Government 317: Campaigns and Elections

Fall 2006

Tuesday and Thursday 2:55–4:10 (GS KAU)

Professor: Walter R. Mebane, Jr.

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**Office hours: T 4:30–5:30, W 2–4 or other times by appointment.**

Course web page:

`http://macht.arts.cornell.edu/wrm1/gov317.html`

- **congressional elections**

- **House and Senate**
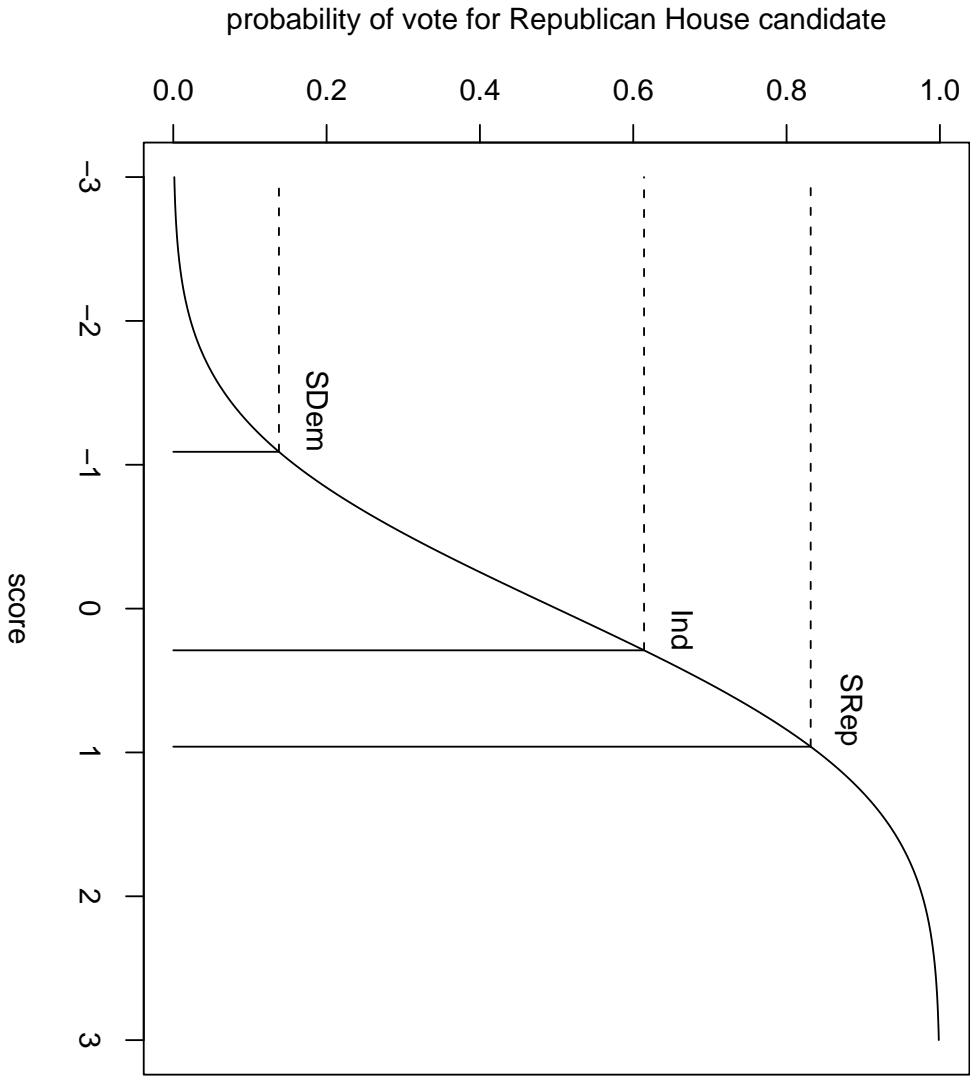 - **biggest difference from presidential races...**

- **congressional elections**

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  - **biggest difference from presidential races...**

  - **incumbent advantage**

- **congressional elections**

- **House and Senate**

  - **biggest difference from presidential races...**

  - **incumbent advantage**

  - **noncompetitive races**

  - **98 percent reelection rate in the House**

  - **90 percent reelection rate in the Senate in recent years (since the mid 1980s)**
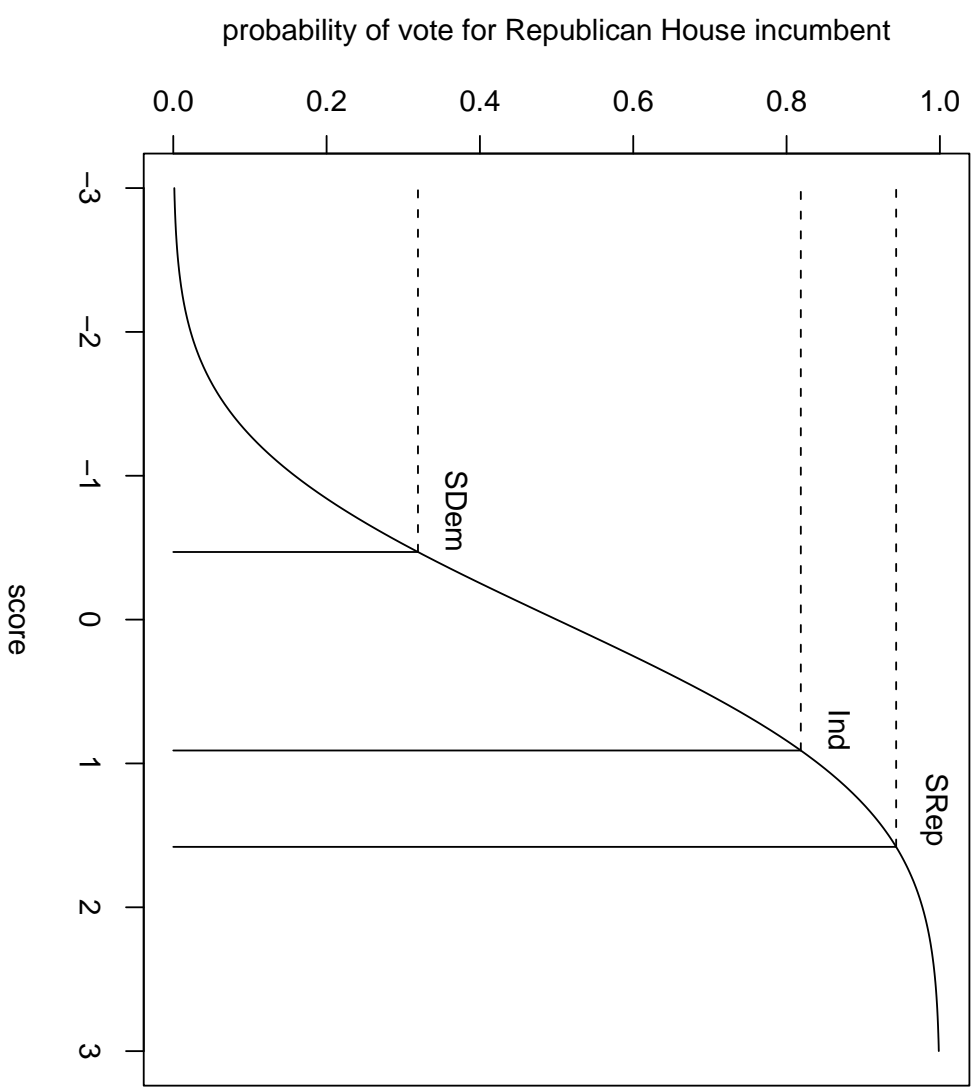
  - **unopposed races**

Probit Regression Probabilities, 2004 Presidential Votes

probability of vote for Republican presidential candidate

score

SDem

Ind
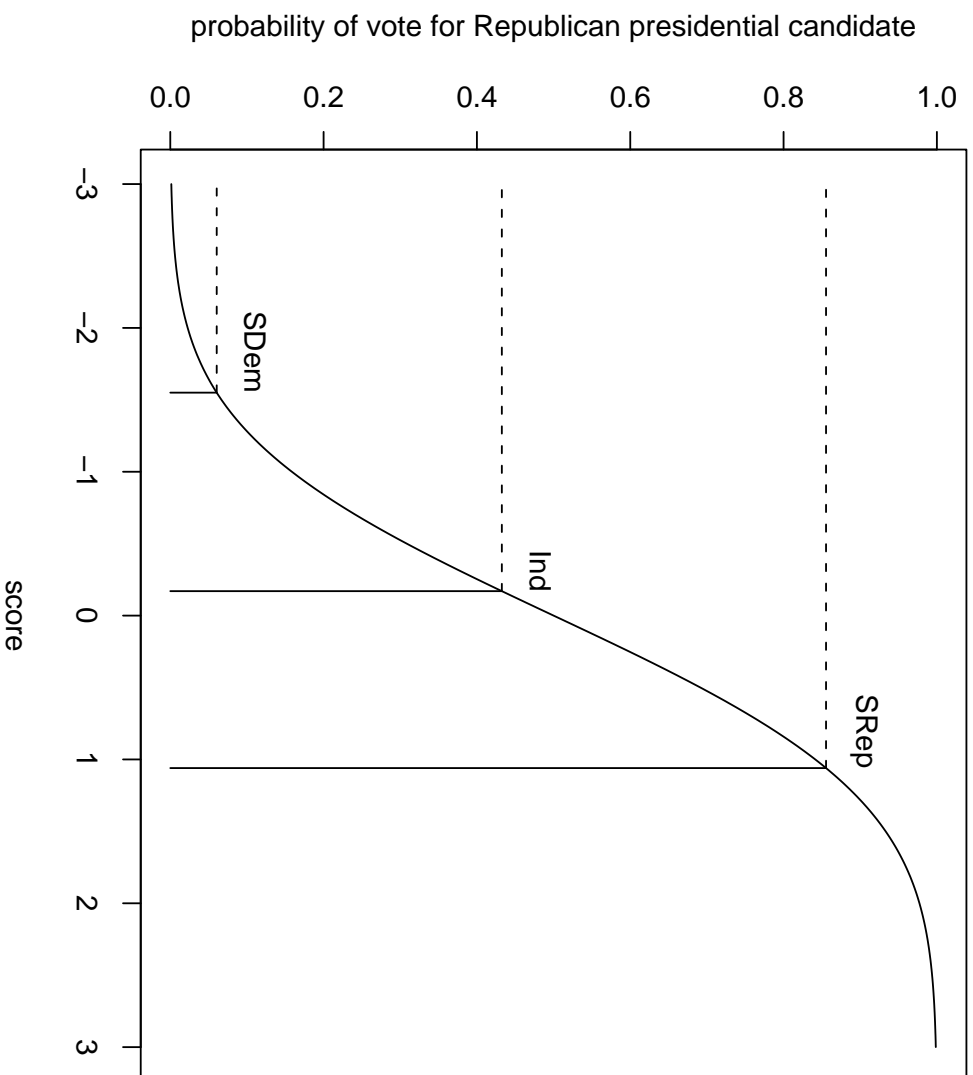
SRep

Probit Regression Probabilities, 2004 House Votes, Open Seat

probability of vote for Republican House candidate

score

SDem

Ind

SRep

Probit Regression, 2004 House Votes, Republican Incumbent

probability of vote for Republican House incumbent

score

SDem

Ind

SRep

Probit Regression, 2004 House Votes, Democratic Incumbent
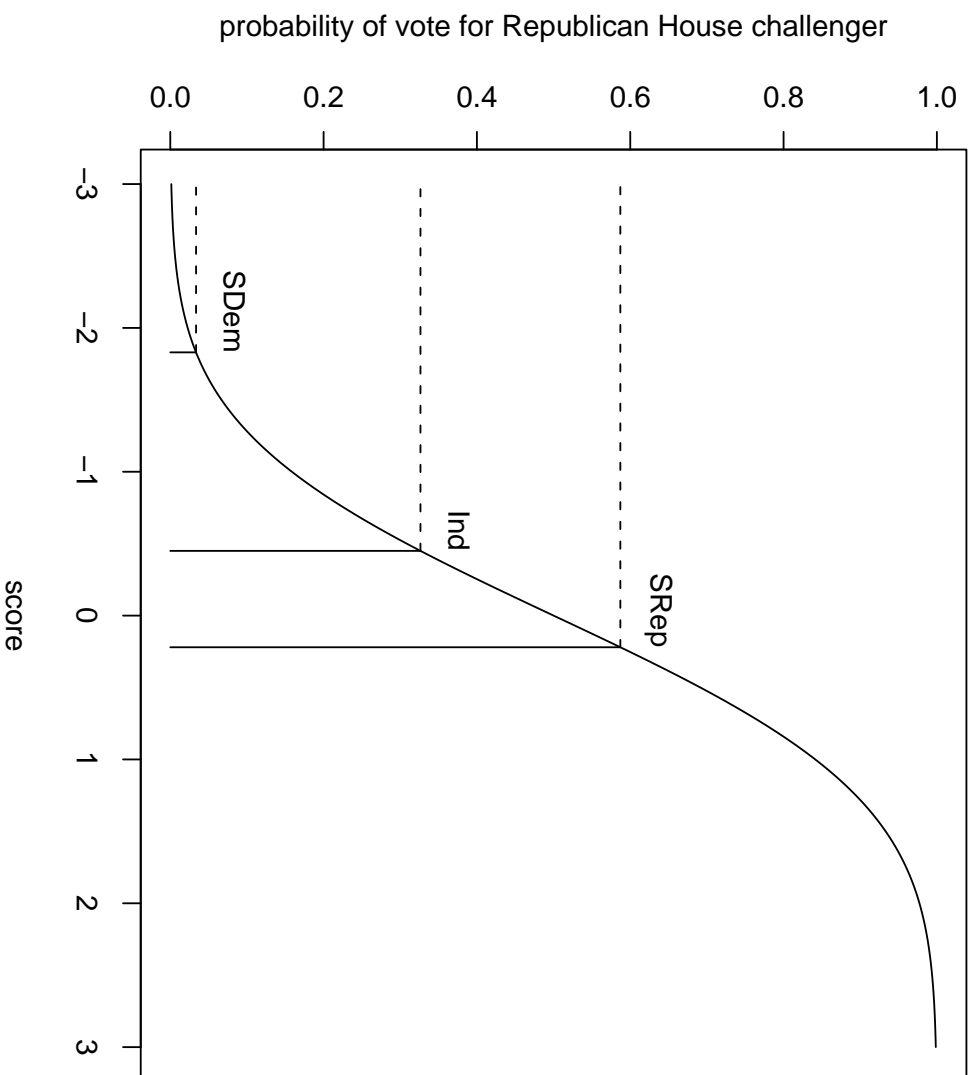
- **House and Senate elections**

  - **importance of constituency service: complicated**
    * **many know about service (nearly 70 percent of constituents in some cases)**
    * **but efforts to find strong connections to votes have not borne out**

- **House and Senate elections**
  - **relationship between pork and votes is complicated: more pork does not mean more votes**

- **House and Senate elections**

  - **relationship between pork and votes is complicated: more pork does not mean more votes**

  - **reasons**
    * **general: only discretionary pork that can be attributed to the representative should be considered by voters**
    * **but a lot of pork is directed at local elites and not at voters**
    * **besides, not all voters like pork**

- **House and Senate elections**

  - **relationship between pork and votes is complicated: more pork does not mean more votes**

  - **four kinds of House campaigns (Mebane 2000):**
    * **good service, unopposed incumbent, high contributions (.08)**
    * **good service, incumbent drops out (.07)**
    * **bad service, unopposed incumbent, high contributions (.38)**
    * **bad service, competitve race but incumbent advantage (.47)**

- **districting in House elections**
  - **incumbent advantage and gerrymandering**
    - ∗ **incumbent protection**
    - ∗ **partisan districts**

- **districting in House elections**
  - **Voting Rights Act**
    - ∗ **majority minority districts: changes over time**
    - ∗ **contiguity and other aesthetics**
    - ∗ **substantive representation and symbolic representation**
    - ∗ **"bleaching" districts**

- **midterm elections and midterm loss**
  - **midterm loss: president's party loses vote share at midterm**
  - **midterm loss was a reliable pattern through most of the 20th century, except for 1998 and 2002**
  - **it's back in 2006**
  - **why did it happen, why did it go away, why is it back?**

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- **alternative possible theories**

  - **surge and decline (false)**

  - **economic performance voting (mostly false)**

  - **"presidential penalty" (Erikson's term: mostly true)**

- **midterm loss: two reliable mechanisms seem to exist, one always, the other mostly**

  - **institutional balancing (based on institutional awareness and strategic voting)**

  - **ideological shifting**

- **models of institutional balancing**

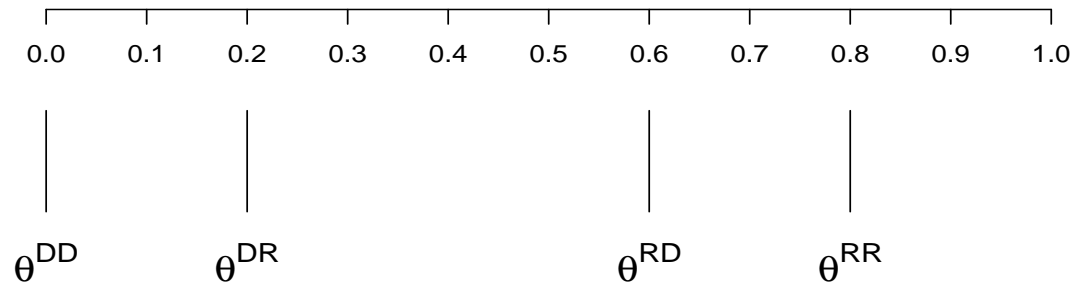- **a president and a legislature (treated as unicameral)**

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  - **four possible policies:** θ_{DD}, θ_{DR}, θ_{RD}, θ_{RR}
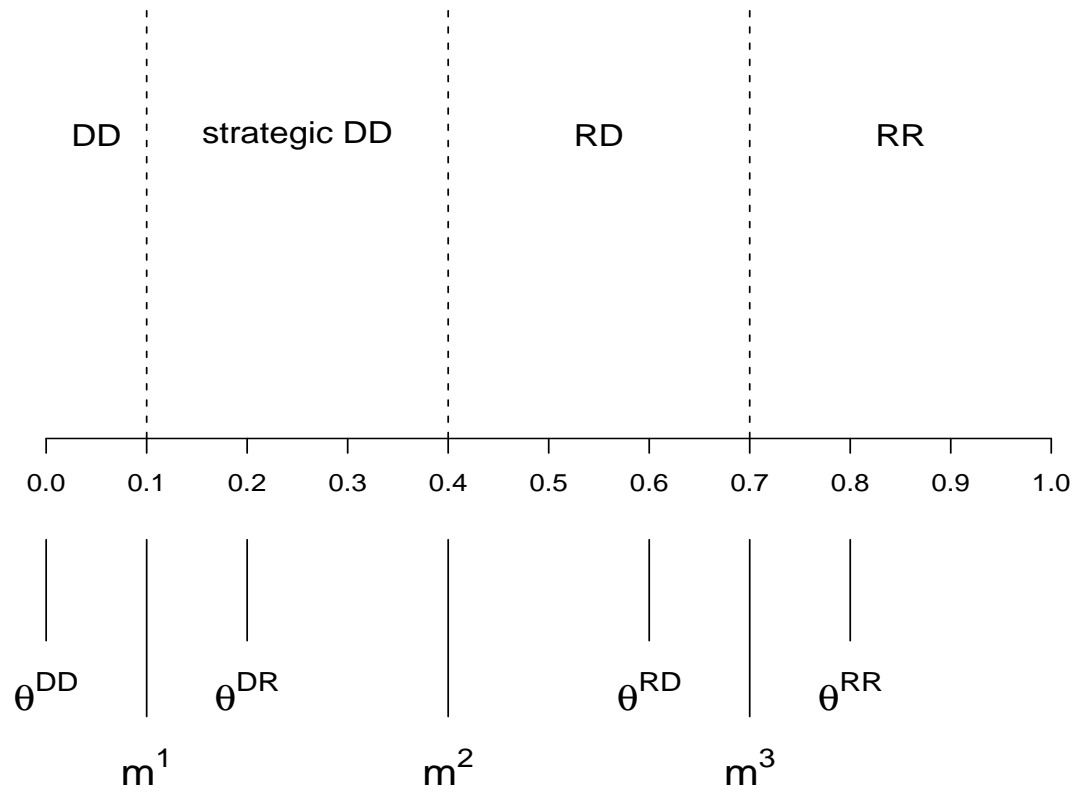
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  - **Fiorina's model: voters choose the closest policy (sincere voting)**

voting model example

0.0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4   0.5   0.6   0.7   0.8   0.9   1.0
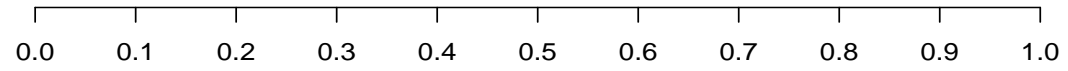
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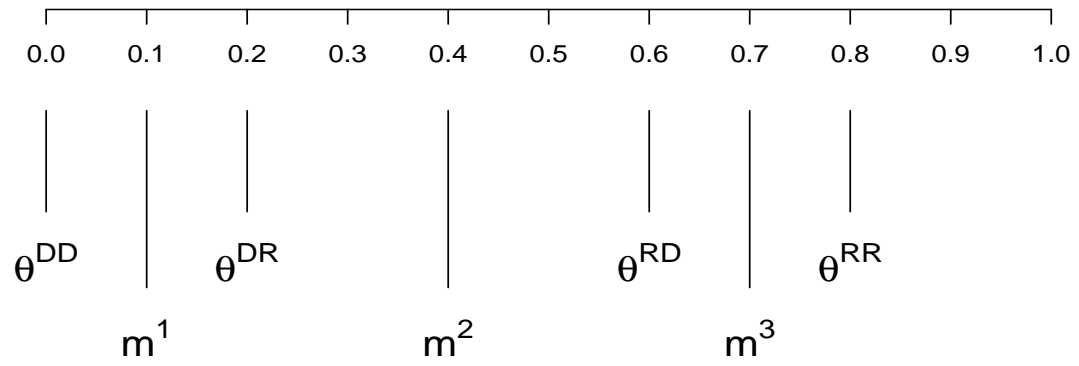
Fiorina model example (sincere voting)
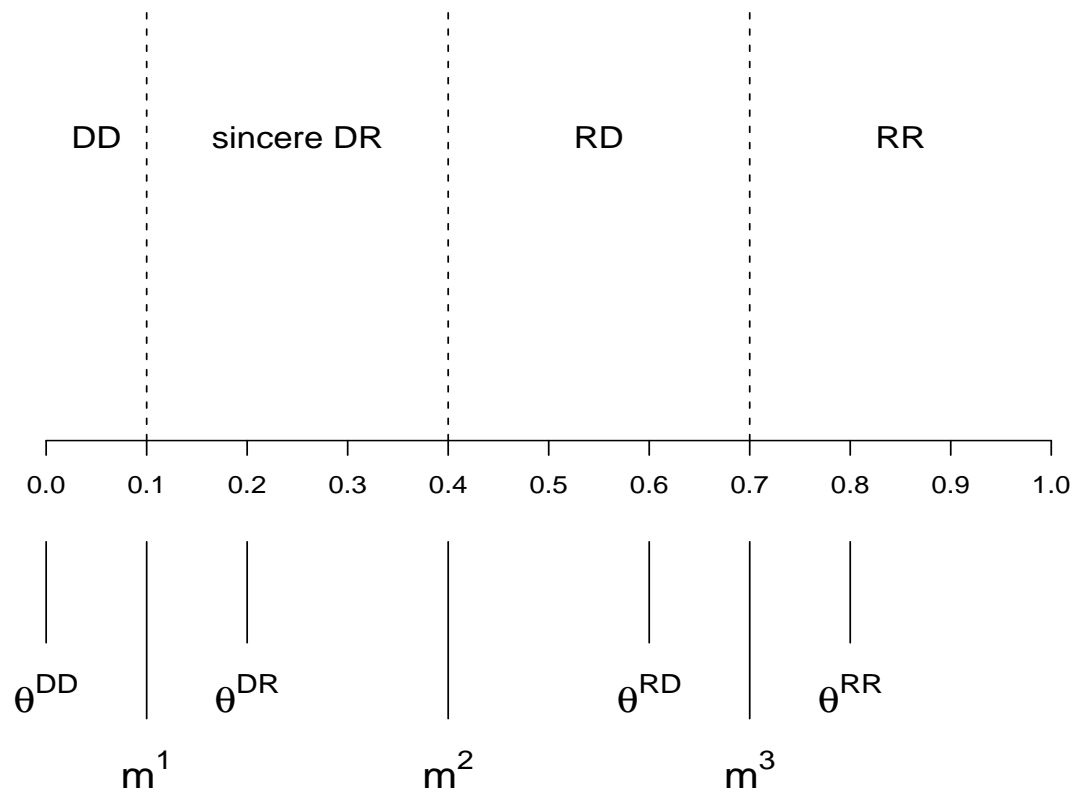
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strategic voting model example

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  - **four possible policies:** θ_{DD}, θ_{DR}, θ_{RD}, θ_{RR}
  - **Fiorina's model with strategic voting: voters choose the closest policy, taking into account how others will vote**
  - **in (coalition-proof Nash) equilibrium, only one group of voters split their tickets**
  - **hence the observed split tickets all go only one way: they are either all DR or all RD, not some of each**

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$$\tilde{\theta}_R^i = \alpha_R \theta_R^i + (1 - \alpha_R)[\bar{H}\theta_R^i + (1 - \bar{H})\theta_D^i] \,, \qquad 0 \le \alpha_R \le 1$$

$$\textbf{expected policy} = \bar{P}\tilde{\theta}_R^i + (1 - \bar{P})\tilde{\theta}_D^i$$

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- **with cutpoint equilibria, ticket splits go only one way**

Alesina-Rosenthal model: presidential year, uncertain

DD   RD   RR

0.0   0.5   1.0

θ^D θ^P θ^L θ^R
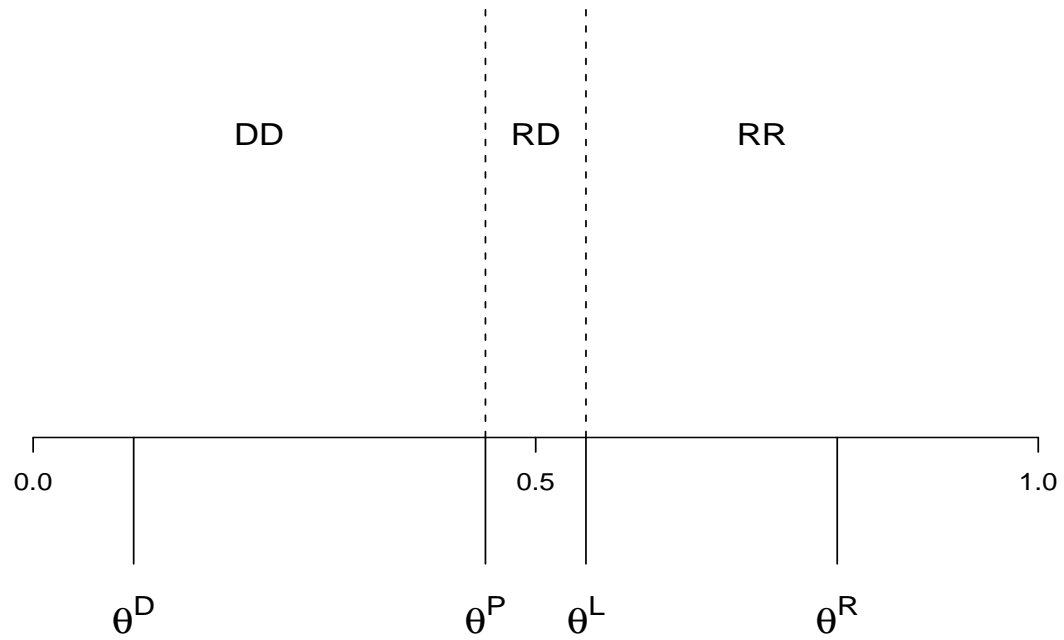
A-R model: pres. year with post-election policies

DD   RD   RR

0.0   0.5   1.0

θ^D θ^{LD} θ^P θ^L θ^{LR} θ^R
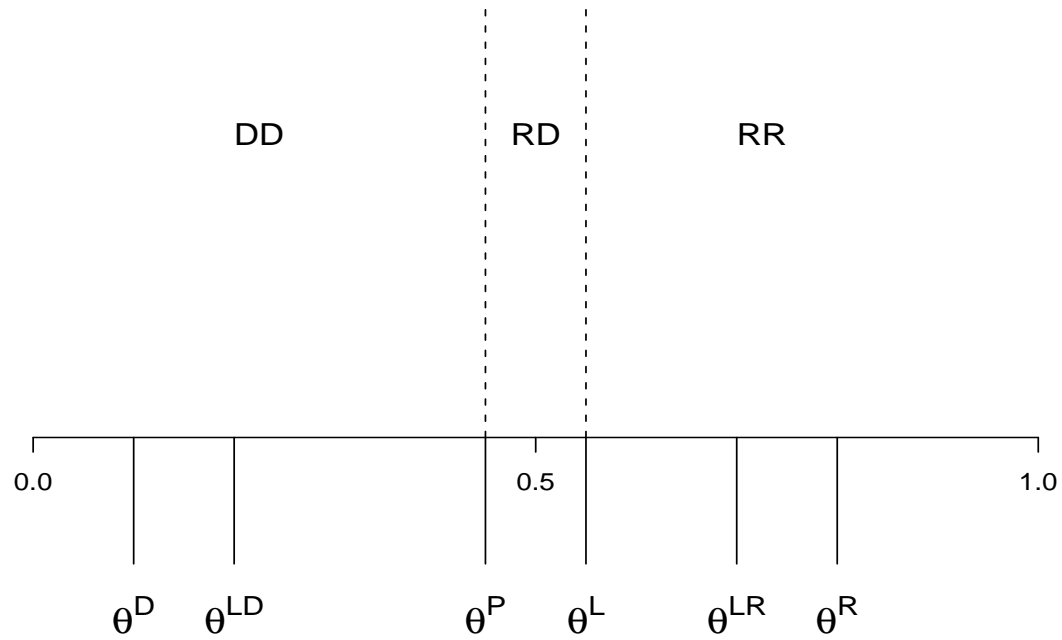
A-R model: pres. year with Republican victory certain

DD

RD

RR

0.0

0.5

1.0

θ^D

θ^P

θ^{LR}

θ^R
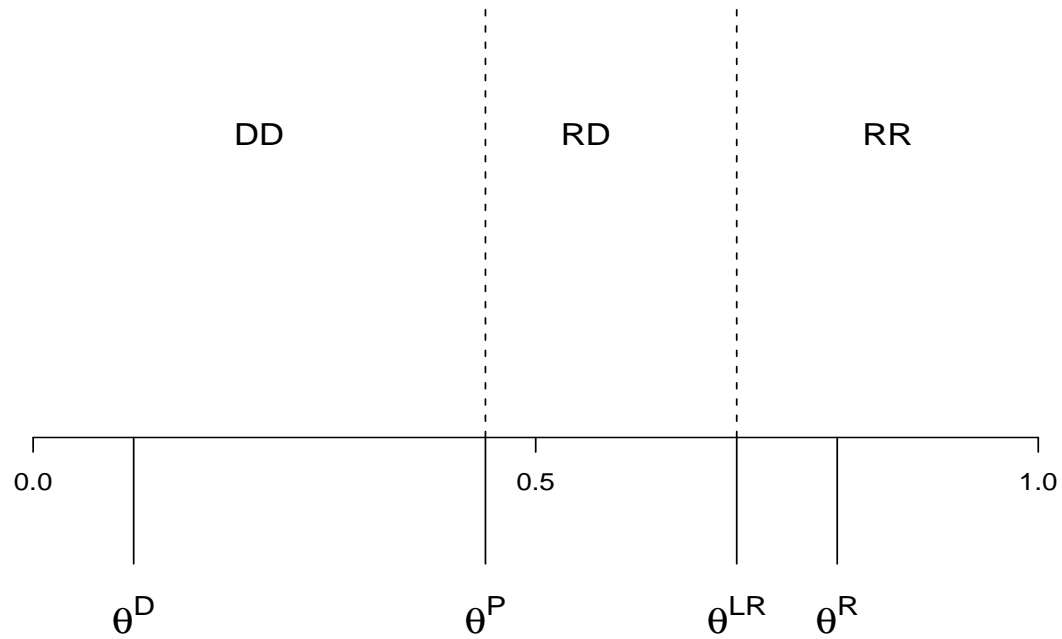
A-R model: pres. year with Democratic victory certain

DD

DR

RR

0.0   0.5   1.0

θ^D θ^{LD} θ^P θ^R
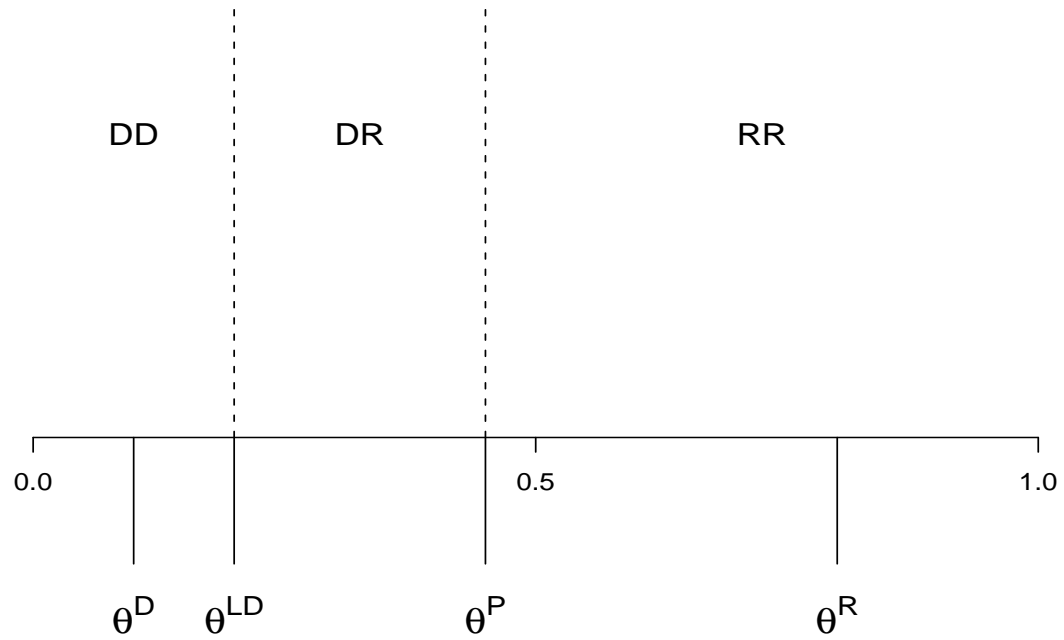
A-R model: pres. year, post-election policies
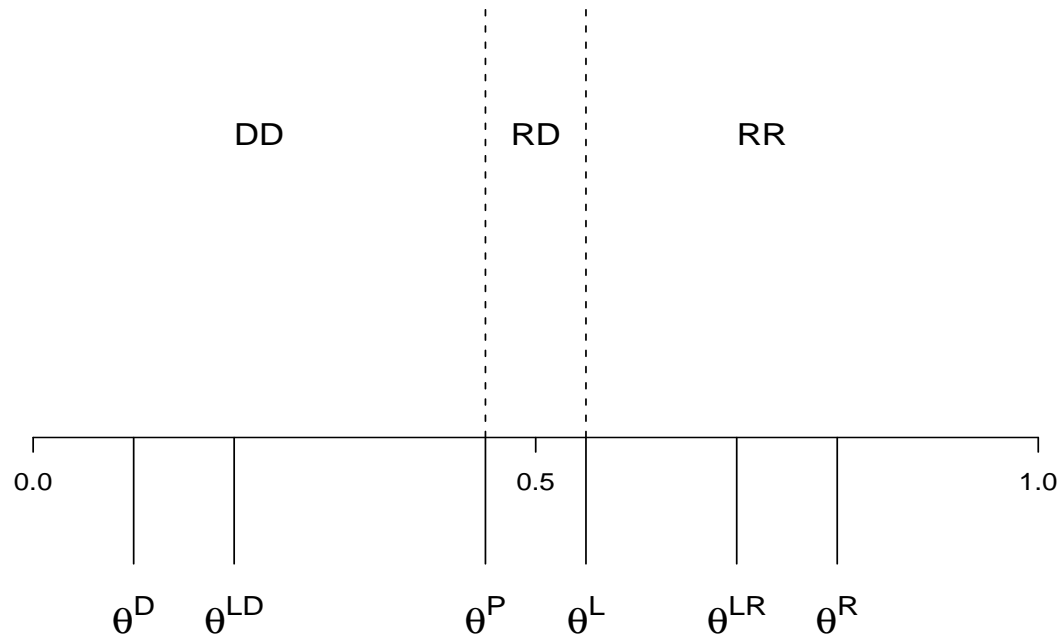
A-R model: midterm with Republican president

DD   DD   RD   RR   RR

d   d   d   d   r

0.0   0.5   1.0

θ^D θ^P θ^L θ^{LR} θ^R
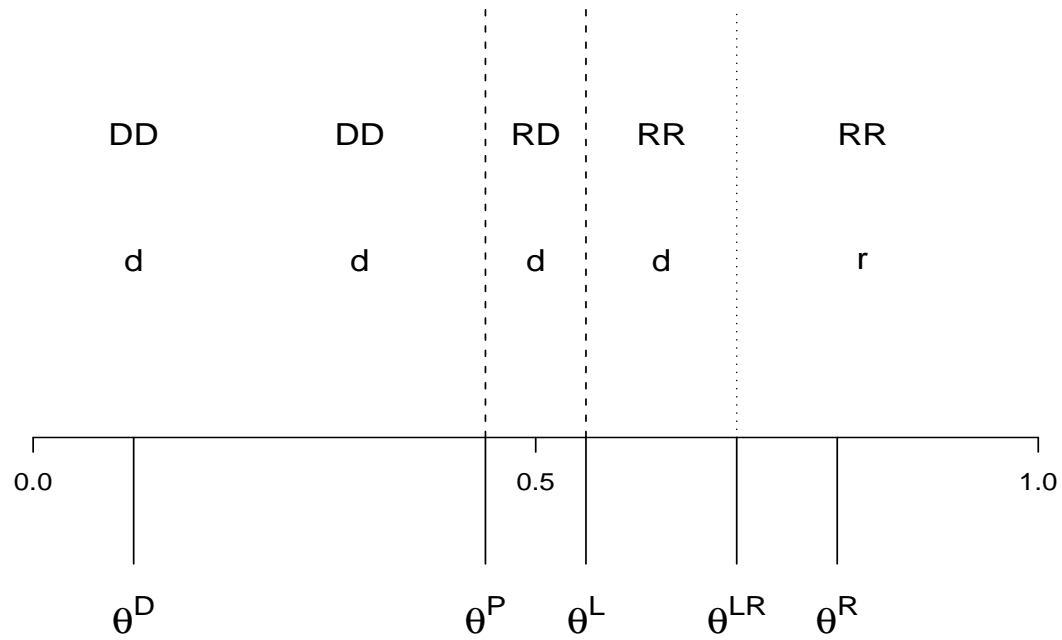
A-R model: midterm with Democratic president
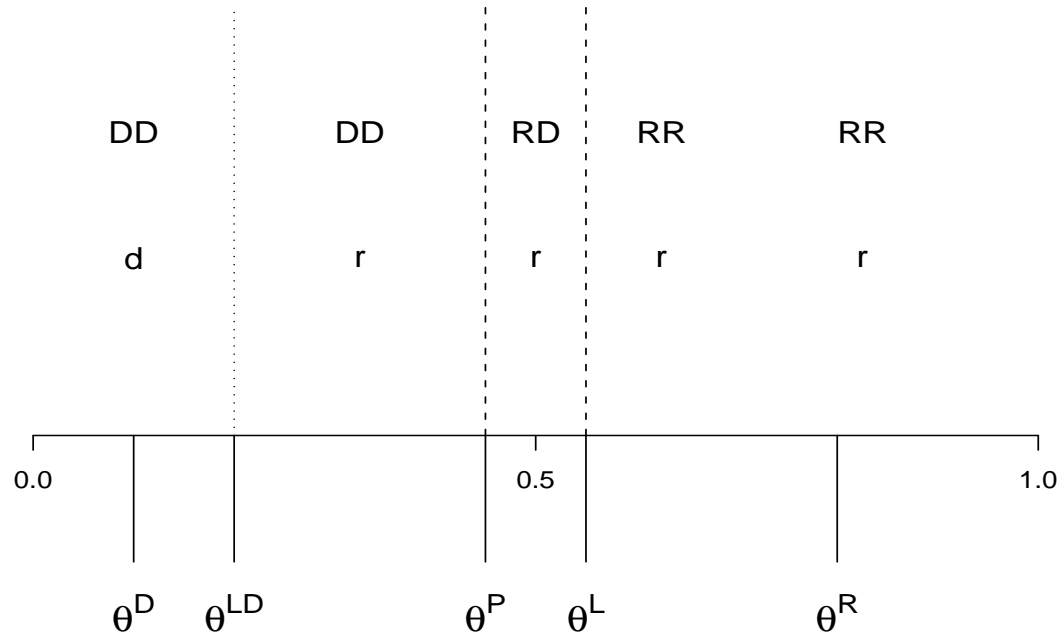
DD   DD   RD   RR   RR

d   r   r   r   r

0.0   0.5   1.0

θ^D θ^{LD} θ^P θ^L θ^R

- **models of institutional balancing**

- **in addition to the structural midterm shifts of Alesina and Rosenthal which relate to uncertainty ...**

- **there is a pattern of midterm shifts in voters' and nonvoters' ideal points away from the party of the president**

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  - **Stimson's averaged opinion poll data going back to 1952**

Jim Stimson's Policy Mood, 1952-2004
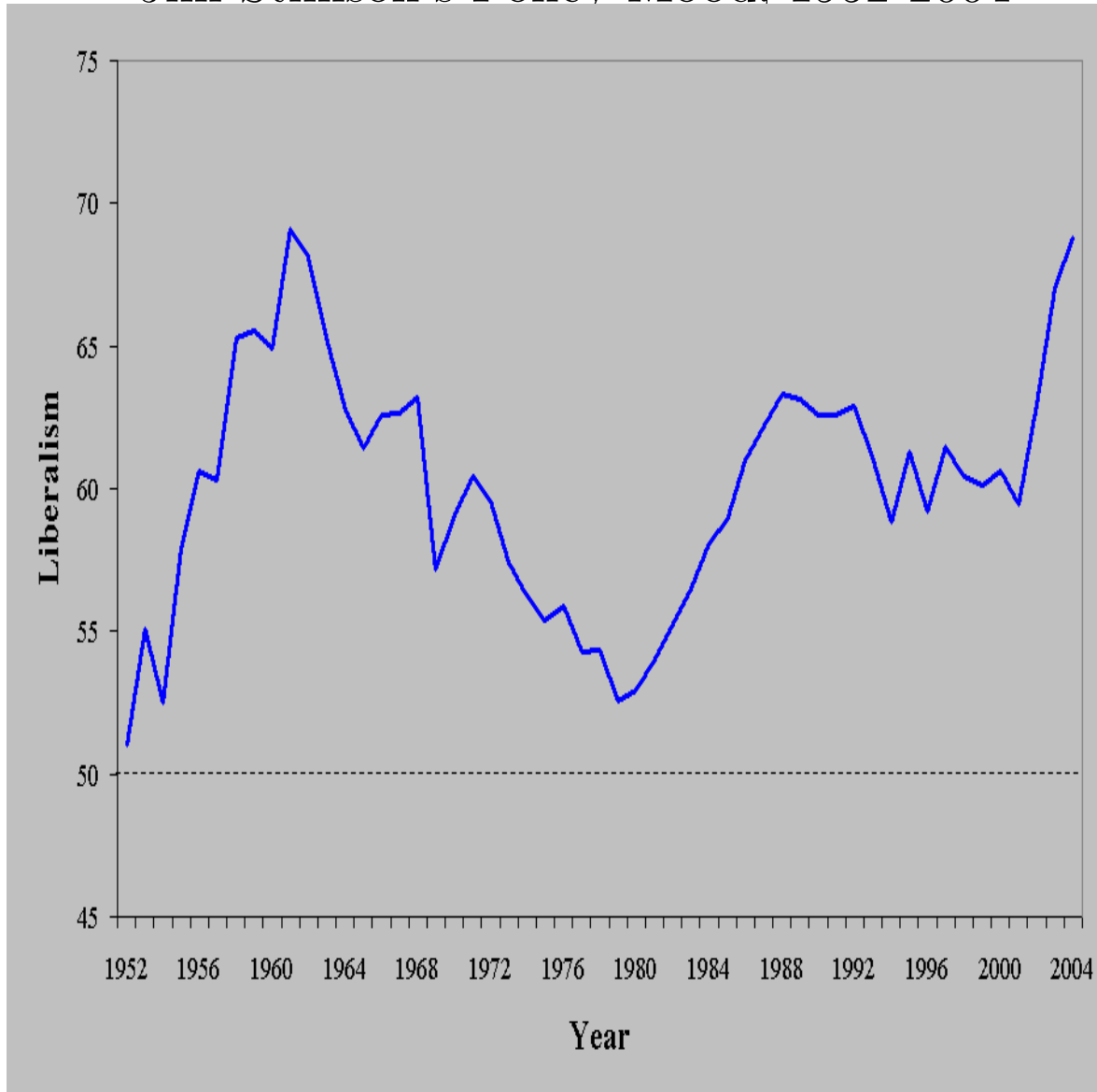
- **models of institutional balancing**

- **in addition to the structural midterm shifts of Alesina and Rosenthal which relate to uncertainty ...**

- **there is a pattern of midterm shifts in voters' and nonvoters' ideal points away from the party of the president**
  - **NES data going back to 1976**

Median Absolute Difference, Self versus Winner's Party

(a) All Voters and Nonvoters
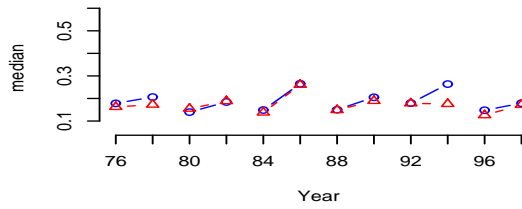
(b) Independent Independents
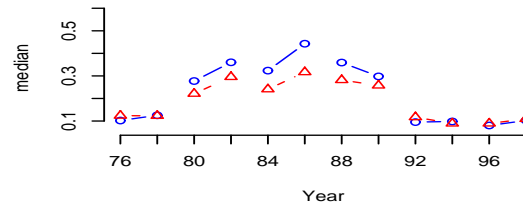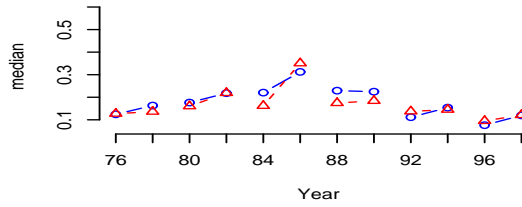
(c) Strong Democrats
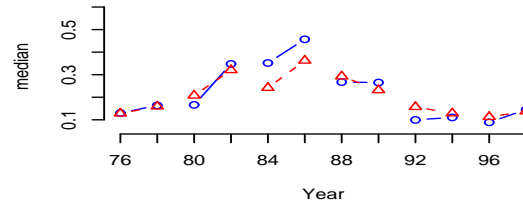
(d) Democrats

(e) Independent Democrats
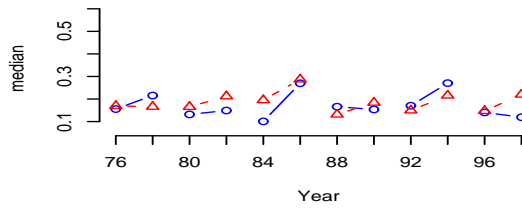
(f) Independent Republicans
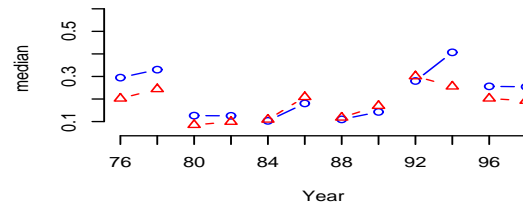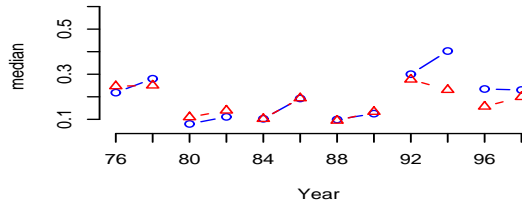
(g) Republicans

(h) Strong Republicans
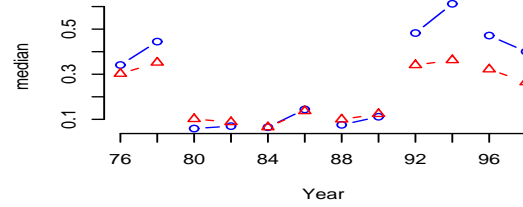
Median Signed Difference, Self versus Both Parties
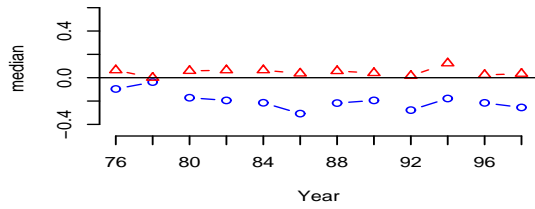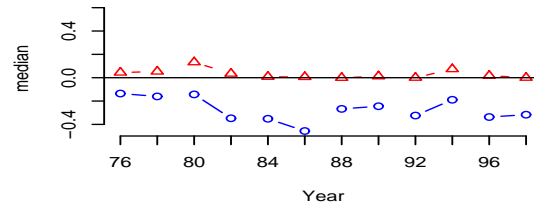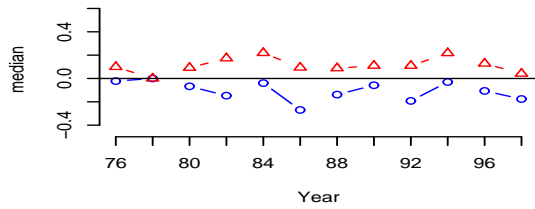

(a) All Voters
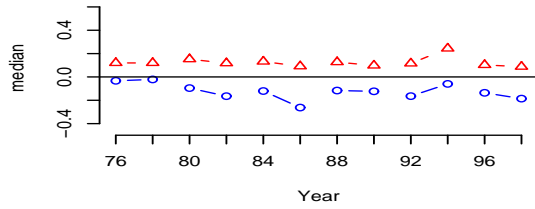
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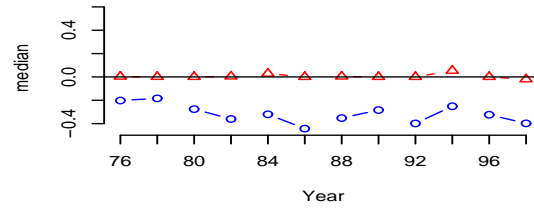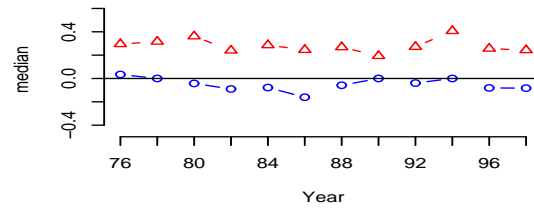
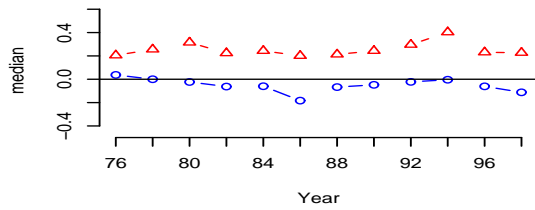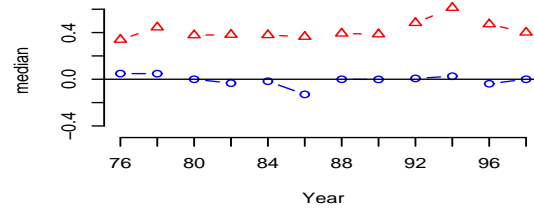(c) Strong Democrats

(d) Democrats

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(f) Independent Republicans

(g) Republicans

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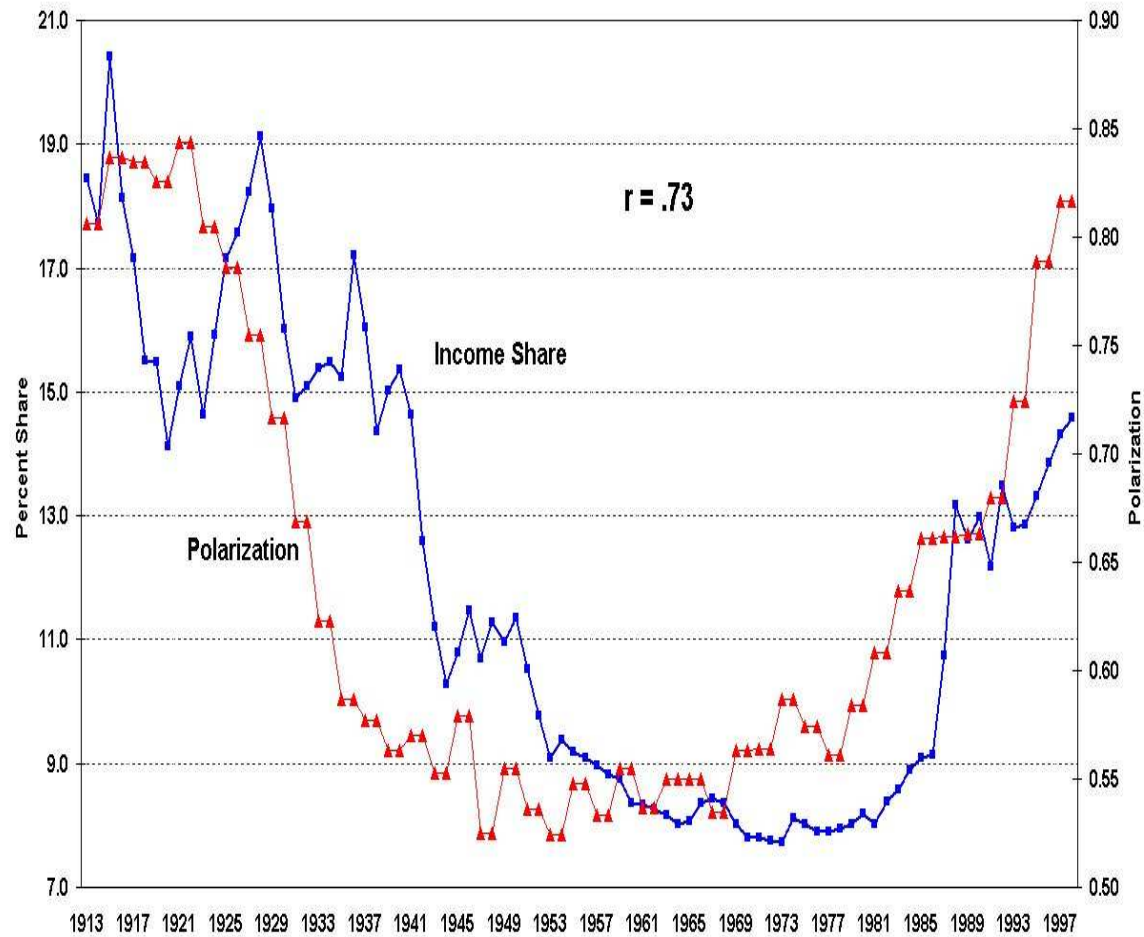
- economics and politics: inequality

- polarized voting in Congress is strongly correlated, over the past 100 years, with measures of income inequality (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal)

- immigration catalyzes this (M, P, R)

McCarty, Poole, Rosenthal: party polarization and income

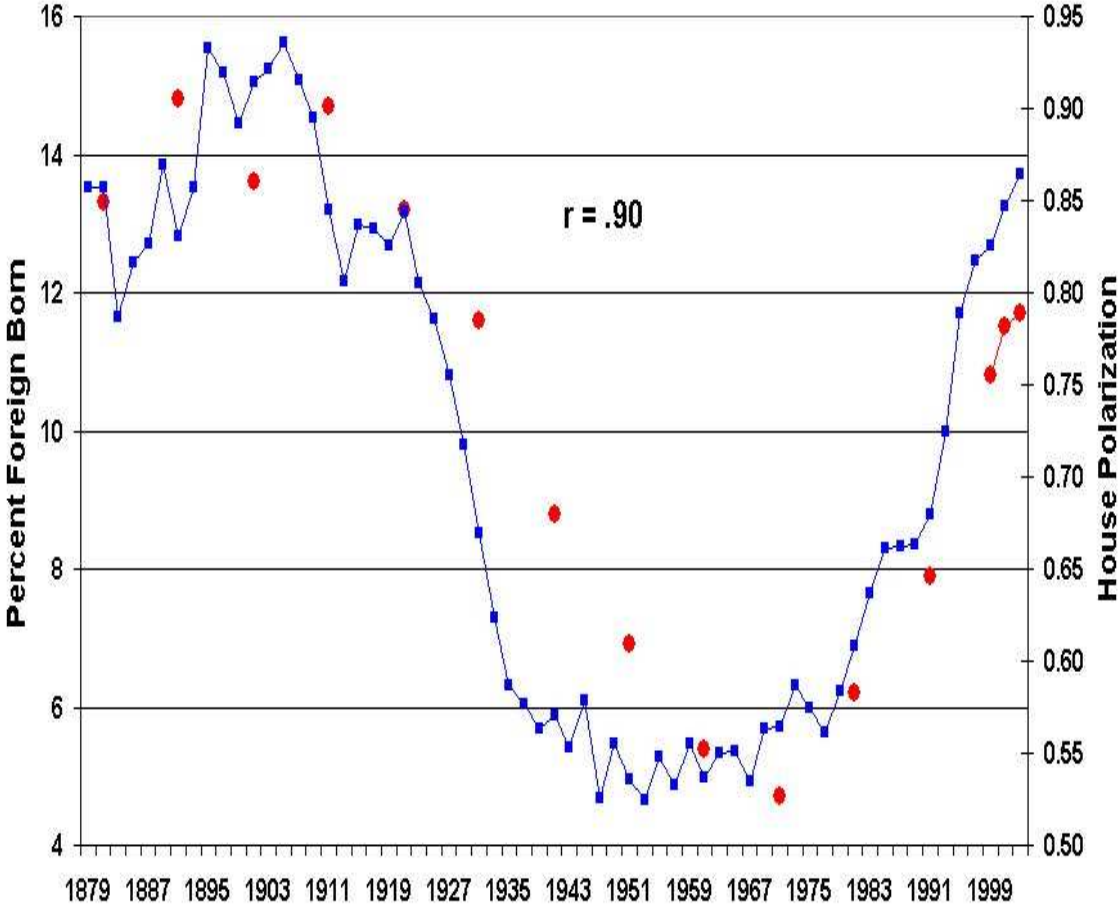Income Inequality and Political Polarization
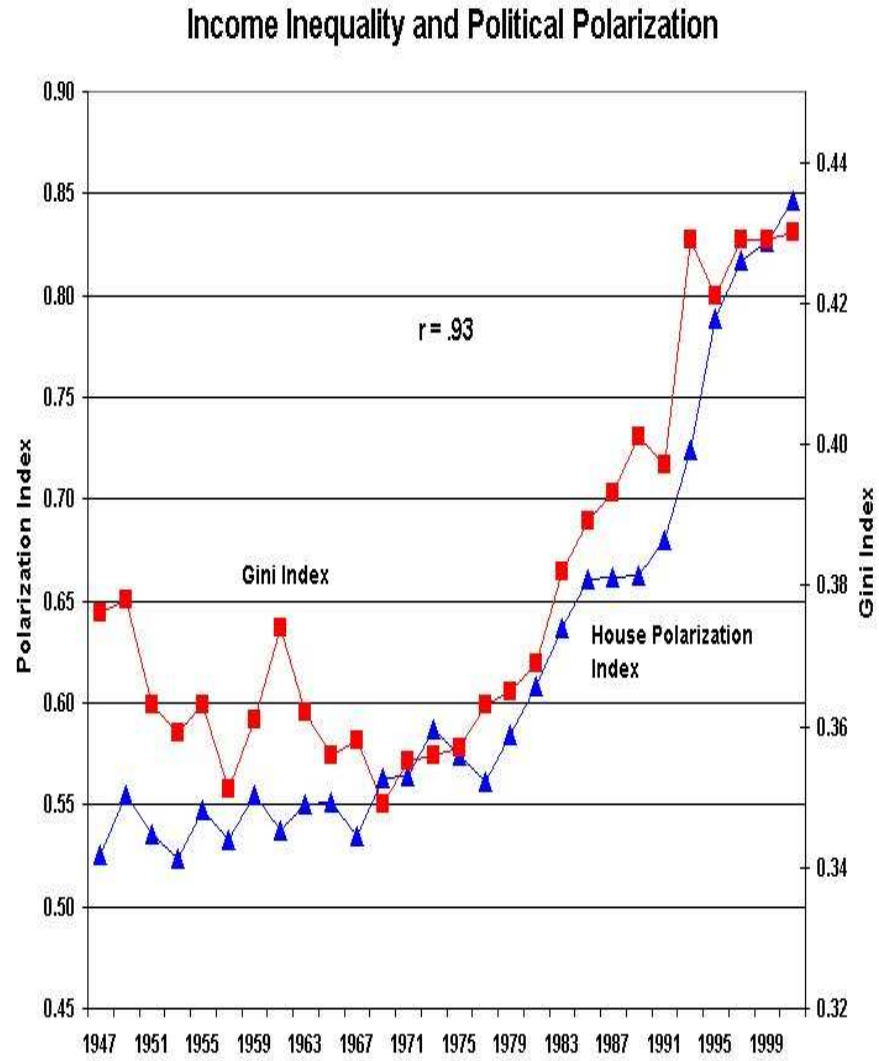
McCarty, Poole, Rosenthal: party polarization and income

Top 1% Income Share and House Polarization
1913 - 1998

McCarty, Poole, Rosenthal: party polarization and immigration

House Polarization vs. Percent Foreign Born
1880 - 2003

- **economics and politics: inequality**

- **is the elite division that Fiorina diagnoses in Culture War primarily driven by preferences for economic distribution?**

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- **is the elite division that Fiorina diagnoses in Culture War primarily driven by preferences for economic distribution?**

- **party ID is strongly driven by economic position (M, P, R)**
  - **changes correlated with income since the 1970s are especially pronounced in the South**
  - **evangelicals are highly sensitive to income**
  - **this enhances the "accidental" (my term) correlation with "moral issues": many evangelicals are relatively wealthy**

- **economics and politics: inequality**

- **the red-blue state distinction is a distracting illusion**

  - **within each state, partisan voting intentions are strongly correlated with income (Gelman et al.)**

  - **similar findings with NES data (Bartels)**

- **2006 was importantly about the war in Iraq**

- **but more profoundly it was about economic inequality**

- **this will be the dominant agenda item for the near future of American politics**