 points

## ► Scandals lead to substantial vote loss

# Congressional Elections

## ▶ Scandals:

- Peters and Welch (1980)—Between 1968 and 1978, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 11 points due to scandals
  - Welch and Hibbing (1997)—Between 1982 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 13 points
  - Levitt (1994)—Between 1972 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 5 points
  - Long (2012)—Between 1992 and 2000, House candidates lost an average of 3 points
  - Abramowitz (1988)—Between 1974 and 1986, Senate candidates lost an average of 7 points
- ▶ Scandals lead to substantial vote loss
- ▶ Scandal effects likely underestimated because many candidates embroiled in scandals retired or lost the primary election

# Congressional Elections

## ▶ Scandals:

- Peters and Welch (1980)—Between 1968 and 1978, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 11 points due to scandals
  - Welch and Hibbing (1997)—Between 1982 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 6 to 13 points
  - Levitt (1994)—Between 1972 and 1990, House candidates lost an average of 5 points
  - Long (2012)—Between 1992 and 2000, House candidates lost an average of 3 points
  - Abramowitz (1988)—Between 1974 and 1986, Senate candidates lost an average of 7 points
- 
- ▶ Scandals lead to substantial vote loss
  - ▶ Scandal effects likely underestimated because many candidates embroiled in scandals retired or lost the primary election
  - ▶ Some evidence effect of scandals have been diminishing over time

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Race and Gender:
  - There is a widespread belief among minority and female candidates that they will have to overcome prejudice by voters

# Congressional Elections

► Race and Gender:

- There is a widespread belief among minority and female candidates that they will have to overcome prejudice by voters

---

---

Dependent variable: vote share of Democratic House candidate	
Controls:	No
Intercept	50.5 (0.5)***
Democratic candidate is female	3.2 (1.0)***
Republican candidate is female	2.5 (1.2)*

---

---

# Congressional Elections

► Race and Gender:

Dependent variable: vote share of Democratic House candidate		
Controls:	No	Yes
Intercept	50.5 (0.5)***	-
Democratic candidate is female	3.2 (1.0)***	0.1 (0.3)
Republican candidate is female	2.5 (1.2)*	-0.1 (0.5)

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Race and Gender:
  - Most recent work suggest that female candidates do no worse than male candidates

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Race and Gender:
  - Most recent work suggest that female candidates do no worse than male candidates
  - There is some evidence that this is a recent phenomenon

# Congressional Elections

## ► Race and Gender:

- Most recent work suggest that female candidates do no worse than male candidates
- There is some evidence that this is a recent phenomenon
- This may reflect not the fact that voters are unbiased, but that bad female candidates are deterred from entering politics

# Congressional Elections

## ► Race and Gender:

- Most recent work suggest that female candidates do no worse than male candidates
- There is some evidence that this is a recent phenomenon
- This may reflect not the fact that voters are unbiased, but that bad female candidates are deterred from entering politics
- Are voters biased against minority candidates?

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Race and Gender:
  - Highton (2004) analyzes the willingness of white voters to vote for black candidates in the 1996 and 1998 House elections

# Congressional Elections

► Race and Gender:

- Highton (2004) analyzes the willingness of white voters to vote for black candidates in the 1996 and 1998 House elections

---

---

DV:	(1) Vote D
Race of Candidate:	
Black Democrat	.58** (.10)
Black Republican	.49** (.12)
Control for incumbency, candidate quality, and spending	
Control for voter characteristics	

---

---

# Congressional Elections

► Race and Gender:

- Highton (2004) analyzes the willingness of white voters to vote for black candidates in the 1996 and 1998 House elections

---

---

DV:	(1) Vote D	(2) Vote D
Race of Candidate:		
Black Democrat	.58** (.10)	.13 (.10)
Black Republican	.49** (.12)	.15 (.13)
Control for incumbency, candidate quality, and spending		Yes
Control for voter characteristics		

---

---

# Congressional Elections

► Race and Gender:

- Highton (2004) analyzes the willingness of white voters to vote for black candidates in the 1996 and 1998 House elections

---

---

DV:	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Vote D	Vote D	Vote D
Race of Candidate:			
Black Democrat	.58**	.13	-.04
	(.10)	(.10)	(.12)
Black Republican	.49**	.15	-.18
	(.12)	(.13)	(.17)
Control for incumbency, candidate quality, and spending		Yes	Yes
Control for voter characteristics			Yes

---

---

# Congressional Elections

## ► Race and Gender:

- Most recent work suggest that female candidates do no worse than male candidates
- There is some evidence that this is a recent phenomenon
- This may reflect not the fact that voters are unbiased, but that bad female candidates are deterred from entering politics
- Black candidates do not seem to perform worse in House elections than white candidates

# Congressional Elections

## ► Race and Gender:

- Most recent work suggest that female candidates do no worse than male candidates
- There is some evidence that this is a recent phenomenon
- This may reflect not the fact that voters are unbiased, but that bad female candidates are deterred from entering politics
- Black candidates do not seem to perform worse in House elections than white candidates
- This may reflect not the fact that voters are unbiased, but that black Democratic candidates tend to run in heavily Democratic districts

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The President and national factors
  - Being of the same party as the president (different effects in presidential vs. midterm elections)
  - Presidential approval
  - The economy

# Congressional Elections

**TABLE 2. House Incumbents' Legislative Voting and Electoral Vote Share: Pooled Analysis, 1956–1996**

	1980–1996	1956–1996
Roll-Call Ideological Extremity	-0.085*** (0.007)	-0.070*** (0.005)
Presidential Vote	0.466*** (0.015)	0.454*** (0.011)
Challenger Quality	-0.025*** (0.003)	-0.053*** (0.002)
In (Challenger Spending)	-0.030*** (0.001)	—
– In(Incumbent Spending)		
Freshman	-0.008** (0.003)	-0.020*** (0.003)
ΔPersonal Income (coded by In Party)	0.013** (0.004)	0.042*** (0.003)
Presidential Popularity (coded by In Party)	-0.089*** (0.019)	-0.044*** (0.010)
Midterm Loss (coded by In Party)	-0.033*** (0.004)	-0.015*** (0.003)
In Party	0.045** (0.017)	-0.040*** (0.011)
Constant	0.656*** (0.010)	0.739*** (0.007)
Number of observations	2950	6521
$R^2$	0.594	0.365
Root MSE	0.063	0.079

Note: Robust standard errors given in parentheses below OLS coefficients. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The President and national factors:
  - In recent years, the President's party is rewarded in House elections
  - In the past, the President's party was punished in House elections

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The President and national factors:
  - In recent years, the President's party is rewarded in House elections
  - In the past, the President's party was punished in House elections
  - The president's party does worse in midterm elections

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The President and national factors:
  - In recent years, the President's party is rewarded in House elections
  - In the past, the President's party was punished in House elections
  - The president's party does worse in midterm elections
  - The president's party does better when the president is up-popular (according to Canes-Wrone et al's study)

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ The President and national factors:
  - In recent years, the President's party is rewarded in House elections
  - In the past, the President's party was punished in House elections
  - The president's party does worse in midterm elections
  - The president's party does better when the president is up-popular (according to Canes-Wrone et al's study)
  - The president's party does better when the economy is good

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ How important are these factors in Congressional elections?  
(big, moderate, small or none)
  - Candidate positions
  - Spending
  - Incumbency
  - The type of election (presidential vs. midterm)
  - Incumbency
  - Challenger quality
  - Scandals
  - Race and gender
  - The president
  - The economy

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Back to polarization in Congress
  - We found evidence against directional voting, primary-driven polarization, donor-driven polarization, and party-pressure driven polarization

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Back to polarization in Congress
  - We found evidence against directional voting, primary-driven polarization, donor-driven polarization, and party-pressure driven polarization
  - We did not find evidence against elite driven polarization

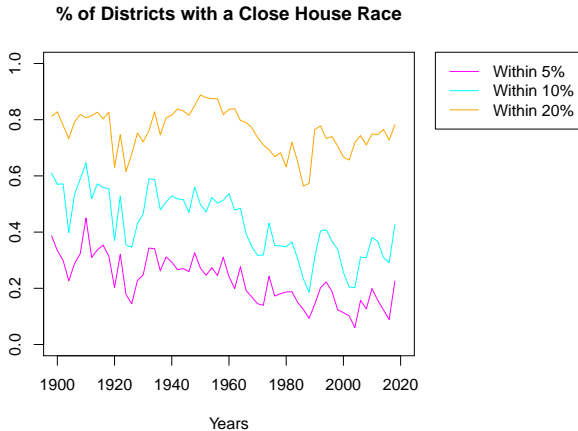
# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Back to polarization in Congress
  - We found evidence against directional voting, primary-driven polarization, donor-driven polarization, and party-pressure driven polarization
  - We did not find evidence against elite driven polarization (though no direct evidence for)

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Back to polarization in Congress
  - We found evidence against directional voting, primary-driven polarization, donor-driven polarization, and party-pressure driven polarization
  - We did not find evidence against elite driven polarization (though no direct evidence for)
  - Most of the literature estimates the vote loss due to being an extremist as small or moderate

# Congressional Elections



# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Back to polarization in Congress
  - We found evidence against directional voting, primary-driven polarization, donor-driven polarization, and party-pressure driven polarization
  - We did not find evidence against elite driven polarization (though no direct evidence for)
  - Most of the literature estimates the vote loss due to being an extremist as small or moderate
  - Given that most congressional races are won by more than 20 points and the vast majority are won by more than 10 points, most incumbents can get away with begin more extreme than their districts

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Back to polarization in Congress
  - We found evidence against directional voting, primary-driven polarization, donor-driven polarization, and party-pressure driven polarization
  - We did not find evidence against elite driven polarization (though no direct evidence for)
  - Most of the literature estimates the vote loss due to being an extremist as small or moderate
  - Given that most congressional races are won by more than 20 points and the vast majority are won by more than 10 points, most incumbents can get away with begin more extreme than their districts
  - Later in the semester: to what degree is the lack of competitiveness due to redistricting

# Congressional Elections

## ► Back to polarization in Congress

- We found evidence against directional voting, primary-driven polarization, donor-driven polarization, and party-pressure driven polarization
- We did not find evidence against elite driven polarization (though no direct evidence for)
- Most of the literature estimates the vote loss due to being an extremist as small or moderate
- Given that most congressional races are won by more than 20 points and the vast majority are won by more than 10 points, most incumbents can get away with begin more extreme than their districts
- Later in the semester: to what degree is the lack of competitiveness due to redistricting
- Later in the semester: the conflict many members of Congress have between their personal extremity and the relative moderation of their voters is a key factor in understanding legislative behavior and organization

# Congressional Elections

- ▶ Next lecture: We will discuss redistricting

## References

- Abramowitz, Alan I. 1988. "Explaining Senate Election Outcomes." *American Political Science Review* 82:385–403.
- Highton, Benjamin. 2004. "White Voters and African American Candidates for Congress." *Political Behavior* 26:1–25.
- Levitt, Steven D. 1994. "Using Repeat Challengers to Estimate the Effect of Campaign Spending on Election Outcomes in the U.S. House." *Journal of Political Economy* 102:777–798.
- Long, Nicholas C. 2012. "The Impact of Incumbent Scandals on House Elections, 1992-2000." Working Paper.
- Peters, John G and Susan Welch. 1980. "The effects of charges of corruption on voting behavior in congressional elections." *American Political Science Review* 74:697–708.
- Welch, Susan and John R. Hibbing. 1997. "The Effects of Charges of Corruption on Voting Behavior in Congressional Elections, 1982-1990." *The Journal of Politics* 59:226–239.