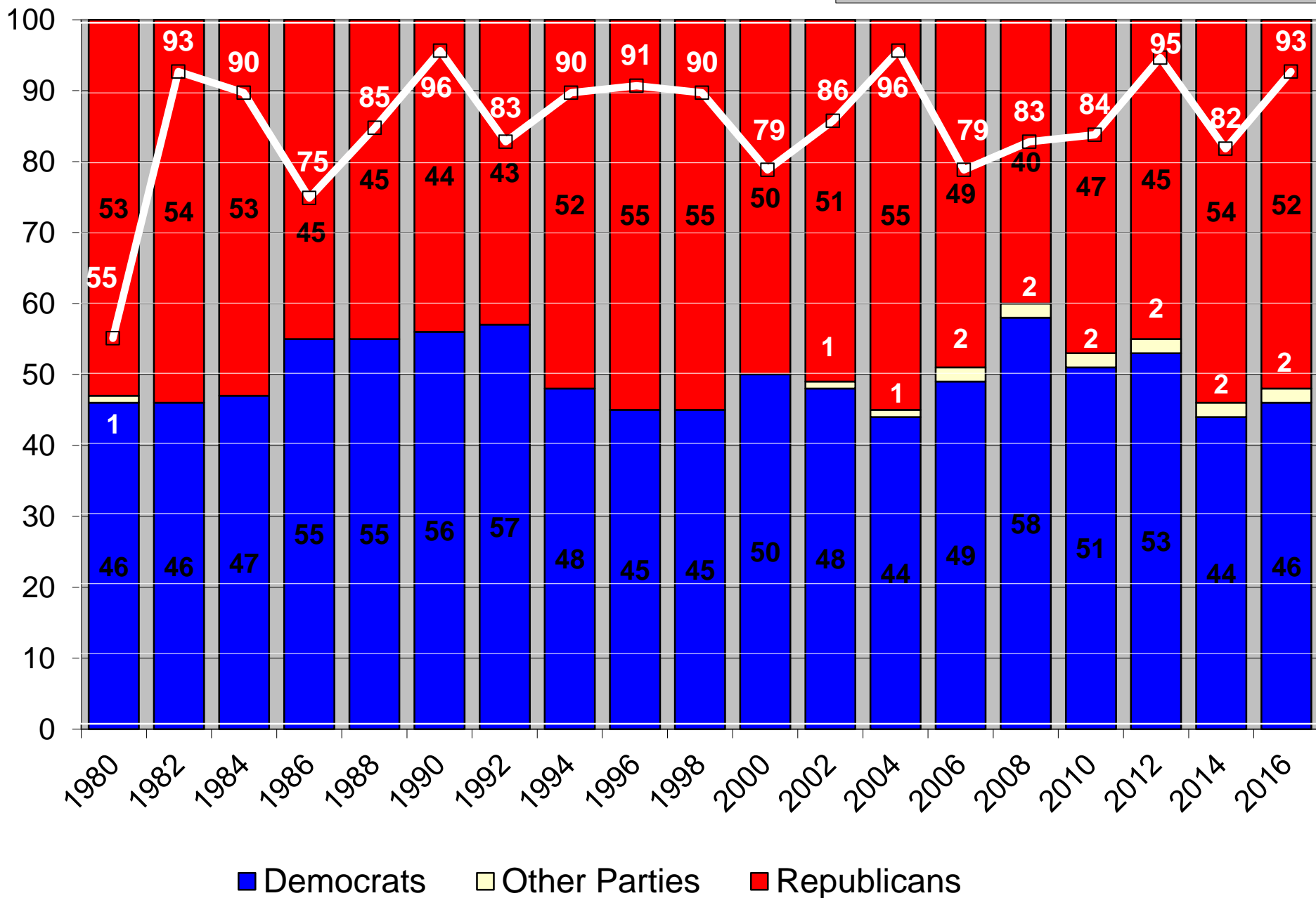


★ US ELECTIONS ★

CONGRESSIONAL  
ELECTIONS

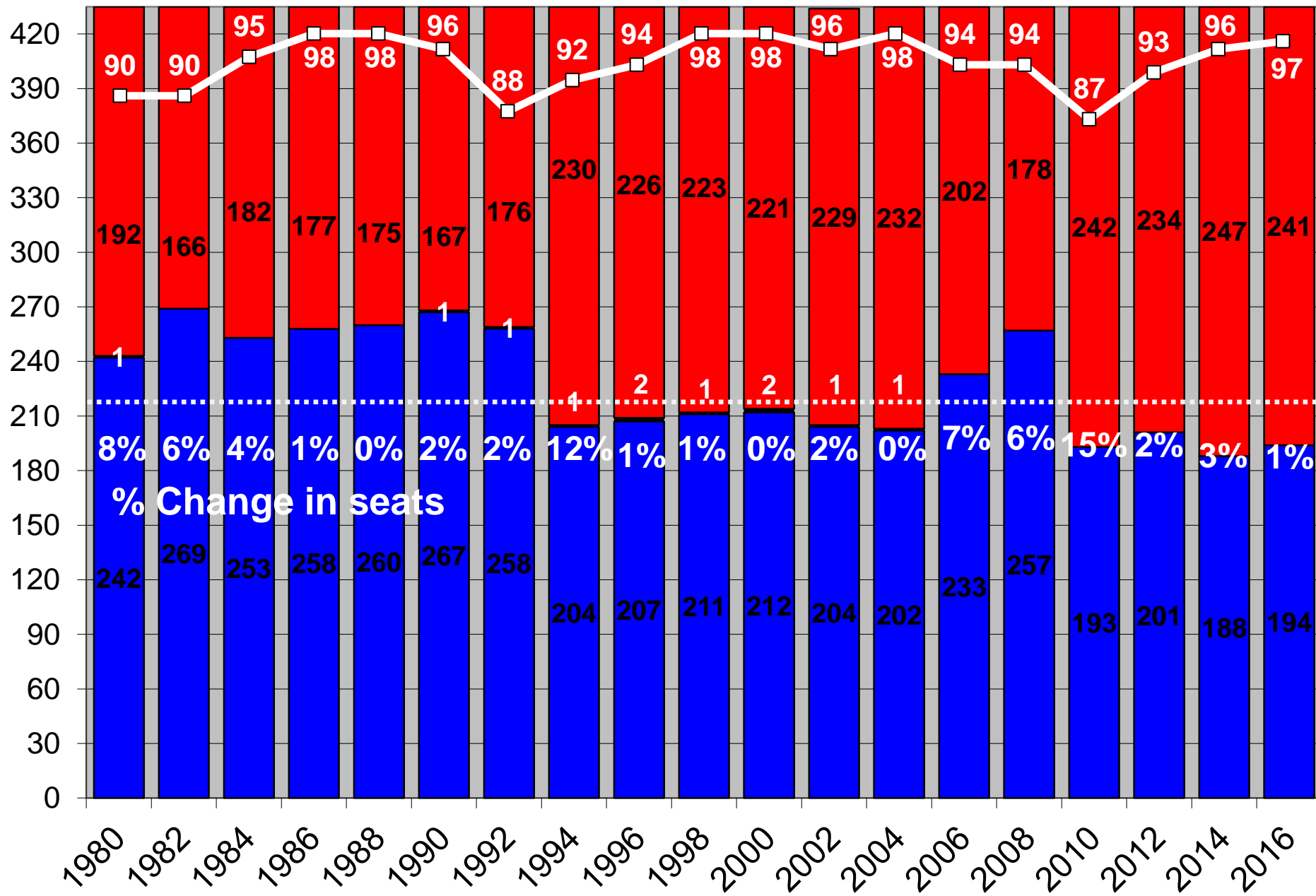
# Senate

Incumbent Re-election rate



# House of Representatives

—■ Incumbent re-election rate

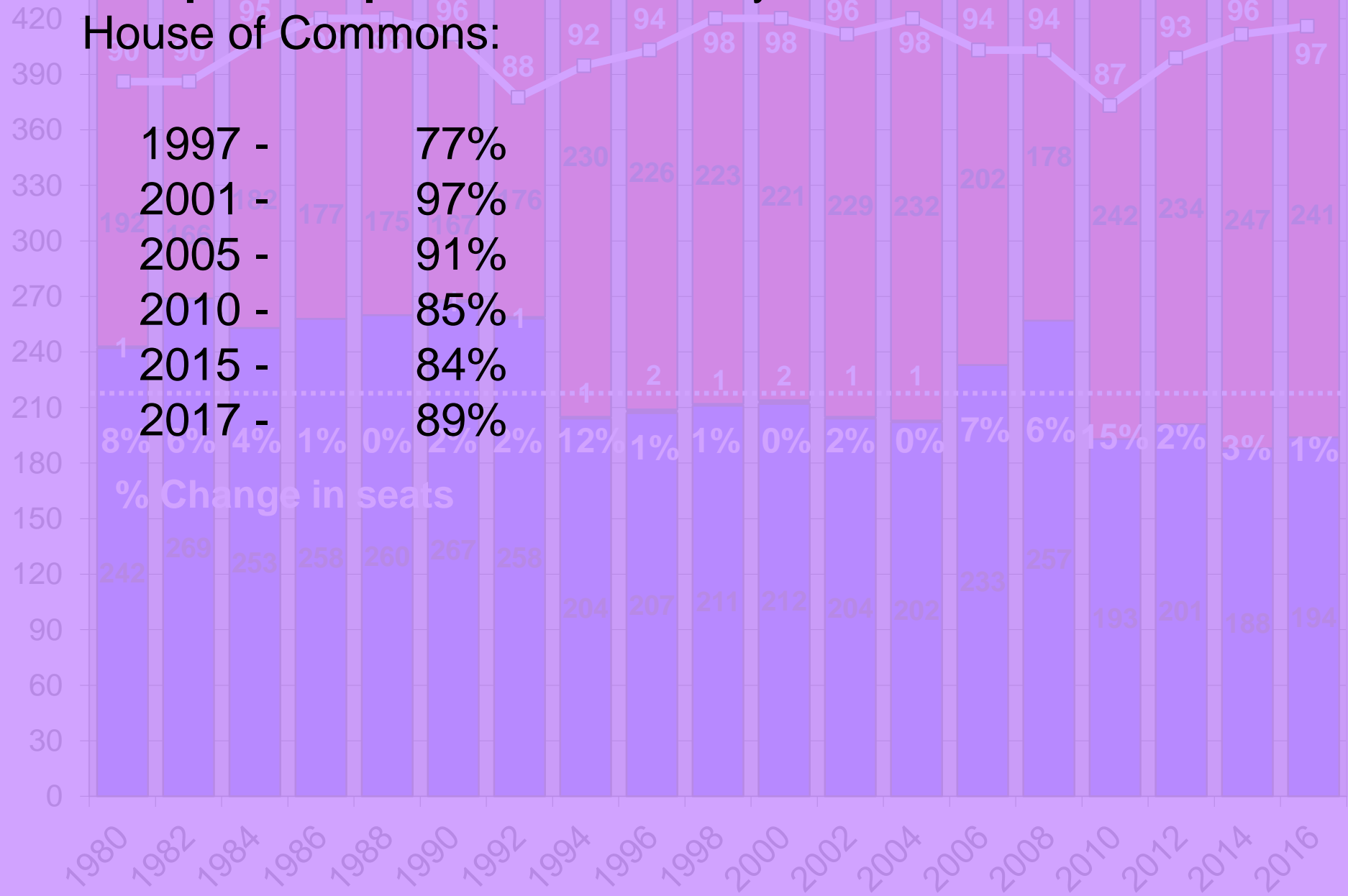


# House of Representatives

## Comparison point – Incumbency re-election rates in UK

House of Commons:

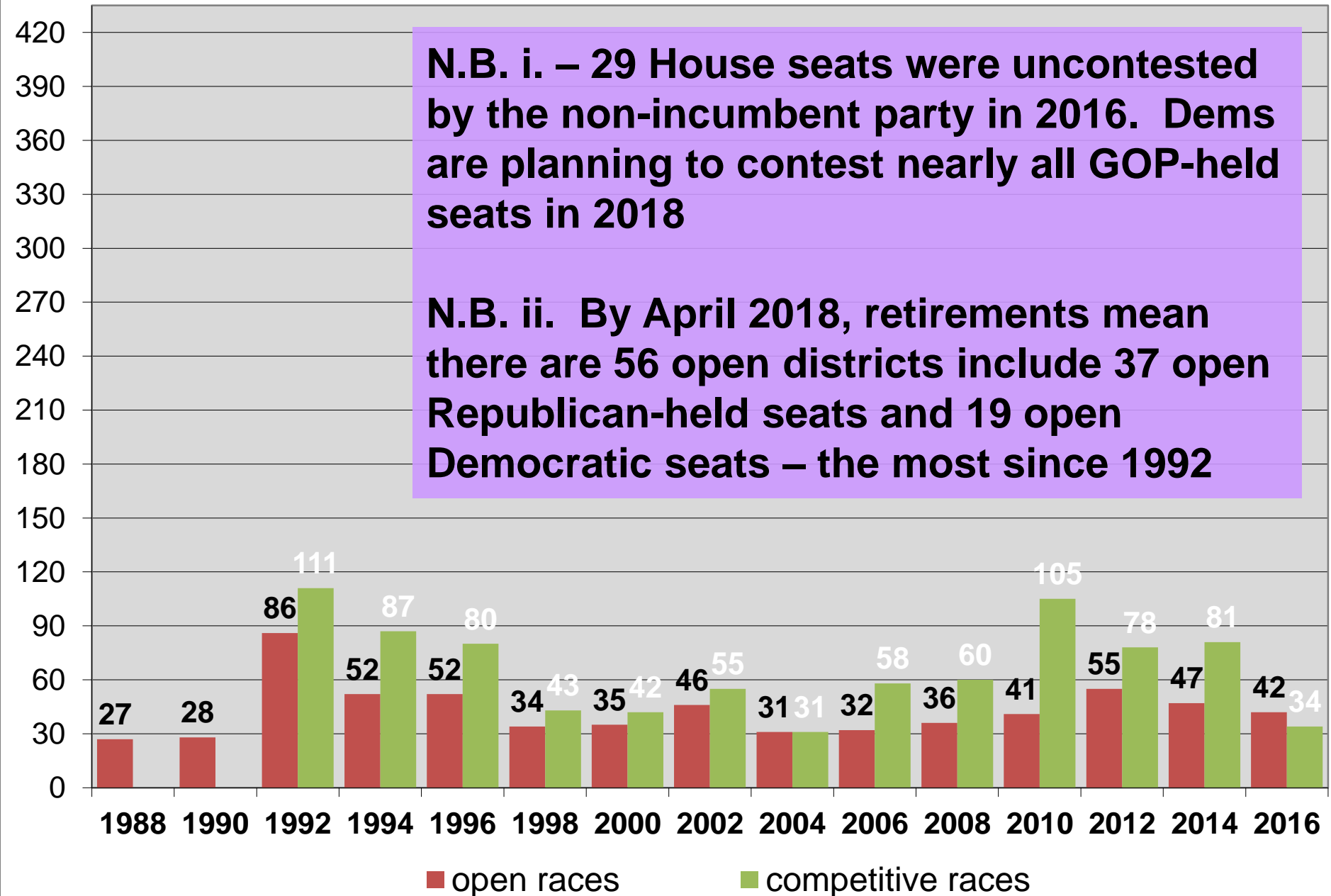
- 1997 - 77%
- 2001 - 97%
- 2005 - 91%
- 2010 - 85%
- 2015 - 84%
- 2017 - 89%



# Open and Competitive House Races

**N.B. i. – 29 House seats were uncontested by the non-incumbent party in 2016. Dems are planning to contest nearly all GOP-held seats in 2018**

**N.B. ii. By April 2018, retirements mean there are 56 open districts include 37 open Republican-held seats and 19 open Democratic seats – the most since 1992**

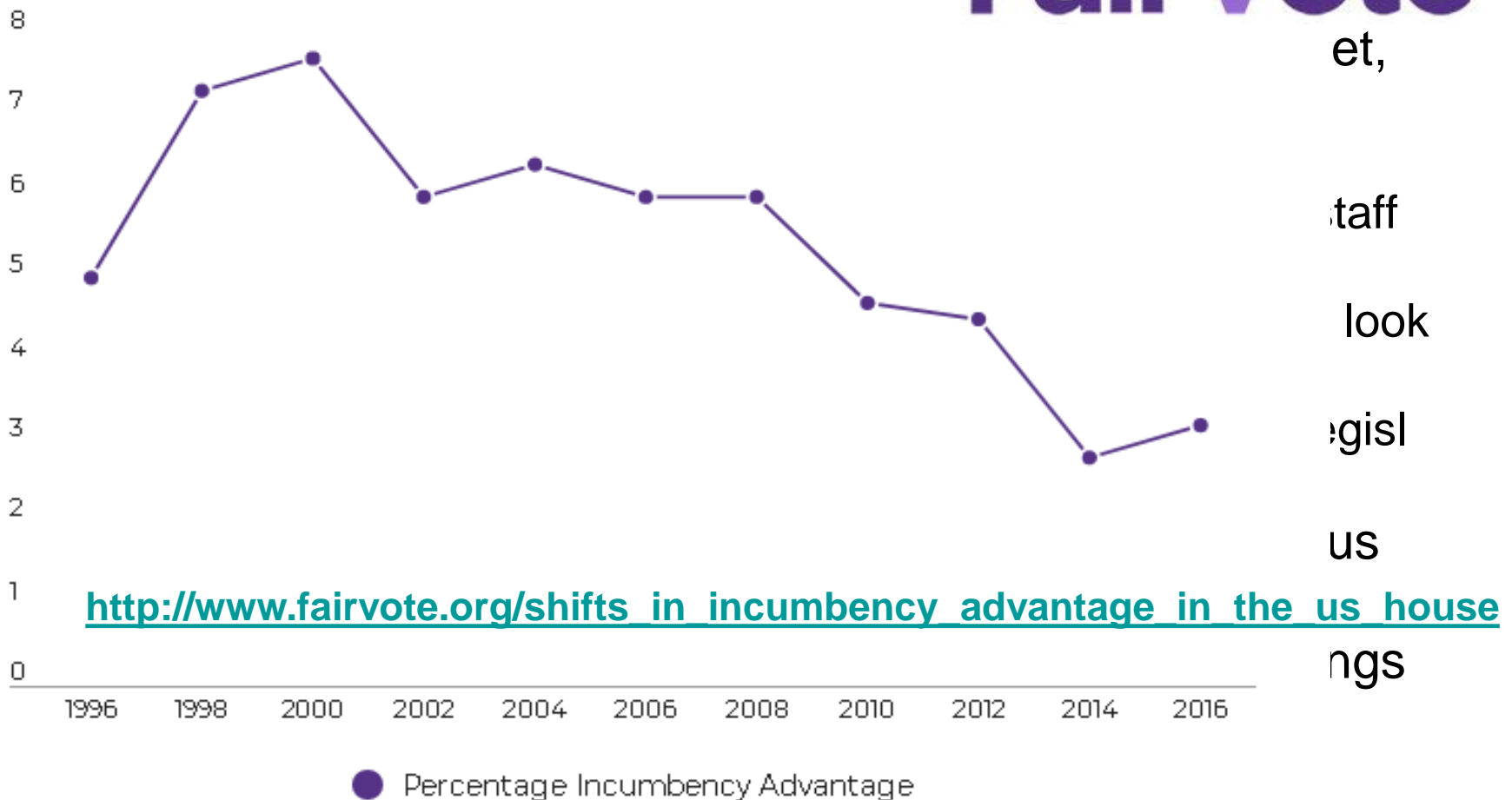


The 56 total open

# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

U.S. House Incumbency Bump, 1996-2016

FairVote



# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

- 5.5 % 20-year average advantage calculated for incumbents – although declining in recent cycles -

## Benefits of office

- **Staff:** Congressmen/women get a substantial office budget, allowing them to employ quite large staffs in both their district/state, and in Washington
  - average House Rep has 14 staff, average Senator has 34 staff
  - > allows them to serve their constituents, responding to letters/emails, dealing with their problems and making them look like an effective, hard-working rep
  - > helps stay in touch with constit opinion and to shape their legisl activities in response
- **Travel:** Congrmen get free travel to/from Washington, plus within their district/state
- **Postage:** Congrmen are able to send postage-free mailings to constits from time to time.

# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

## Time

- Congressmen paid to be in politics full-time, whereas challengers usually have to hold another job down while trying to campaign (or give up job and go into debt to campaign full-time)
- Part of Congressmen's job is to meet many voters, attend special events, appear on the media, etc. – so easy to campaign for re-election while serving constituents. Challengers find it harder to generate such opportunities.

## Visibility

- Incumbents have good name-recognition among constituents due to previous campaign and 2+ / 6+ years of service.
- Local media also give them much attention – no obligation to be balanced in coverage or to provide public hearings as in UK
- although public often has low opinion of Congress collectively, they often have a much higher opinion of their own Representative or Senator



# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

## Campaign organisation

- Every incumbent has the exp of running at least one successful campaign already – so more likely than challenger to build and manage an effective campaign org in subseq races.
- + incumbents usually have network of donors & volunteers already in place to call upon.
- + challengers may be less “battle-hardened” and media savvy
  - Tea Party-backed primary winners in 2010 (Angle, O’Donnell, Buck) and 2012 (Mourdock, Mandel) lost the GOP Senate seats due to gaffes and inept performances.

# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

**Money - 2016 Congressional races estimated to have cost c\$4.3 Bn**  
(incl candidate \$ + party \$ + outside \$)

- Incumbents enjoy a huge advantage in raising money compared to challengers:

– House races incl incumbents:	<u>2010</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2016</u>
• Average Incumbent =	\$ 1.5M	\$ 1.6M	\$ 1.6M	\$ 1.6M
• Average combined all Challenger =	\$ 0.7M	\$ 0.5M	\$ 0.4M	\$ 0.4M

– Senate races incl incumbents:	<u>2010</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2016</u>
• Average Incumbent =	\$10.9M	\$11.8M	\$12.1M	\$12.7 M
• Average combined all Challenger =	\$ 4.9M	\$ 7.1M	\$ 5.8M	\$ 6.8 M

<https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/incumbs.php>

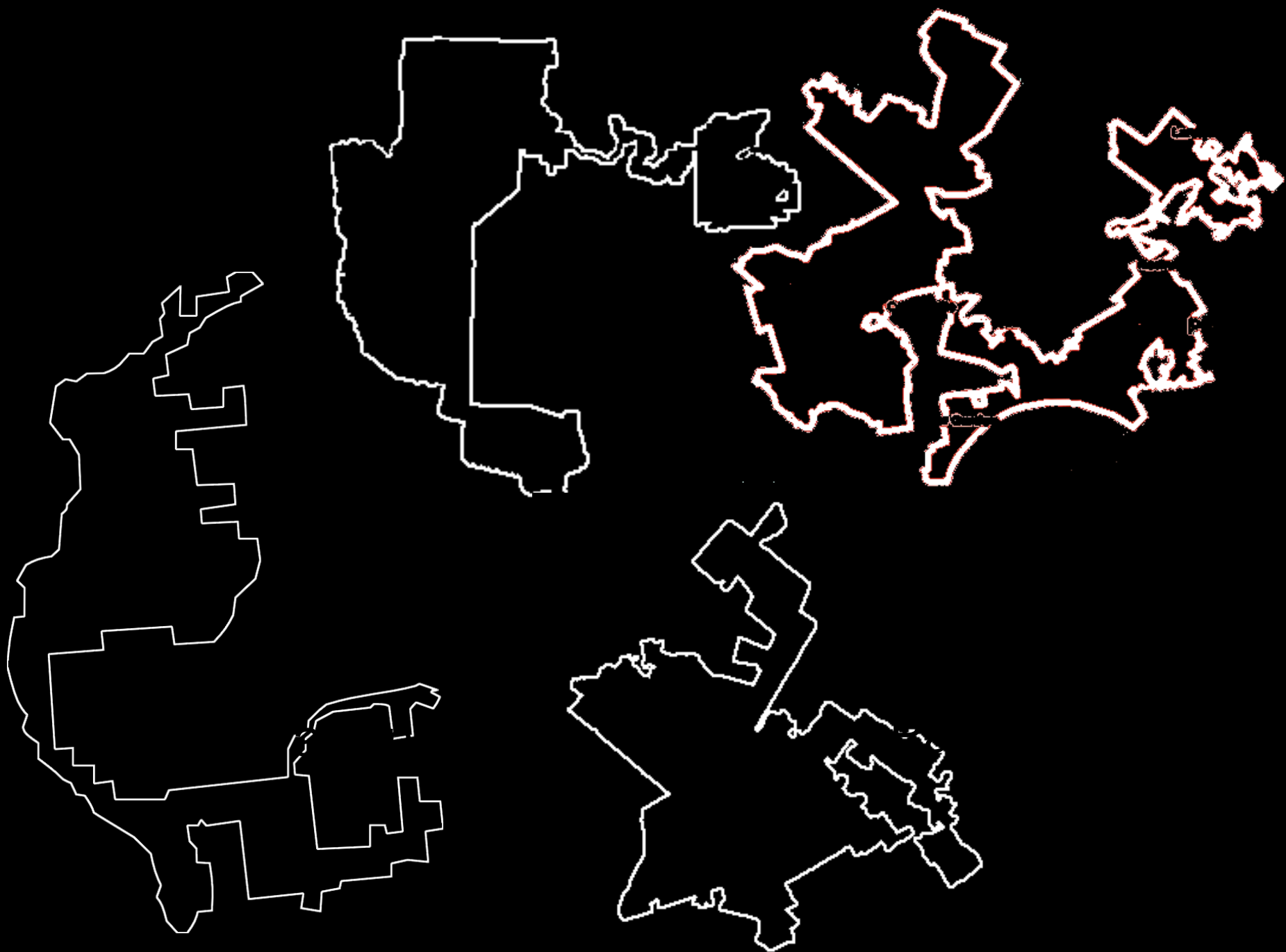


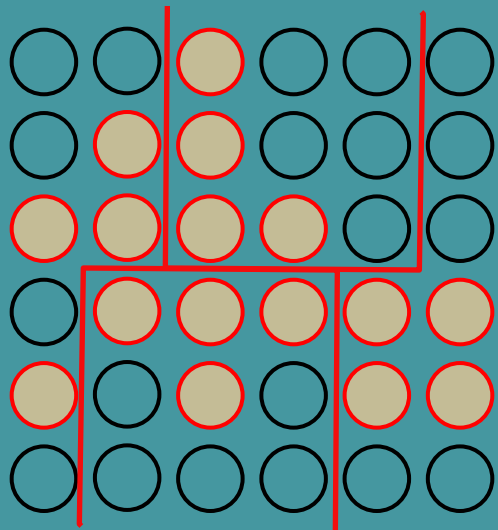
- DNC/RNC & Congr leadership committee money v largely directed to incumbents rather than challengers
- Incumbents in safe seats often give to more endangered party colleagues
- PACs overwhelmingly give to incumbents rather than challengers
- Money buys a better campaign organisation and greater spending on ads.
- BUT [http://www.cfinst.org/Press/PReleases/10-11-05/Non-Party\\_Spending\\_Doubled\\_But\\_Did\\_Not\\_Dictate\\_Results.aspx](http://www.cfinst.org/Press/PReleases/10-11-05/Non-Party_Spending_Doubled_But_Did_Not_Dictate_Results.aspx)  
If Congressman hit by scandal or voting record departs from constits, challengers (in primary or gen election) can quickly gain funding to run competitive race vs incumbent

# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

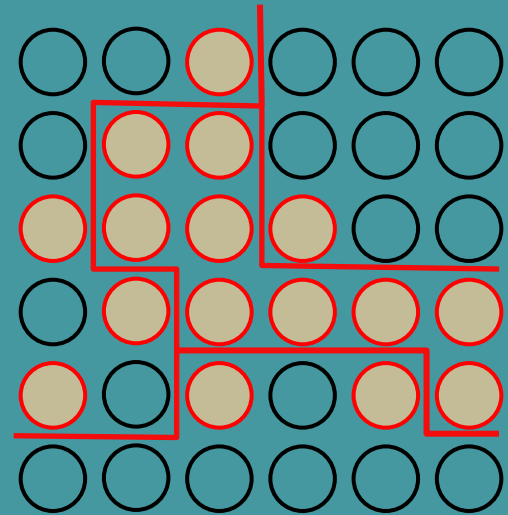
## Redistricting

- After every census many House districts have their boundaries redrawn – this is governed by state law and in 36 / 43 states legislators in the State Congress control or strongly influence the process. When districts redrawn to partisan advantage it is called *gerrymandering* – politicians choosing their voters.
  - some House incumbents have had their position strengthened after redistricting by allied state legislators – (Tom Delay)
  - sometimes new “safe” seats are created – once won, these will promote incumbency
- BUT most legislators elected pre-redistricting, recent academic study argues that it has little impact on future electoral outcomes (and as a result, handing over redistricting to non-partisan state commissions – e.g. in California from 2011 - will not do anything / much to address the issue of incumbency) -  
[http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/jsnyder/files/redist\\_incumb\\_0.pdf?m=1390423489](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/jsnyder/files/redist_incumb_0.pdf?m=1390423489)
- The courts are increasingly intervening on redistricting -  
<https://wtop.com/supreme-court/2018/03/supreme-court-takes-up-2nd-major-partisan-redistricting-case/>



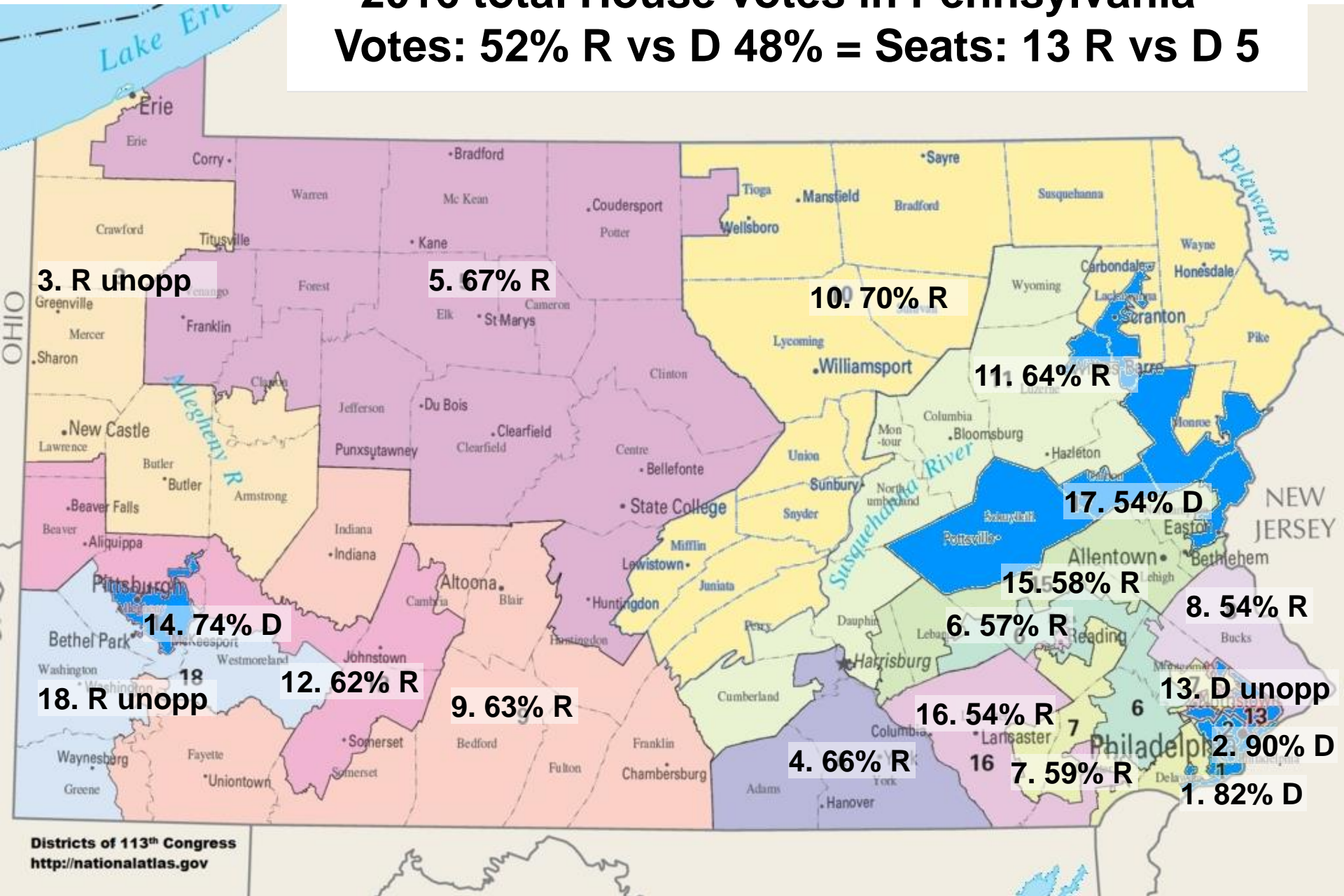


Cracking



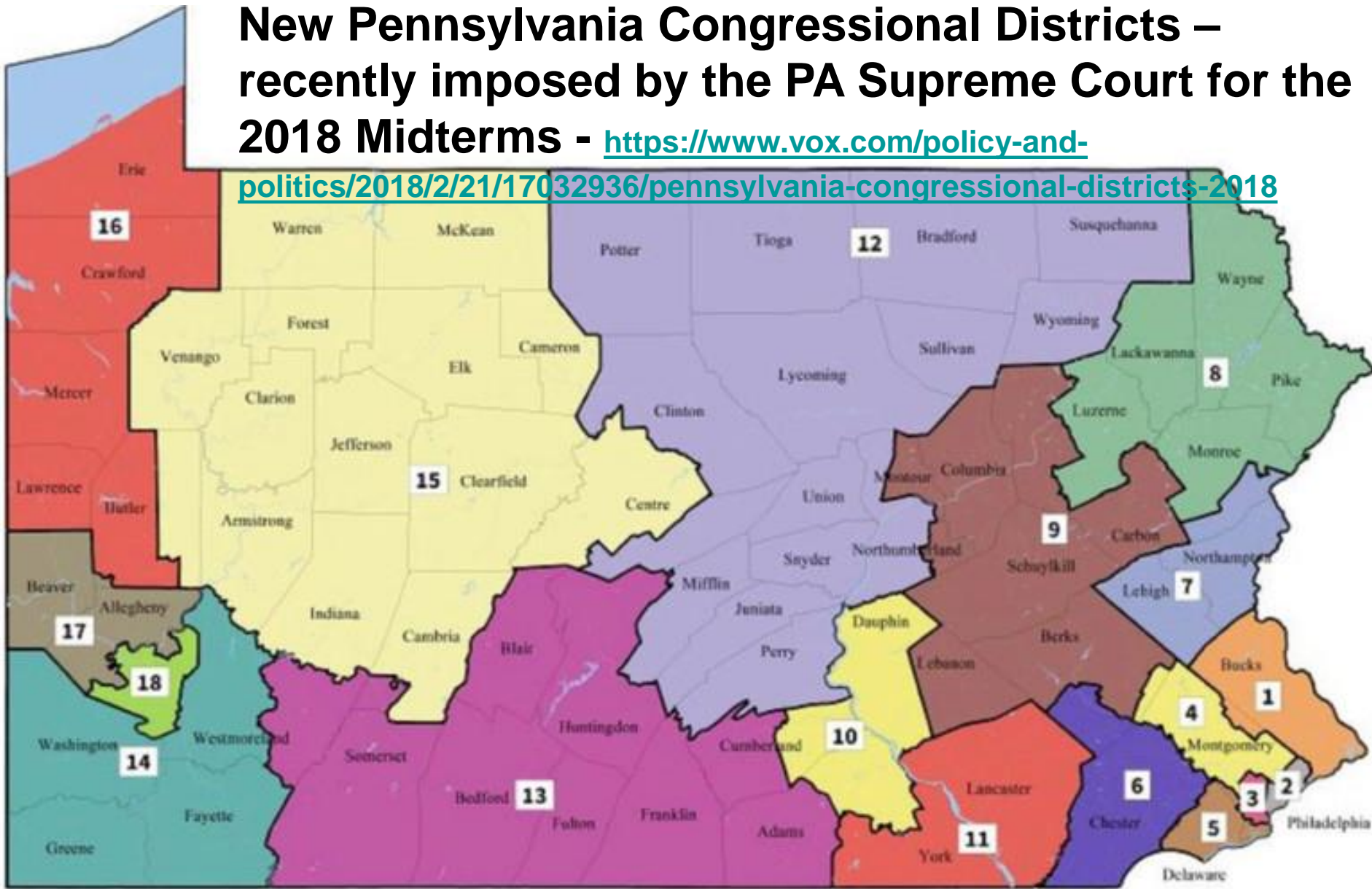
Packing

# 2016 total House votes in Pennsylvania – Votes: 52% R vs D 48% = Seats: 13 R vs D 5



# New Pennsylvania Congressional Districts – recently imposed by the PA Supreme Court for the 2018 Midterms -

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/2/21/17032936/pennsylvania-congressional-districts-2018>



# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

## The Pork Barrel

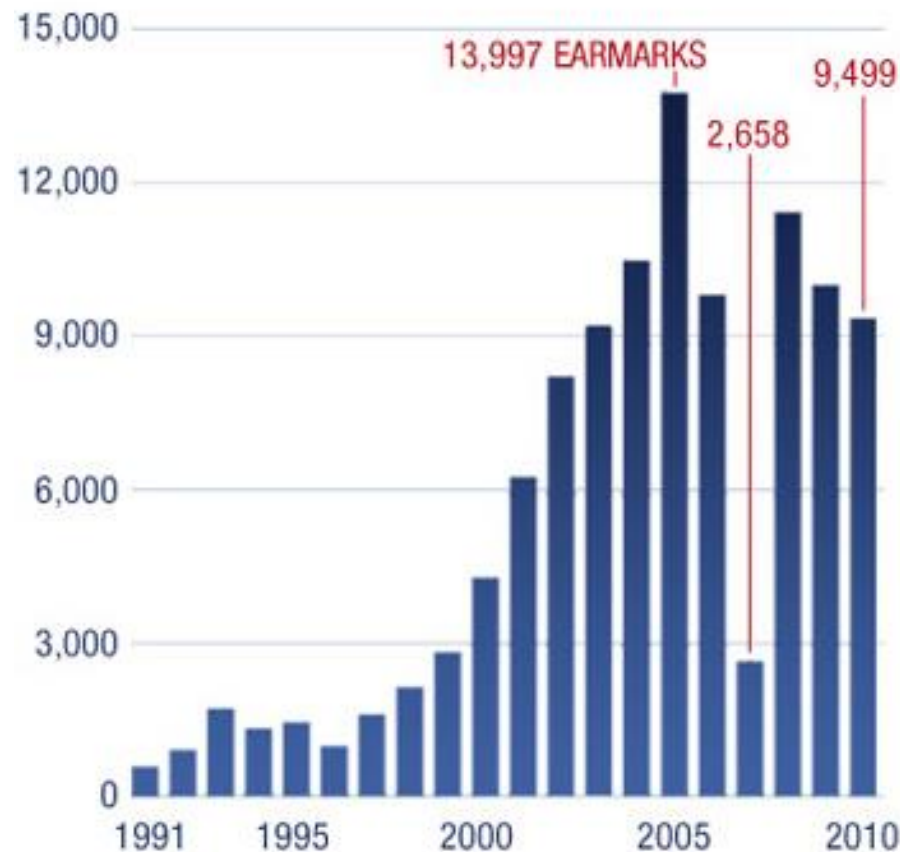
- = using amendments and earmarks to insert provisions into Bills that favour the Congressmen's constituents
- can be used to build stronger base of support at home, proving to constituents that their rep is working hard on their behalf. Common for incumbents to boast of their success in exploiting their "insider" status at election time.
- <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/meet-congress-king-of-pork/>
- <http://archive.today/z4Cly>
- BUT moratorium on the use of earmarks introduced in 2011 - <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2011/04/congress-shackles-itself-zeroes-out-earmarks-to-nowhere.php>
- [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-earmark-ban-lawmakers-try-to-direct-money-to-hundreds-of-pet-projects/2011/11/29/gIQA2L2WAO\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-earmark-ban-lawmakers-try-to-direct-money-to-hundreds-of-pet-projects/2011/11/29/gIQA2L2WAO_story.html)



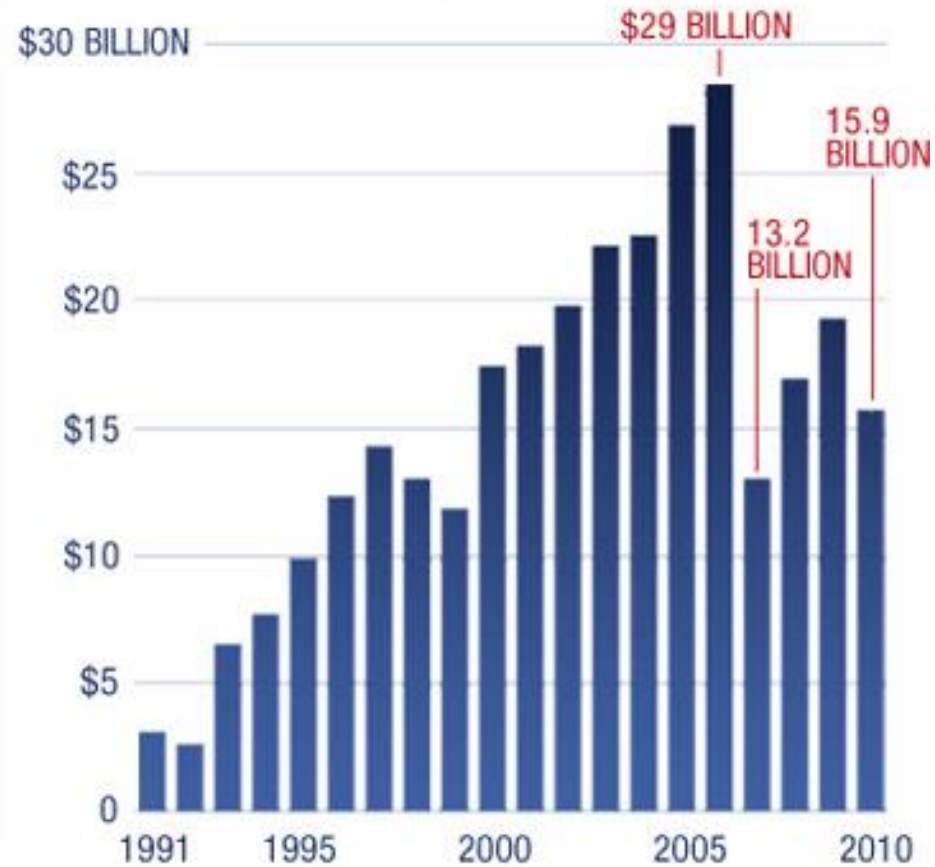


# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

## NUMBER OF EARMARKS



## COST OF EARMARKS



SOURCE: CITIZENS AGAINST GOVERNMENT WASTE AND TAXPAYERS FOR COMMON SENSE AND THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION.

# Why do incumbent Congressmen almost always get re-elected?

- **BUT N.B.-** statistics can be misleading
  - one important reason for retirement is fear that running again might result in defeat
    - may account for 6 /18 Democrat Senators up for re-election in 2010 choosing to retire
      - e.g. Chris Dodd of Connecticut, Evan Bayh of Indiana
    - And 4 Dem Senators up for re-election in 2014 retired.
  - And 37 Republican House members have already announced retirements ahead of the 2018 midterms.

# What other factors affect the outcome of Congressional races?

- incumbency v imp, but not only factor: always some competitive seats, incl open ones –
  - **2010**: 105 House & 15 Senate seats competitive (defined as winner getting 55% or less of the vote – i.e. < 10% lead in a 2-horse race)
  - **2012**: 78 House and 20 Senate seats competitive in 2012,
  - **2014**: 81 House & 10 Senate seats competitive
  - **BUT 2016**: only 34 House and 10 Senate seats competitive
  - **2018** shaping up to be more competitive – potential wave election?
    - The party not holding the White House almost always gains seats
    - and Dems highly energised in the Trump era – many more candidates in primaries than usual, including many more women
    - successes in a number of 2017 state votes and 2018 special elections
    - 37 GOP House retirements to April 2018 – historically large number
    - But Dem coalition including minorities and young less likely to turn out in midterm elections than GOP base

# What other factors affect the outcome of Congressional races?

- Other factors include:
  - **Finance** – cand with > \$\$\$ will often win – reinforces incumbency, but also allows self-funding cand to become competitive  
BUT – limits on this – min spend nec to gain recogn, but limited additional adv above this level.  
see [http://www.cfinst.org/Press/PReleases/12-11-09/Early\\_Post-Election\\_Look\\_at\\_Money\\_in\\_the\\_House\\_and\\_Senate\\_Elections\\_of\\_2012.aspx](http://www.cfinst.org/Press/PReleases/12-11-09/Early_Post-Election_Look_at_Money_in_the_House_and_Senate_Elections_of_2012.aspx)
  - **“Coat-tails”** effect in Pres election years – varies but can be substantial – e.g. Reagan in 1980s, Bush 2004, Obama 2008, Obama 2012?
  - **Timing** – Pres party often loses seats in mid-terms: Reps in 2006, Dems 1994, 2010, 2014  
– but not always (Dems gained in 1998, Reps in 2002)
  - **Info Tech** – Republicans had big adv in early 2000s in use of “Voter Vault” software to target segments of voters with carefully-crafted messages, Dems caught up and gained an advantage as Obama’s high-tech social media campaign methods were adopted more widely  
– but 2016 Trump Campaign’s controversial data use (Cambridge Analytica) suggests GOP may be pulling ahead again?

# ARE ELECTIONS CANDIDATE-CENTRED, WITH LITTLE ROLE FOR PARTIES?

## Conventional wisdom says YES

- **Candidates win or lose on**
  - personal characteristics
  - Personal policy positions
  - + record of service to constituents (favours incumbents but also those who have held other local elected office, e.g. FL & WV Govs running for Senate seat)
  - + ability to fundraise (incl spending their own fortunes – e.g. Meg Whitman \$140M 2010 in CA; Linda McMahon \$48M in CT in 2012 – & both lost! Most big self-funders do lose).
  - & Often distance themselves from party as a whole, esp if it is in power (Reps in 2008, Dems 2010->)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIJORBRpOPM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XL-xMAyCuOI>

# ARE ELECTIONS CANDIDATE-CENTRED, WITH LITTLE ROLE FOR PARTIES?

## ...YES cont. - Why?

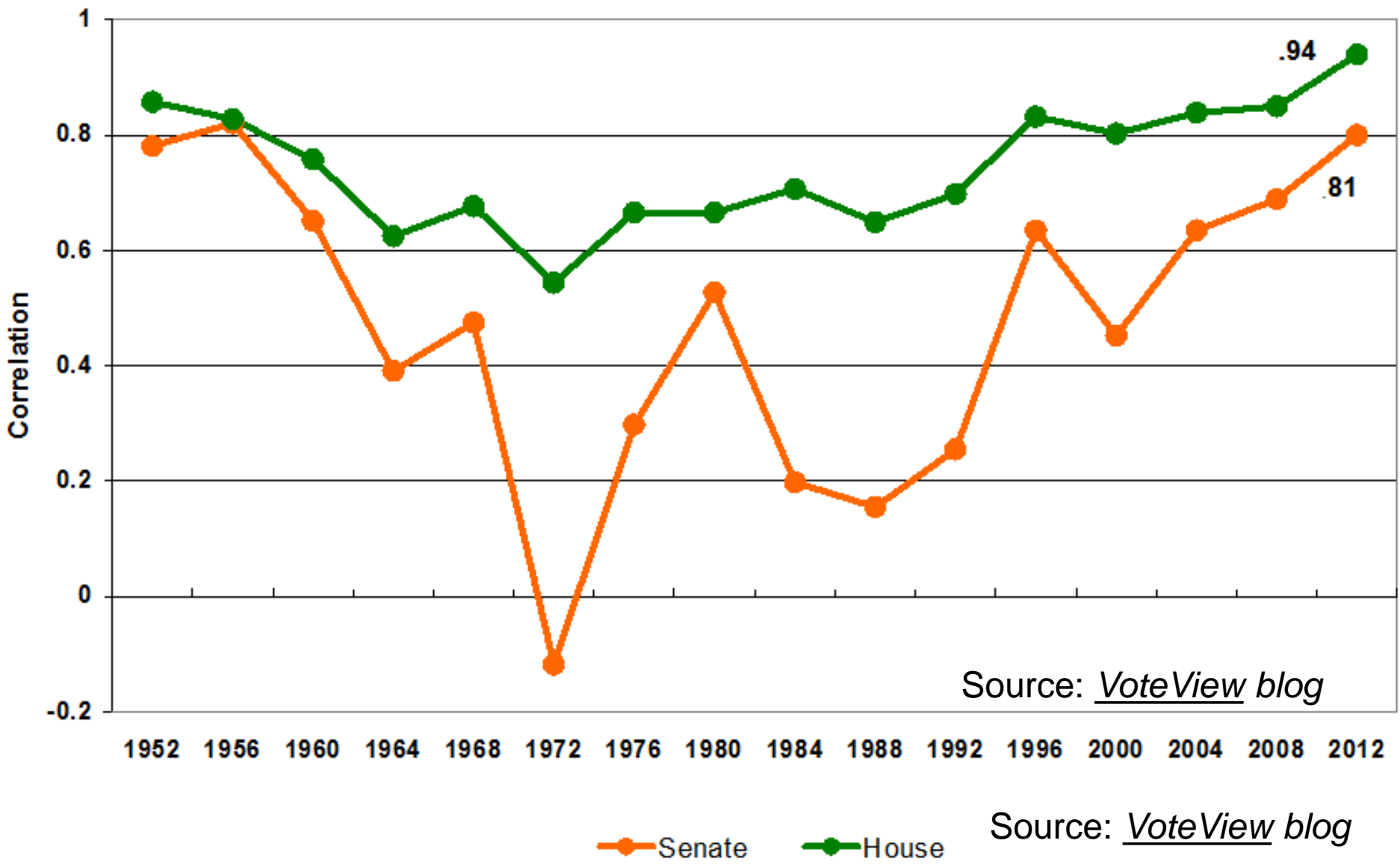
- primaries mean politicians have to run their own campaigns, dev distinctive personal message
- partisan dealignment 1950s -> meant more split-ticket voting
- death of old, C19th “spoils system” of party boss patronage
- huge diversity of USA, esp rural/heartland vs urban/coastal divide, means candidates toeing a strong party line would fail to win any seats in whole regions – so candidates for the same party adopt quite diff agenda depending on where they are running.

# ARE ELECTIONS CANDIDATE-CENTRED, WITH LITTLE ROLE FOR PARTIES?

## Counter-argument: NO - parties still play signif role

- Congressional leadership committees imp in fundraising & directing funding into particular races – e.g. 2016 GOP cttees put \$13M into OH Senate race - <https://www.opensecrets.org/parties/>
- Safe incumbents can transfer funds to more endangered party colleagues
- Senior party figures can influence primary & general election races, by endorsements & by encouraging or discouraging donors from backing a candidate – e.g. 2006 Dem leaders backed 11 veterans for fed office + e.g. Paul Ryan raised over \$90M for 2016 GOP efforts
  - BUT rel failure of Republican establ candidates in 2010 vs Tea Party surge; & Dems unable to get Arlen Specter chosen as Senate cand in PA. HoR Maj leader Eric Cantor defeated in GOP primary 2014.
- Rise in partisan alignment in Clinton/ Bush years? Obama too? White evangelicals now clearly loyal Reps, blacks to Dems Source: *VoteView blog*
- Pres can often influence races, esp when Pres is v pop (Bush 2002, 2004) candts wish to be assoc with them. Even unpop Pres can shape debate & may boost party seats (Ob visiting DE Oct 2010) Source: *Yotivlog blog*

Figure 2 Correlations Between the the Presidential Congressional Vote at the State and District Levels, 1952-2012





## Figure 2 Correlations Between the the Presidential Congressional Vote at the State and District Levels, 1952-2012

**Table 5 The District-Level Presidential Vote and House Results, 2000-2012**

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House Election Year	Presidential Vote Year	House/President Vote Correlation	% Winners Correctly Predicted	Value of Incumbency
2000	2000	.80	80.4	12.1
2002	2000	.81	86.2	12.6
2004	2004	.84	86.4	11.3
2006	2004	.84	83.5	9.9
2008	2008	.85	80.7	9.6
2010	2008	.92	91.3	6.8
<b>2012</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>.94</b>	<b>93.3</b>	<b>4.8</b>

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Source: Compiled by author.

Source: *VoteView blog*