

15.9 – Incumbency advantage #1

- Fenno's paradox (again)
- Overview – what's incumbency advantage?
- Five explanations (mine, not Mayhew's)
 - Continued into next lecture

Fenno's paradox

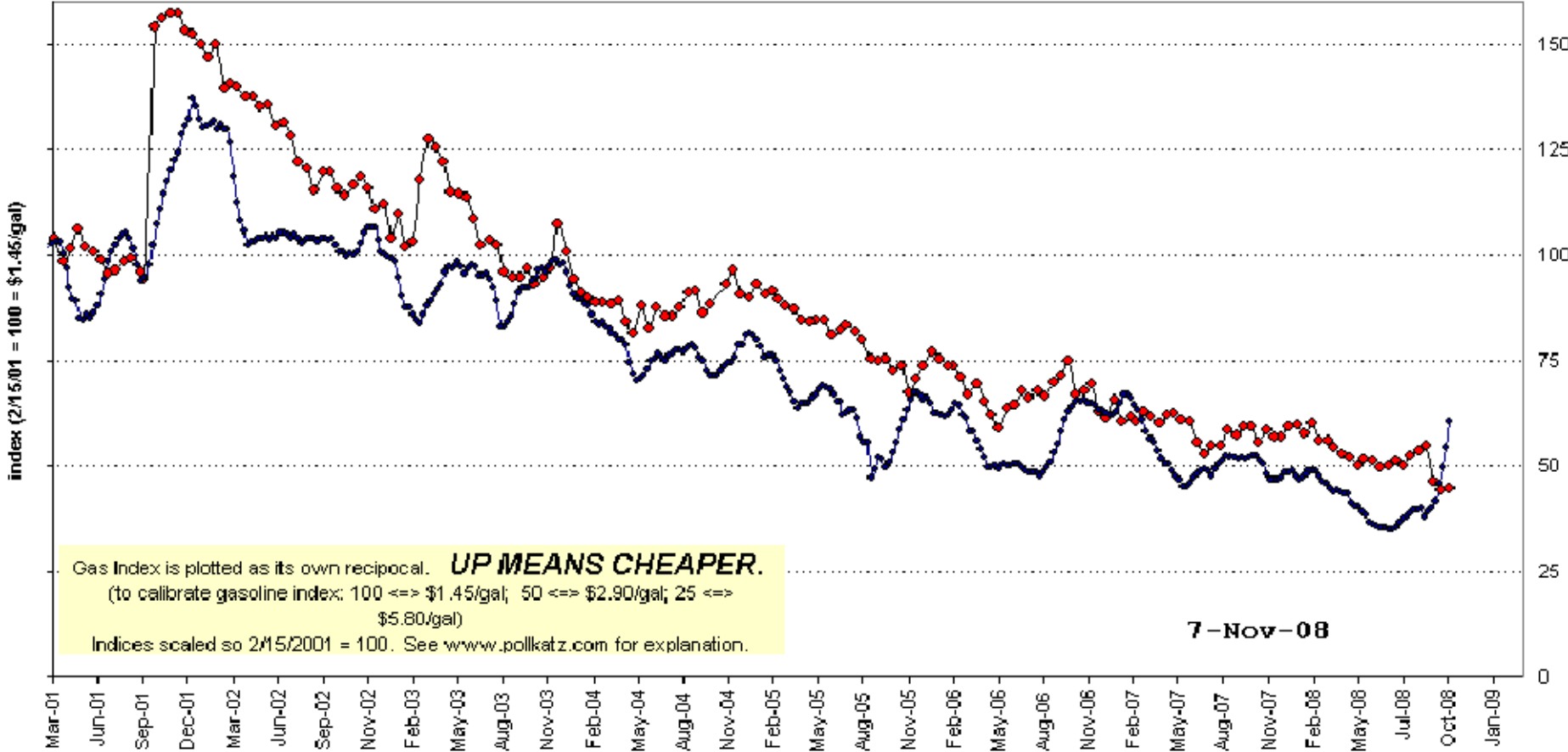
- People hate Congress, but love their own congressman or congresswoman
 - In other words, individual popularity unrelated to institutional popularity
- Is this surprising?
 - Yes: Congress is a collective enterprise
 - Yes: Gov't judged by results (e.g. Bush popular when people satisfied with the nation's direction, unpopular when they aren't)
 - Gas price example from www.pollkatz.com

Bush Approval: In Fact It's a Gas?

Bush Index and Gasoline Price Index

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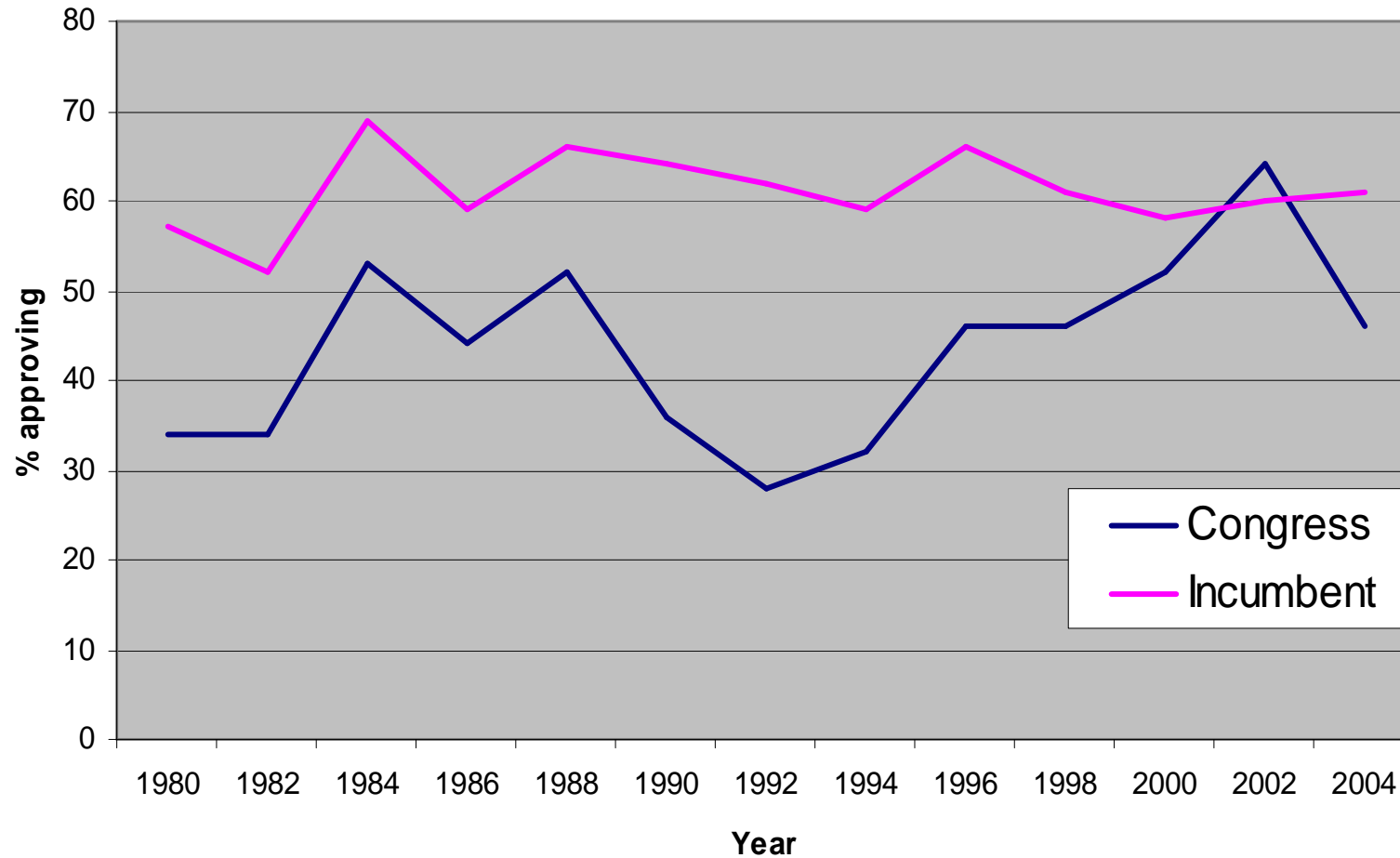
—●— bush index —◆— (reciprocal) gasoline index



How do we know Fenno's right?

Approval of Congress & Incumbents

(source: ANES)



How is this possible?

- Global answer: individual candidates manage to develop some sort of personal reputation or popularity
 - Vs what? (last week's slide on personal reputation)
- Mayhew
 - 5 explanations for increased margins
 - 4 related to actions by incumbents to protect selves
 - Phenomenon of vanishing marginals almost entirely result of gains in incumbents' margins

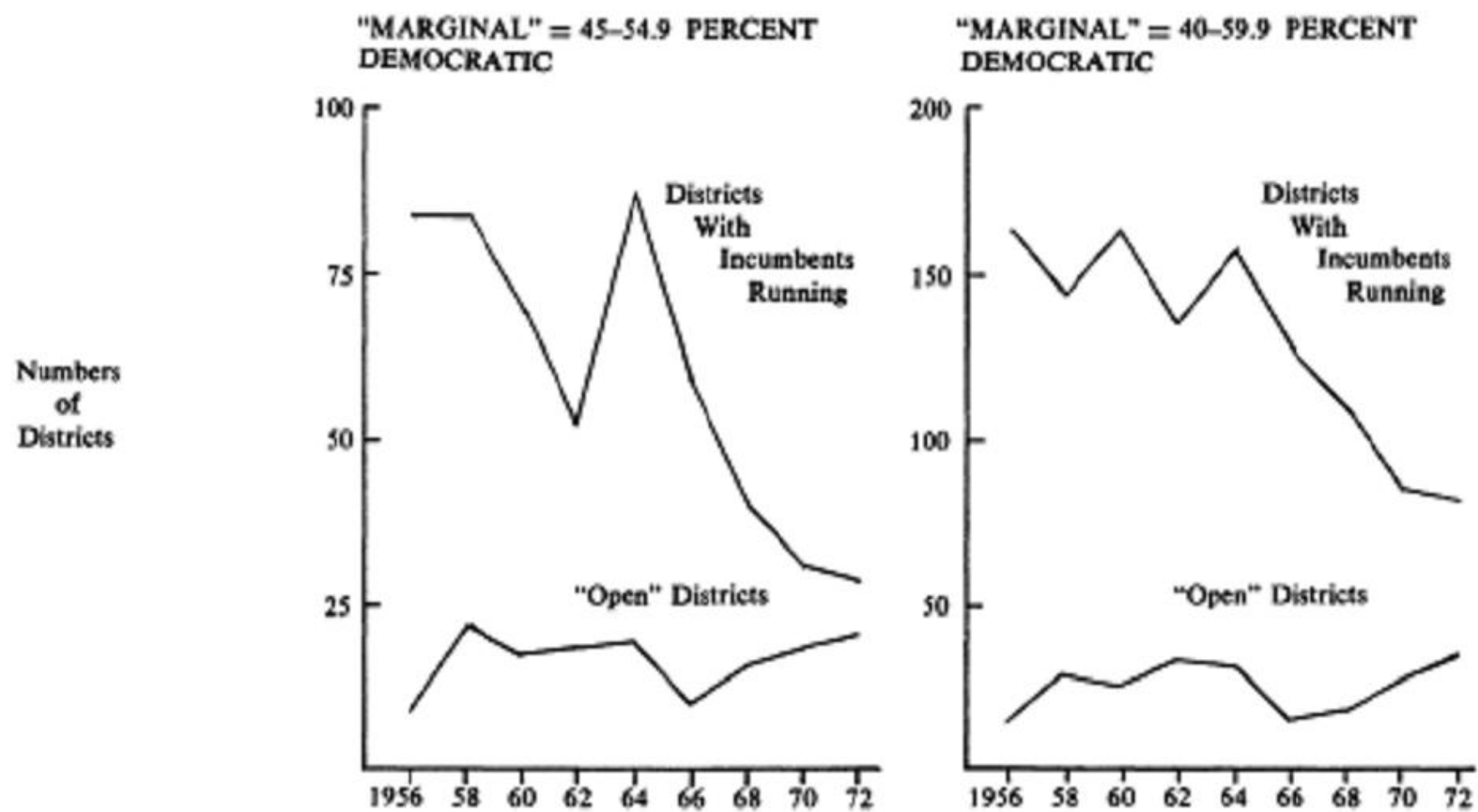


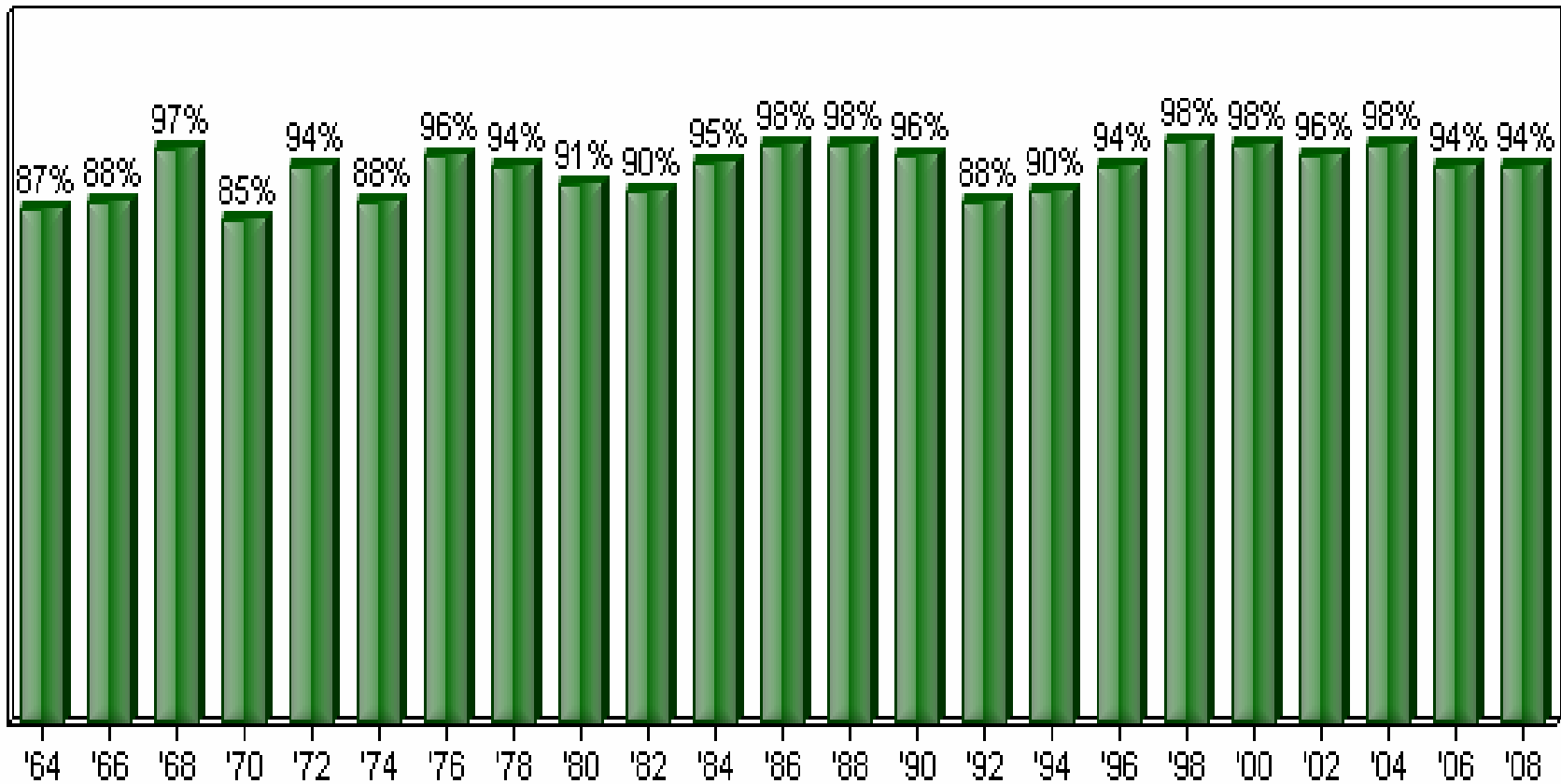
FIGURE 2. Numbers of House Elections Won in the "Marginal" Range, 1956-1972, in Districts With and Without Incumbents Running

Just how big is incumbency
advantage?

House Reelection rates

(Opensecrets.com)

US House Reelection Rates, 1964-2006



Average incumbent vote

(source: Jacobson 2008)

The Incumbency Factor 31

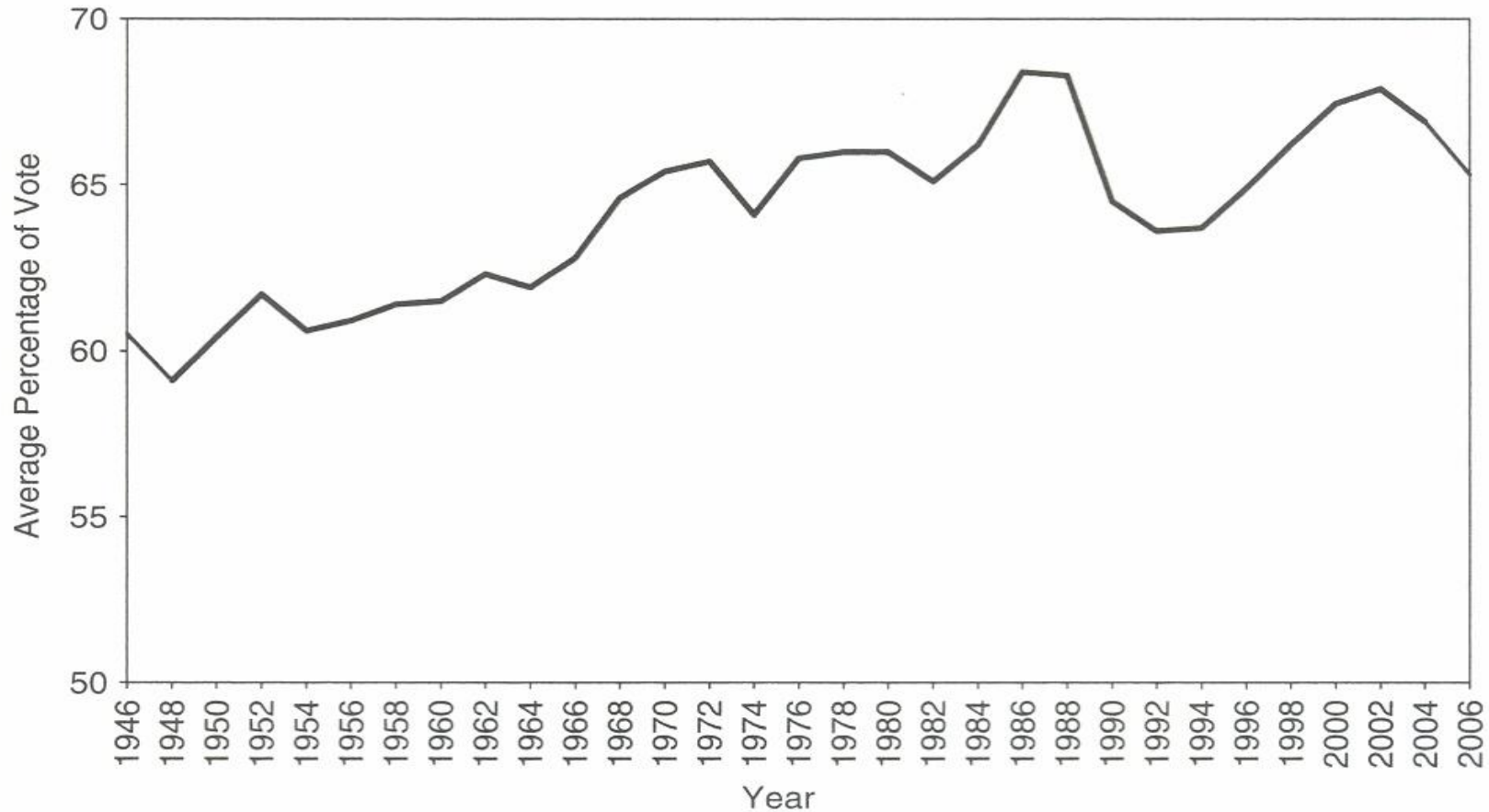


FIGURE 3-2 Average Percent of the Major Party Vote Won by House Incumbents in Contested Elections, 1946-2006

Source: Compiled by Author.

Declining “marginals”

(source: Jacobson 2008)

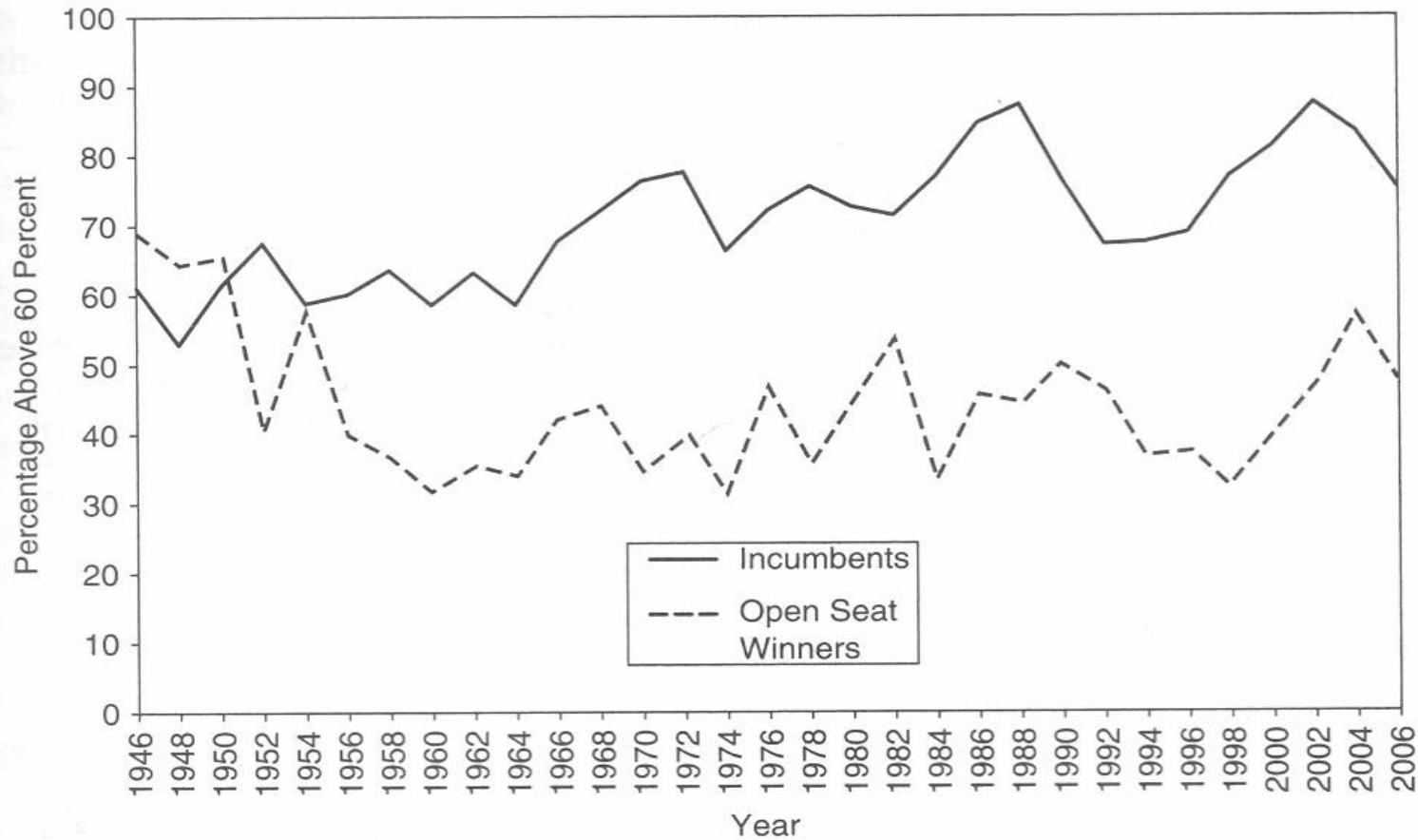
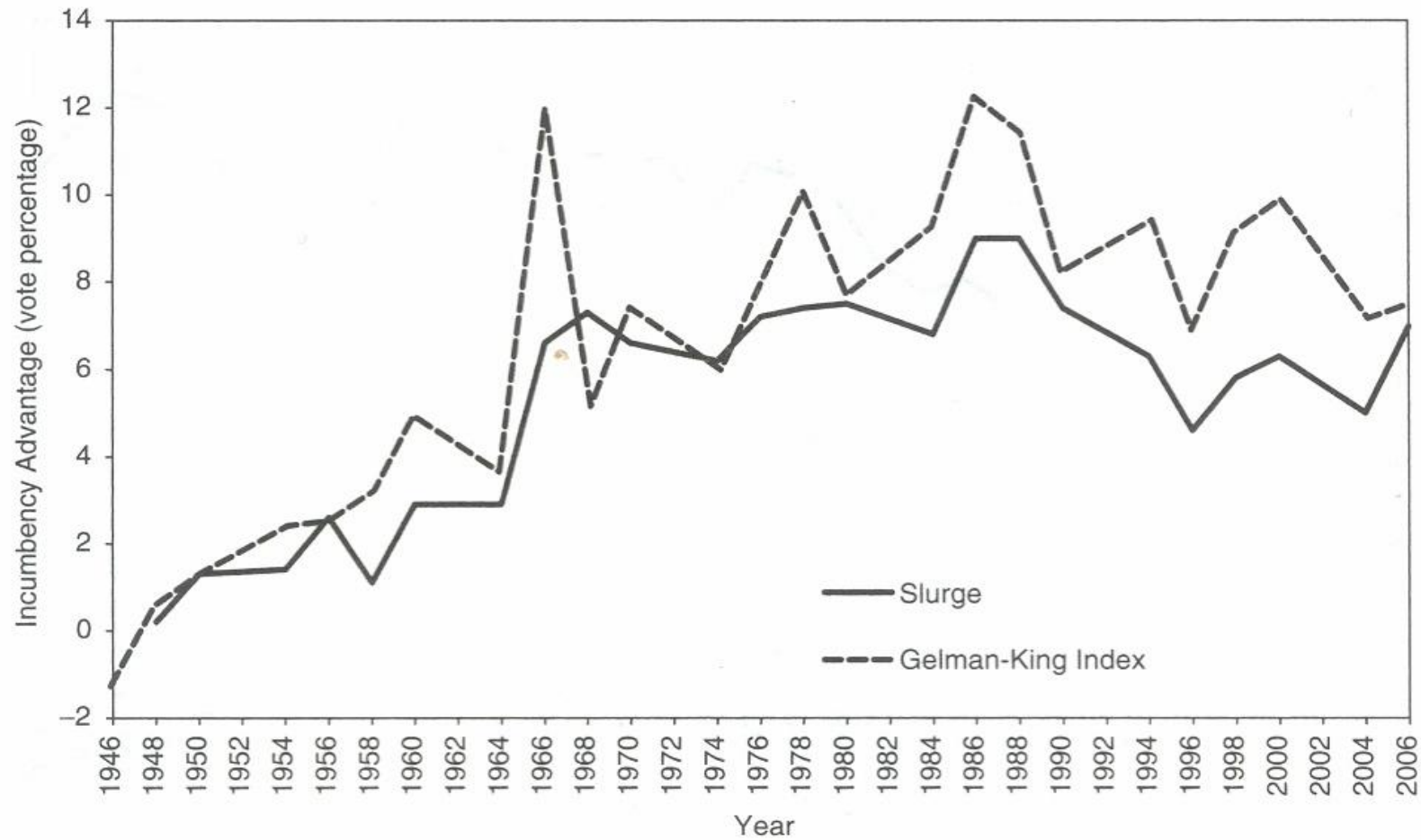


FIGURE 3-4 House Candidates Receiving More Than 60 Percent of the Major-Party Vote, 1946–2006

Estimating incumbency advantage

32 Chapter 3 Congressional Candidates



Some examples of “sophomore surge”

- NY 24
 - 2006: Arcuri wins by 8.9
 - 2008: Arcuri wins by 2
- NY 20
 - 2006: Gillibrand by 6.2
 - 2008: Gillibrand by 23.6
- NY 19
 - 2006: Hall by 2.4
 - 2008: Hall by 17.3
- PA 10
 - 2006: Carney by 6
 - 2008: Carney by 12

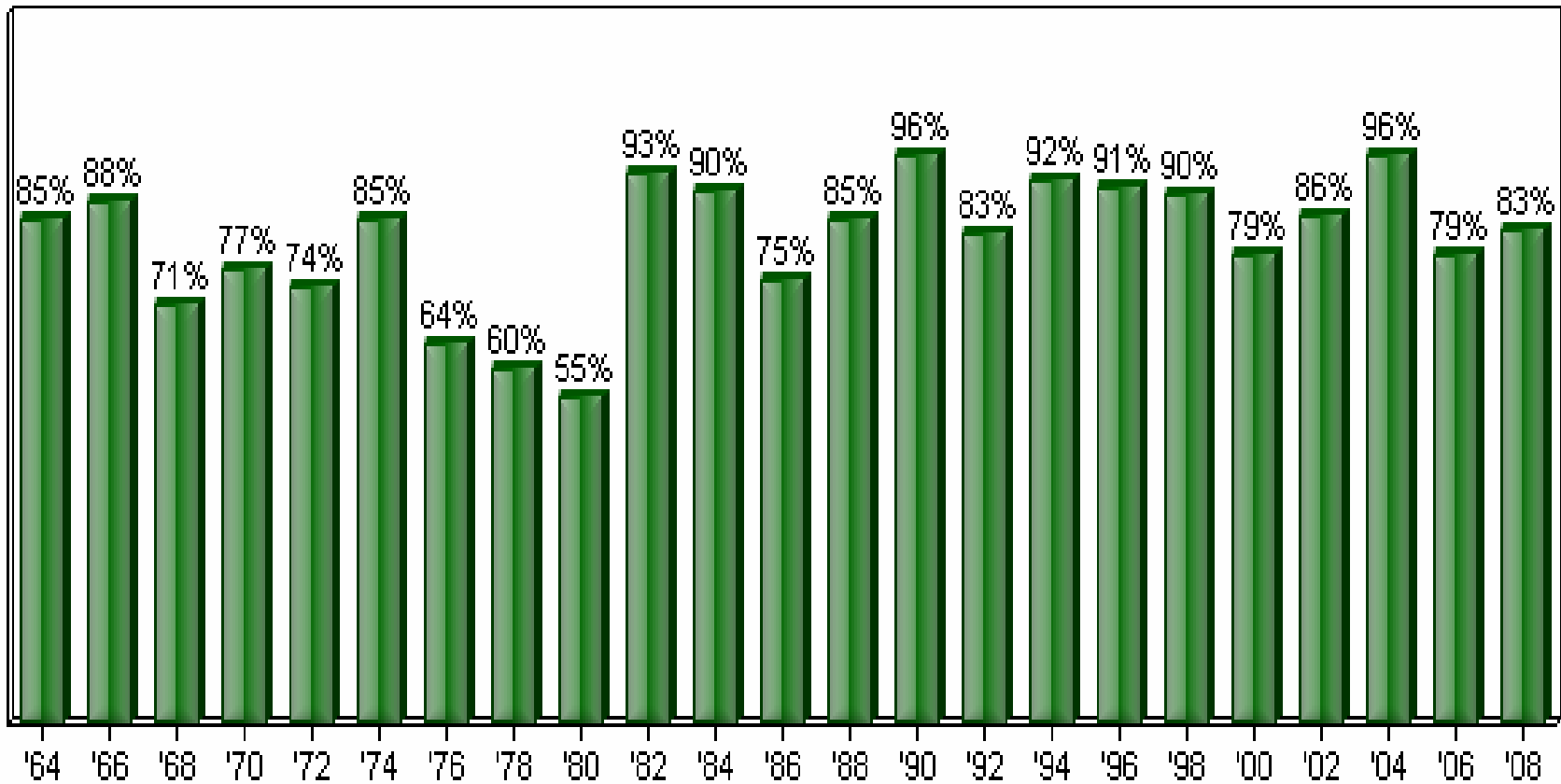
Notice that all these examples refer to House only, not Senate

- Why?
 - Analytical advantages
 - Big numbers, equal sized districts (esp. after 1964)
- What's the story in the Senate?
 - Harder to characterize because of class fluctuations

Senate Reelection rates

(Opensecrets.com)

US Senate Reelection Rates, 1964-2006



Two rules for voting

- Voters support candidates from their own party
- Voters support incumbents
- Question 1: what happens if the two conflict?
 - *Incumbency advantage*
- Question 2: what happens if there is no incumbent?
 - *Ans: open seats v. incumbent-contested seats*

What do we mean by party?

- Survey items:
 - NES: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?”
 - Gallup: “In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?”
- Alternative explanations:
 - Party ID as an enduring affiliation
 - Party ID as a political counter
- What about independents?

Implications

- Huge difference between races with and without incumbent
 - Recognize from Mann & Wolfinger?
- Are there any differences between races *with* incumbents?
 - Do all incumbents do so well?
 - If not, why?
- è theories of incumbency advantage
 - Why do most incumbents do so well?
 - (and why don't all of them always do well)

Five theories of incumbency advantage

- “The bureaucracy did it” (Fiorina)
- “The ‘perks’ of office”
- Districting
- Campaign spending
- Challenger quality

The bureaucracy

- Changing nature of gov't è more programs, more services for individuals
- Credit claiming
- Intervention
 - Fiorina's line: congressmen as caseworkers
- What do you think? Is this convincing?

“Perks” (perquisites of office)

- Enhancing communication & presence
 - Franking privilege
 - 1962 @ 110 million pieces of mail; currently > 600 million
 - Staff
 - Typically one secretary in 1930s; today 20 - 30
 - Free phone (used to be a big deal...)
 - Trips home
 - 1962 = 3 paid, today unlimited
 - Office space
- Davidson and Oleszak value perks at @ \$1 million
- What do you think? Is this convincing?

A closing questions for you to think and/or write about...

Is the high reelection rate of U.S. congressmen and congresswomen a sign that the system is working (perhaps because voters know and like their representatives) or a sign that the system is broken and impervious to popular control? Do you share Mayhew's concerns about the vanishing marginals?