Slippage among the Experts

Agency Costs in Partisan Election Regulation

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Mat McCubbins Memorial Conference, UCSD

Our work on Mexican election regulation

Before: Party watchdog model, congressional parties delegate

- Expect party segmentation of IFE's Council General
- Ideal point estimation confirms

Now: Longitudinal approach to study councilor drift 1996–2014

- Still exploratory
- New puzzles emerge

The Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)

- Nine-member, non-partisan regulatory board
- Ran federal elections nationwide 1997–2012
- Congress appoints members by super-majority for 7-year terms
- Public roll call votes
- Upgraded in 2014 to also regulate subnational races (INE)

PRI (later others) conceded,
how did IFE achieve this?

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IFE's success story: conventional arguments

- IFE as *ombusdman* representing citizens directly
  (Eisenstadt 2004, Ackerman 2004)
- Budget and tenure security
- Congressional appointment yet no inevitable bias in experts
  (Schedler 2000, Woldenberg 2008)

$$\text{Independence} + \text{impartiality} \rightarrow \text{citizen trust}$$

Public opinion

	% trust
Church	72
IFE	**67**
Army	65
Congress	35
Parties	34

Reforma poll May 2005

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Our argument owes much to Mat

Congressional parties (principal) structure a referee (agent) that they can influence

High stakes: IFE has authority over every aspect of party life

- voter registration
- redistricting
- nominations
- campaign content
- allocates TV spots
- campaign finance
- who clears subsidy hurdle
- ...

Careful delegation $\rightarrow$ **party** trust $\rightarrow$ citizen trust

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Our argument

Contract design (Kiewiet & McCubbins 1991)

- Screening
  - formally non-partisan
  - super-majority rule
  - party quotas/veto (informal)
- Monitoring
  - party reps in board and committees
  - constant signalling
- Carrots/sticks
  - routine impeachment threats, some took place
  - budget cuts
  - nuclear option (electoral reform)
- Checks and balances
  - split in thirds
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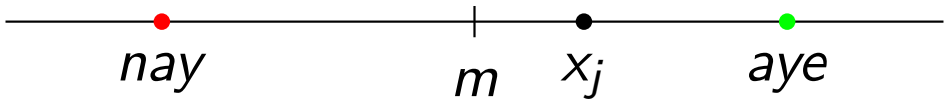
From http://reforma.com.mx 8/29/2007

Stochastic spatial voting



Vote propensity: $v_j^* = \texttt{signal}(x_j - m) + \texttt{error}$

Voting is sincere: $v_j = \begin{cases} 1 \text{ ('aye')} \iff v_j^* \geq 0 \\ 0 \text{ ('nay') otherwise} \end{cases}$

Dynamics: $x_{j,t} \sim \mathrm{N}(x_{j,t-1}, \text{slack})$ (cf. Martin&Quinn 2002, also Bonica 2010)

Small committee: Bayesian estimation via MCMC simulation

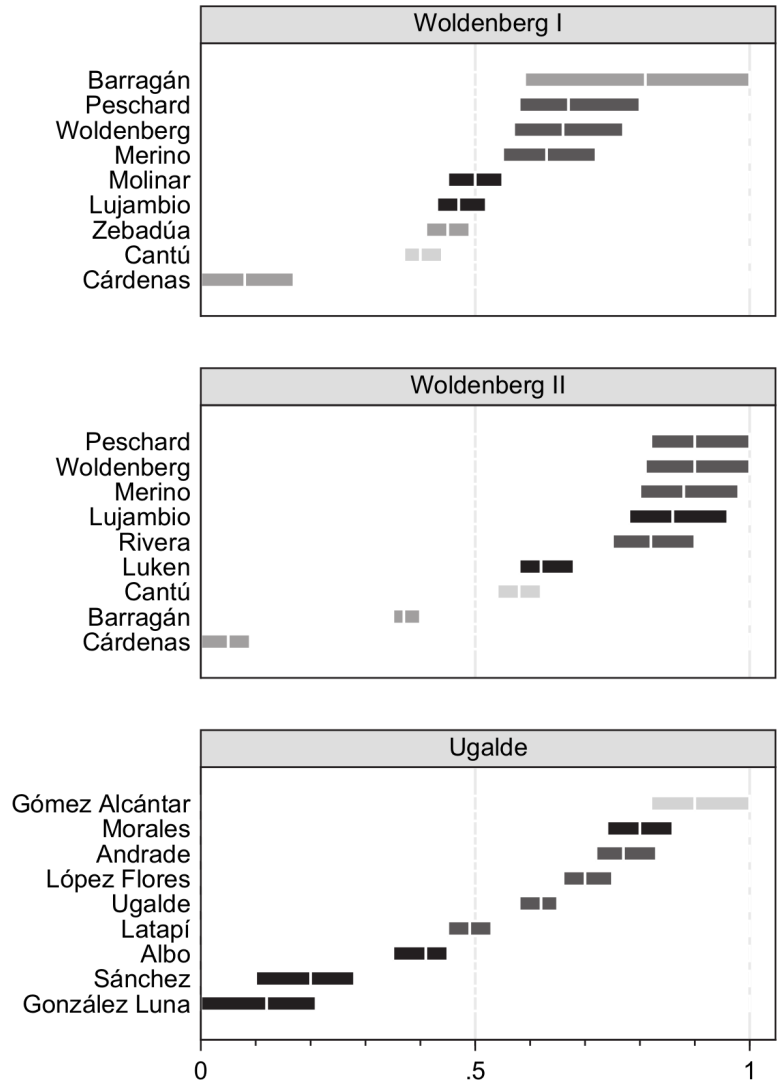
Identification Votes

Expectations

Ideal point summarizes member's voting record vis-à-vis rest, proximity = vote likeness

1. Contiguity/superimposition of same-sponsor members
2. Party segmentation
3. Move in tandem
4. Gatekeeping: blocking divisive issues brings most together
5. Vanishing principal: drift should *follow*

Evidence


Woldenberg I
Barragán
Peschard
Woldenberg
Merino
Molinar
Lujambio
Zebadúa
Cantú
Cárdenas
Woldenberg II
Peschard
Woldenberg
Merino
Lujambio
Rivera
Luken
Cantú
Barragán
Cárdenas
Ugalde
Gómez Alcántar
Morales
Andrade
López Flores
Ugalde
Latapí
Albo
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González Luna
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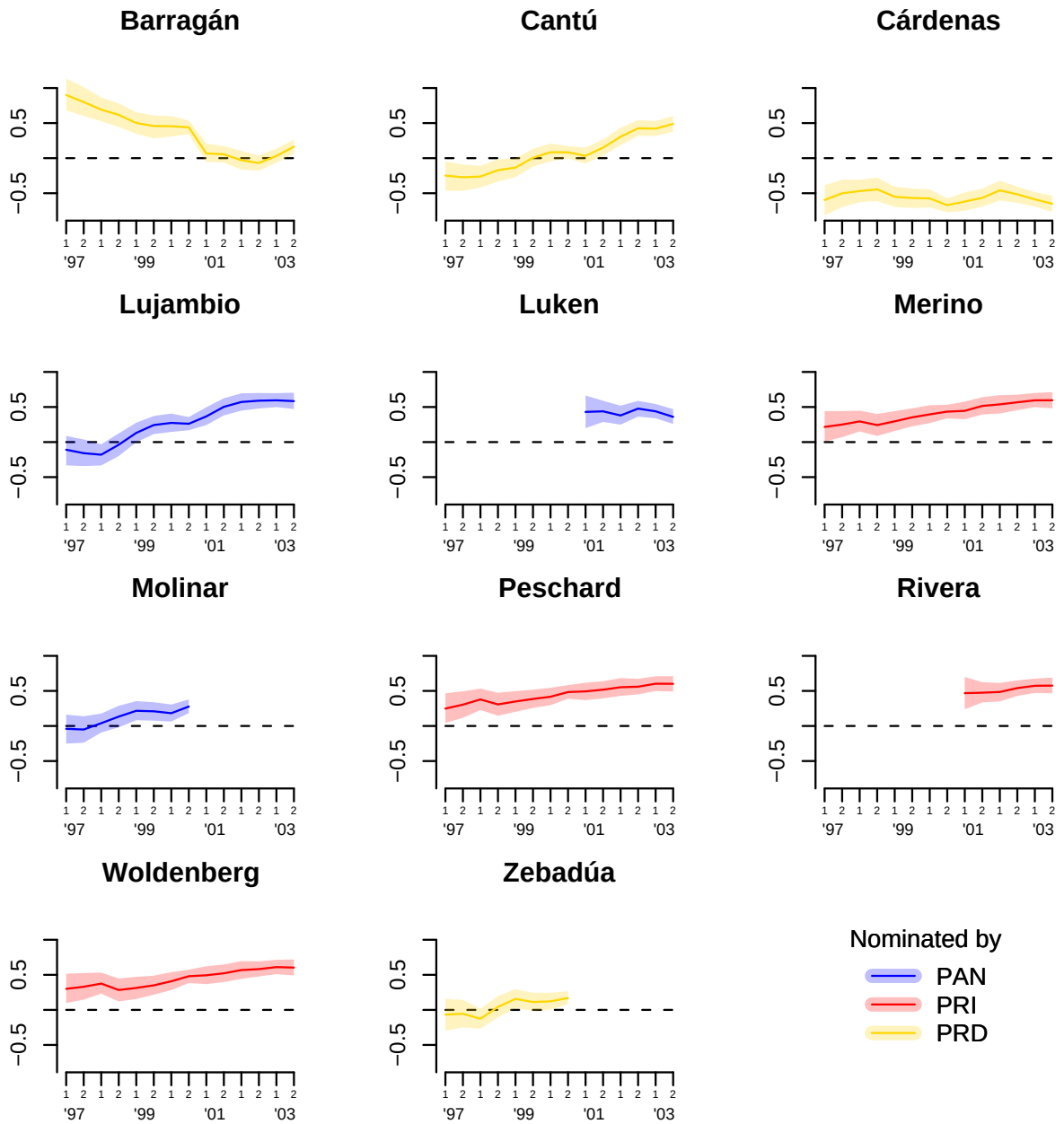
1

Overview stability & change



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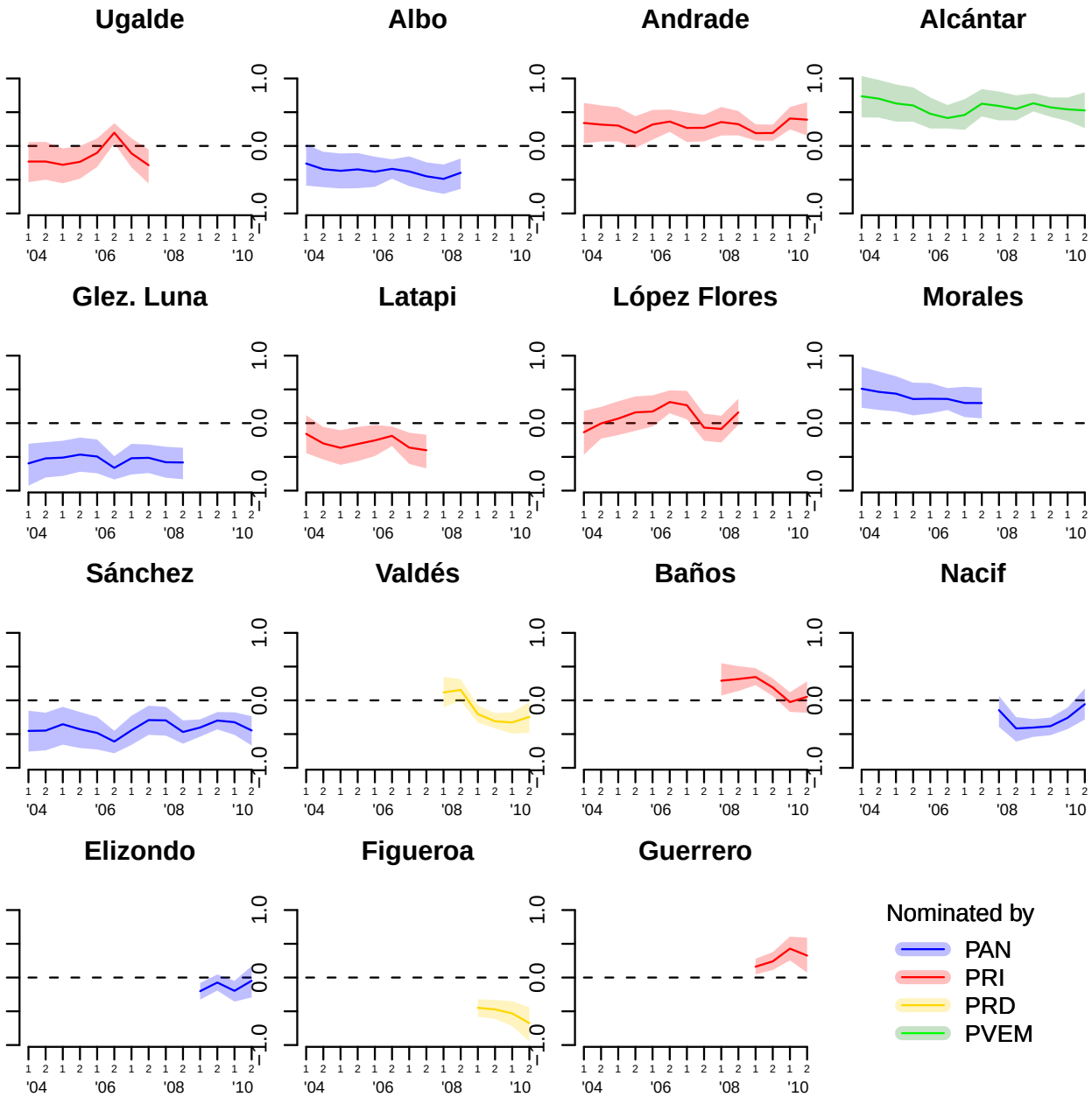

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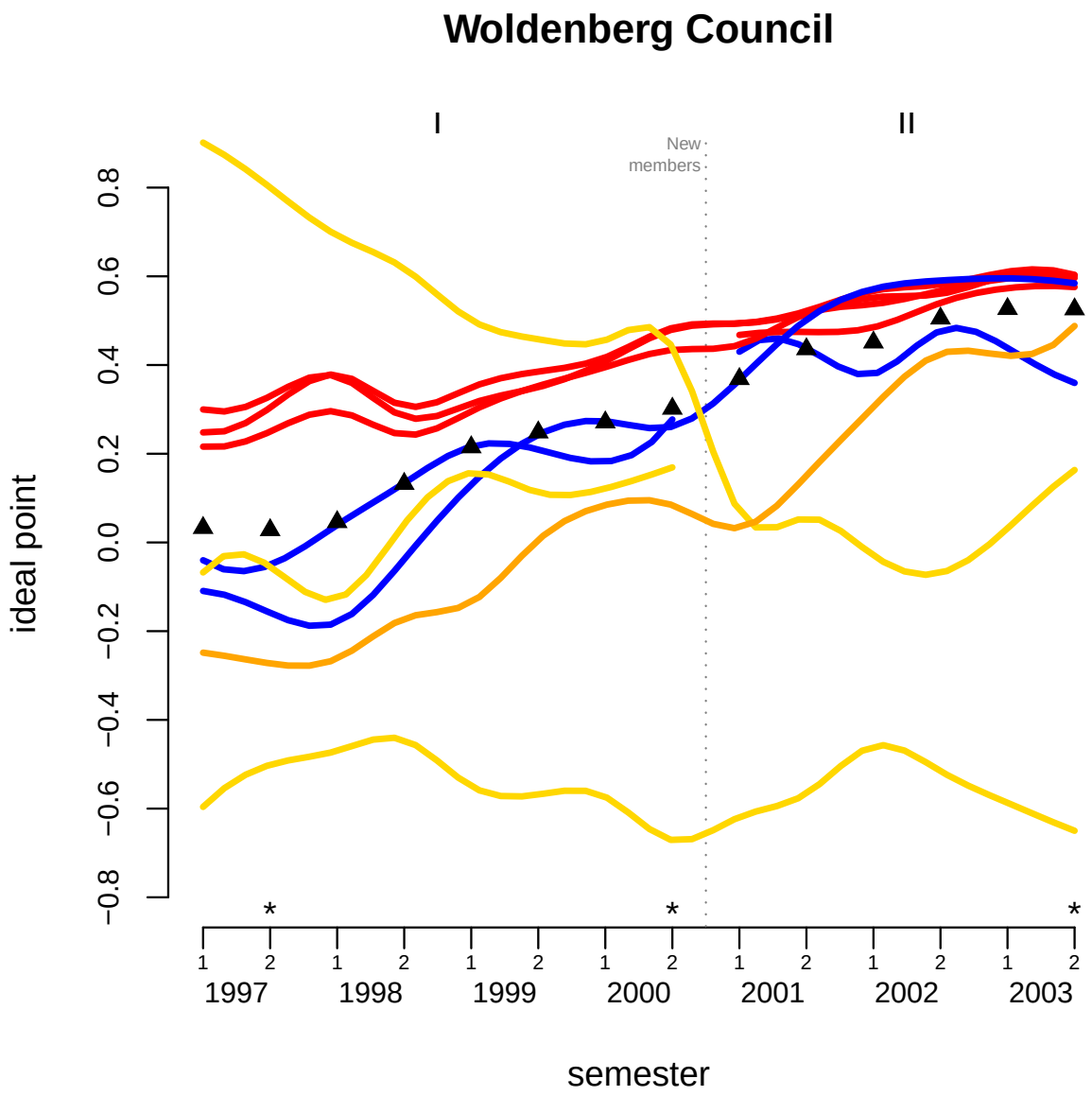

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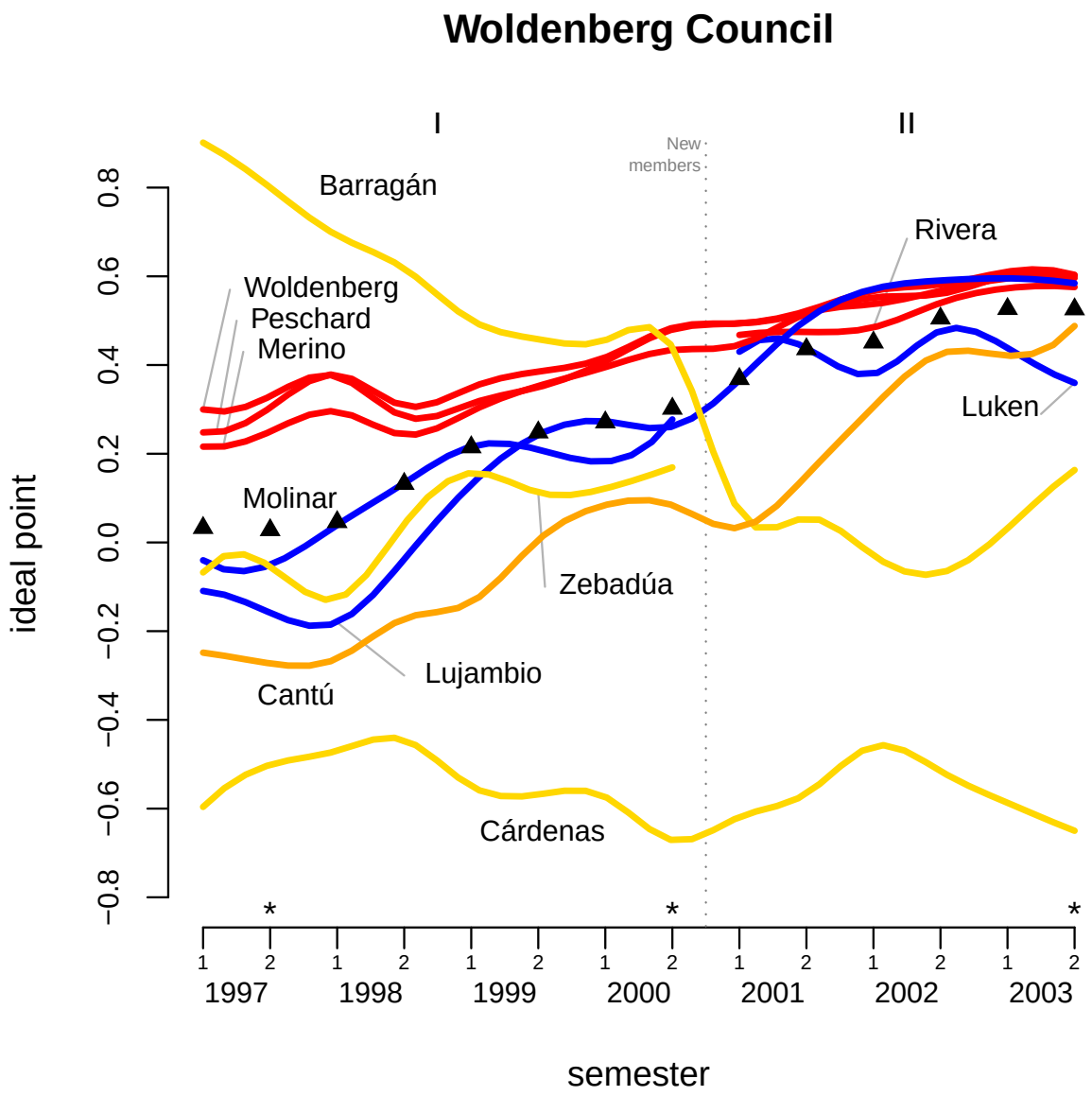

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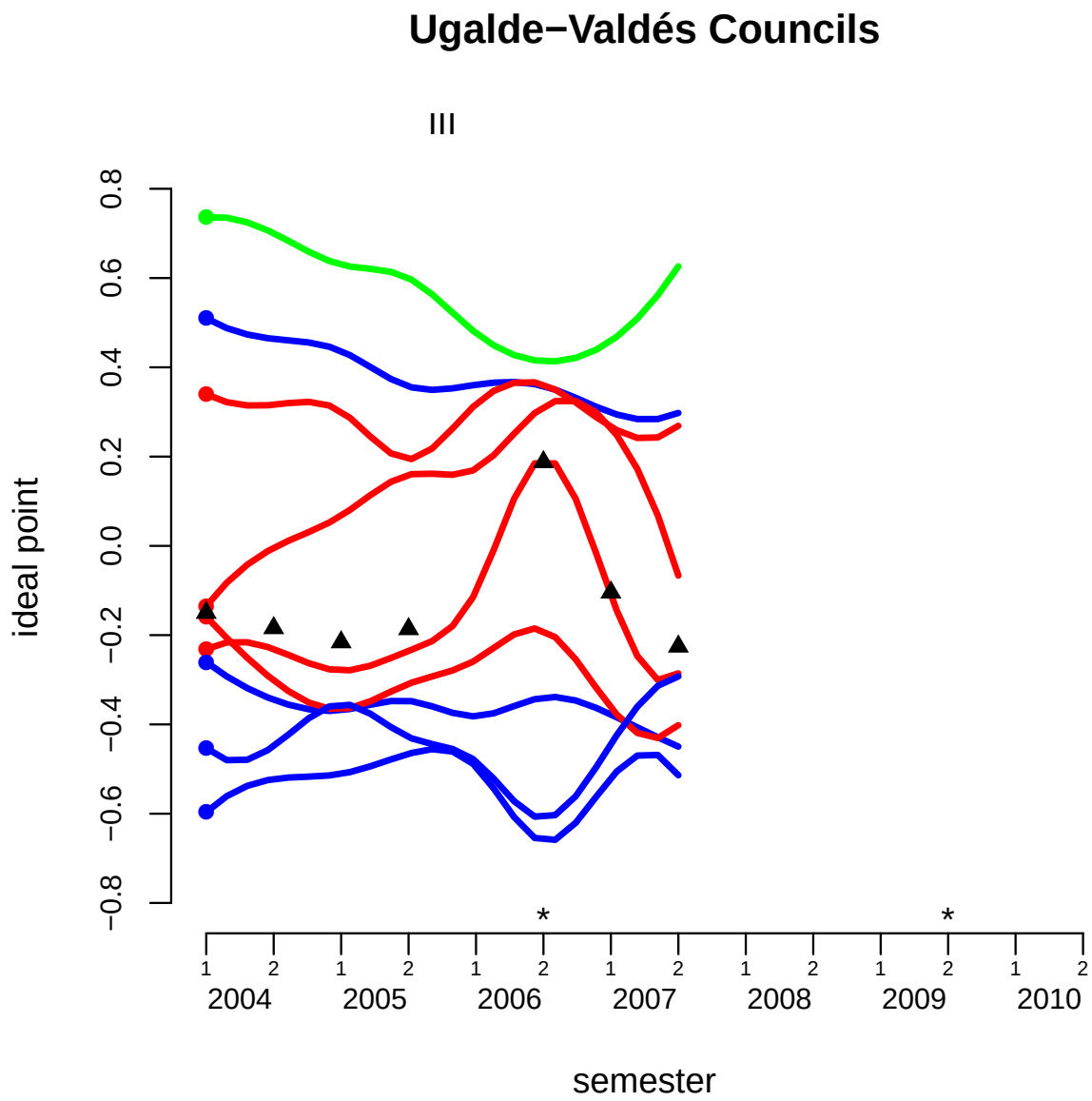

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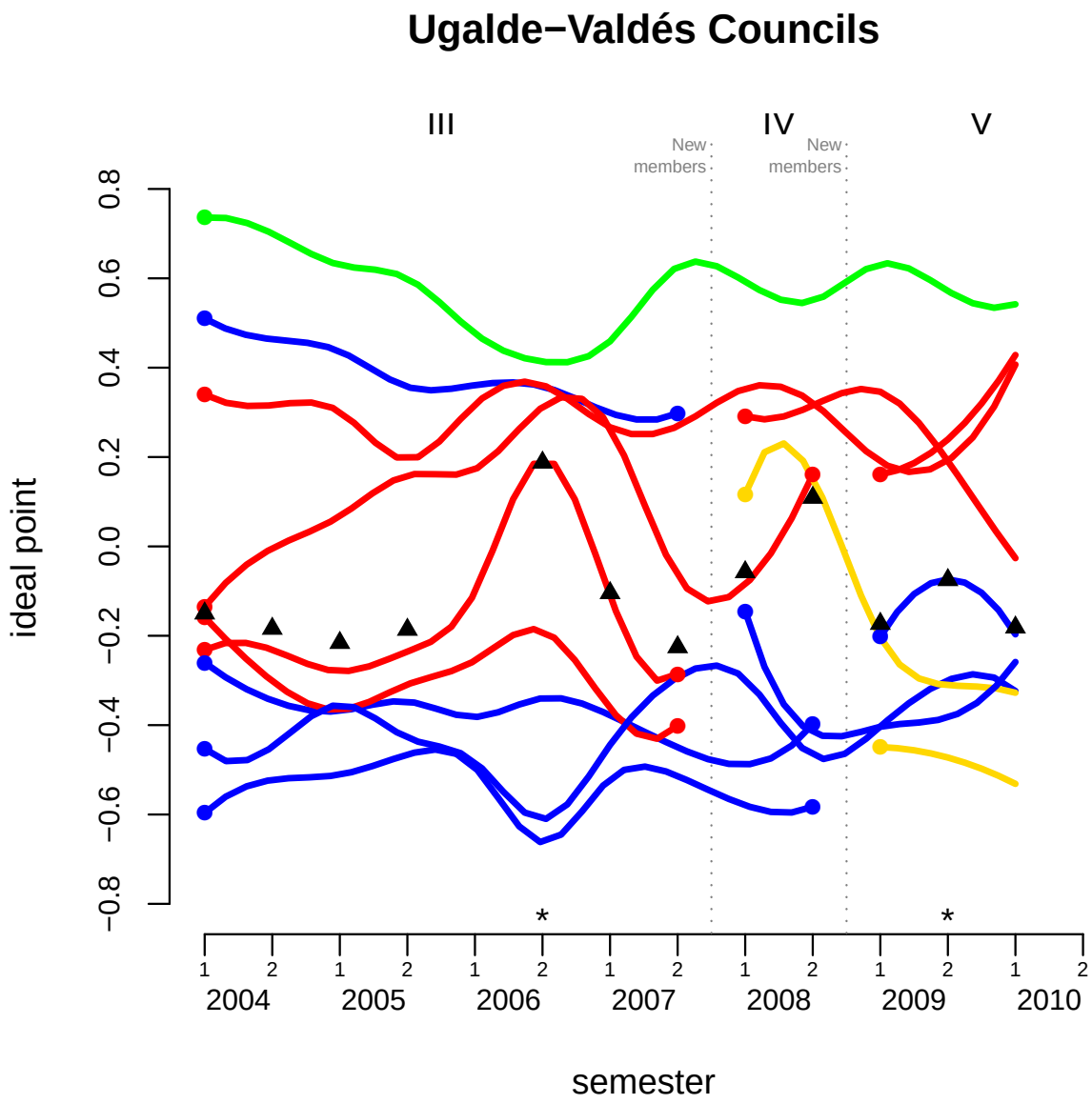

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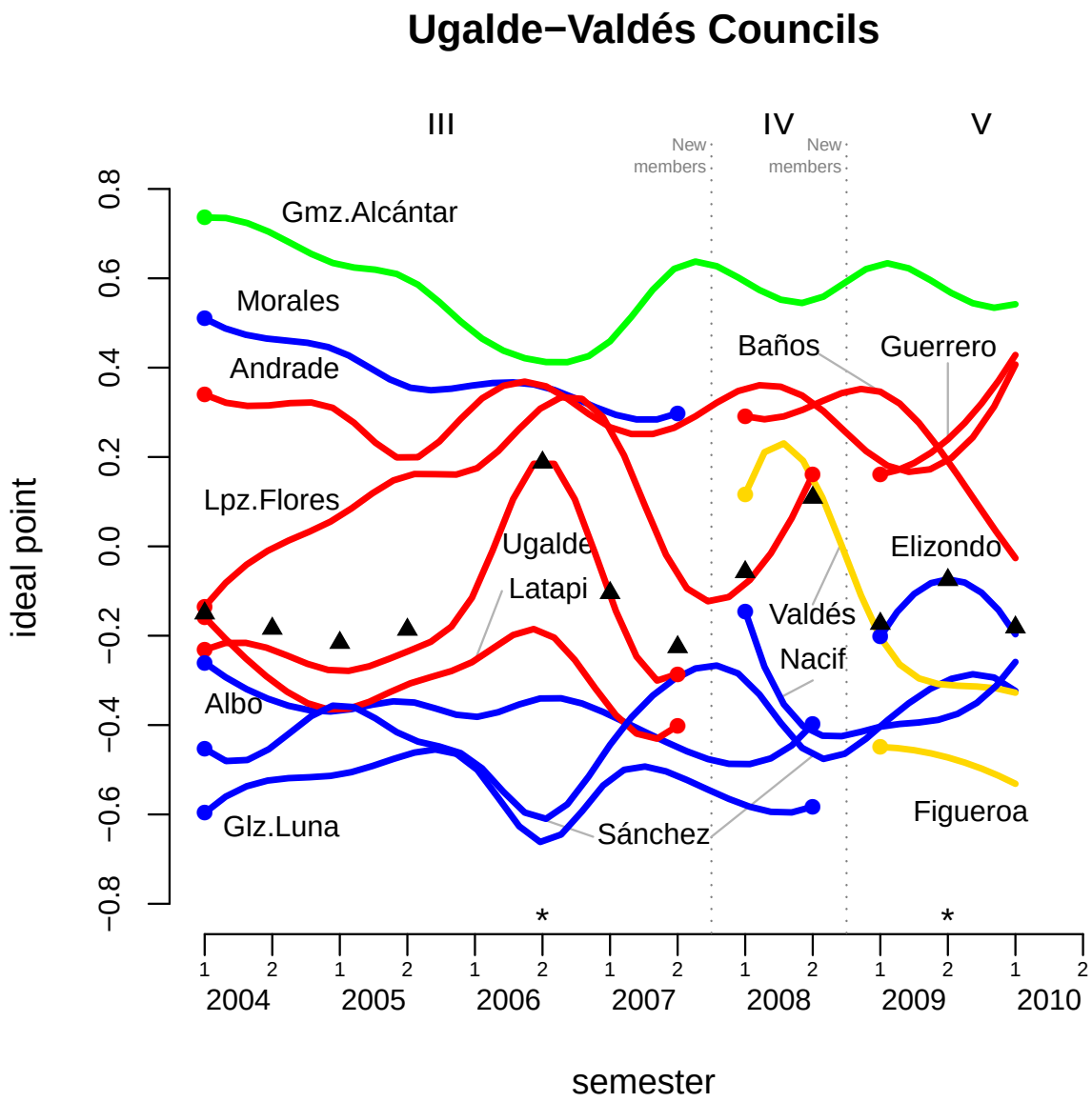

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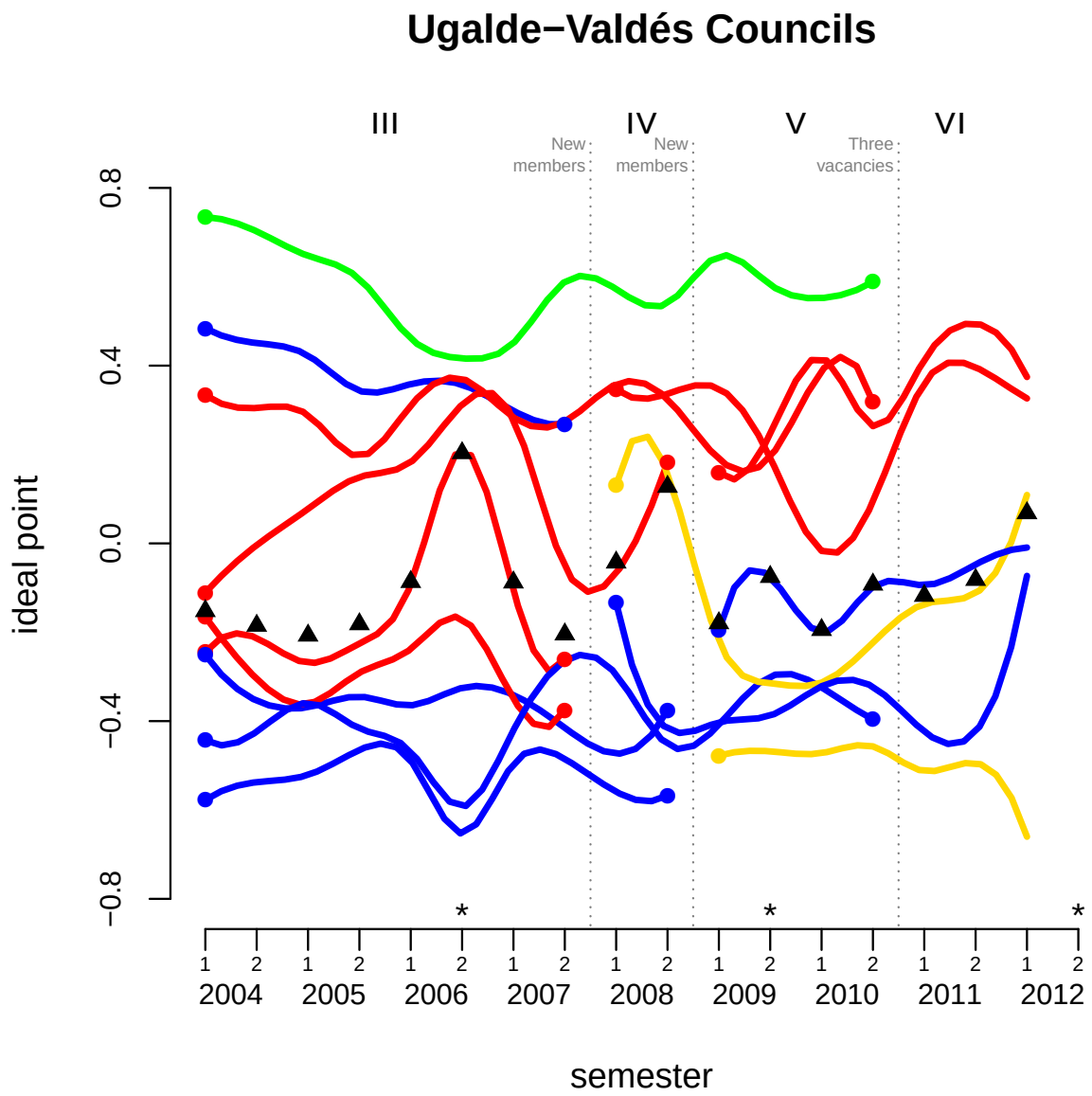
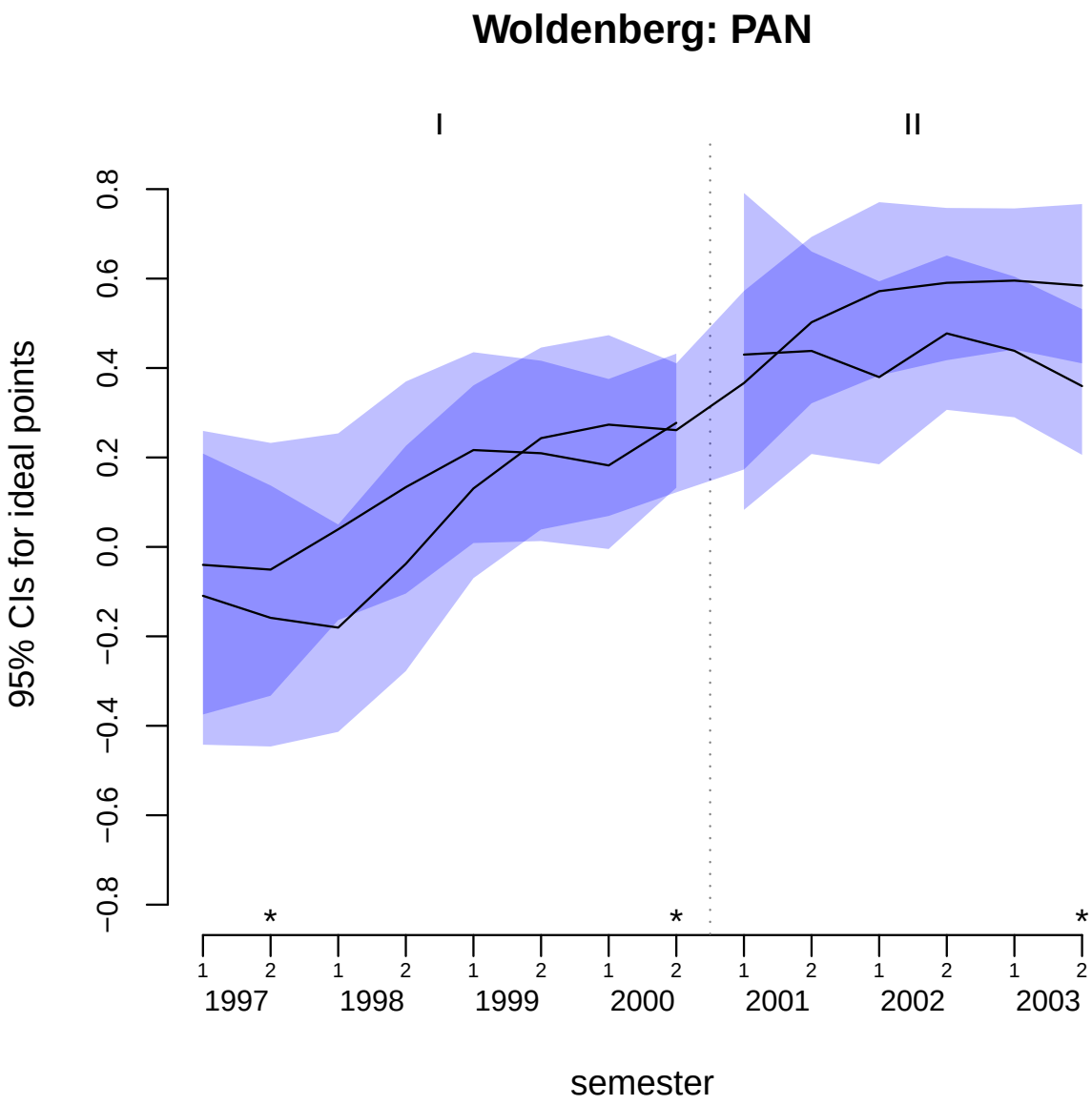


Clustering and overlaps



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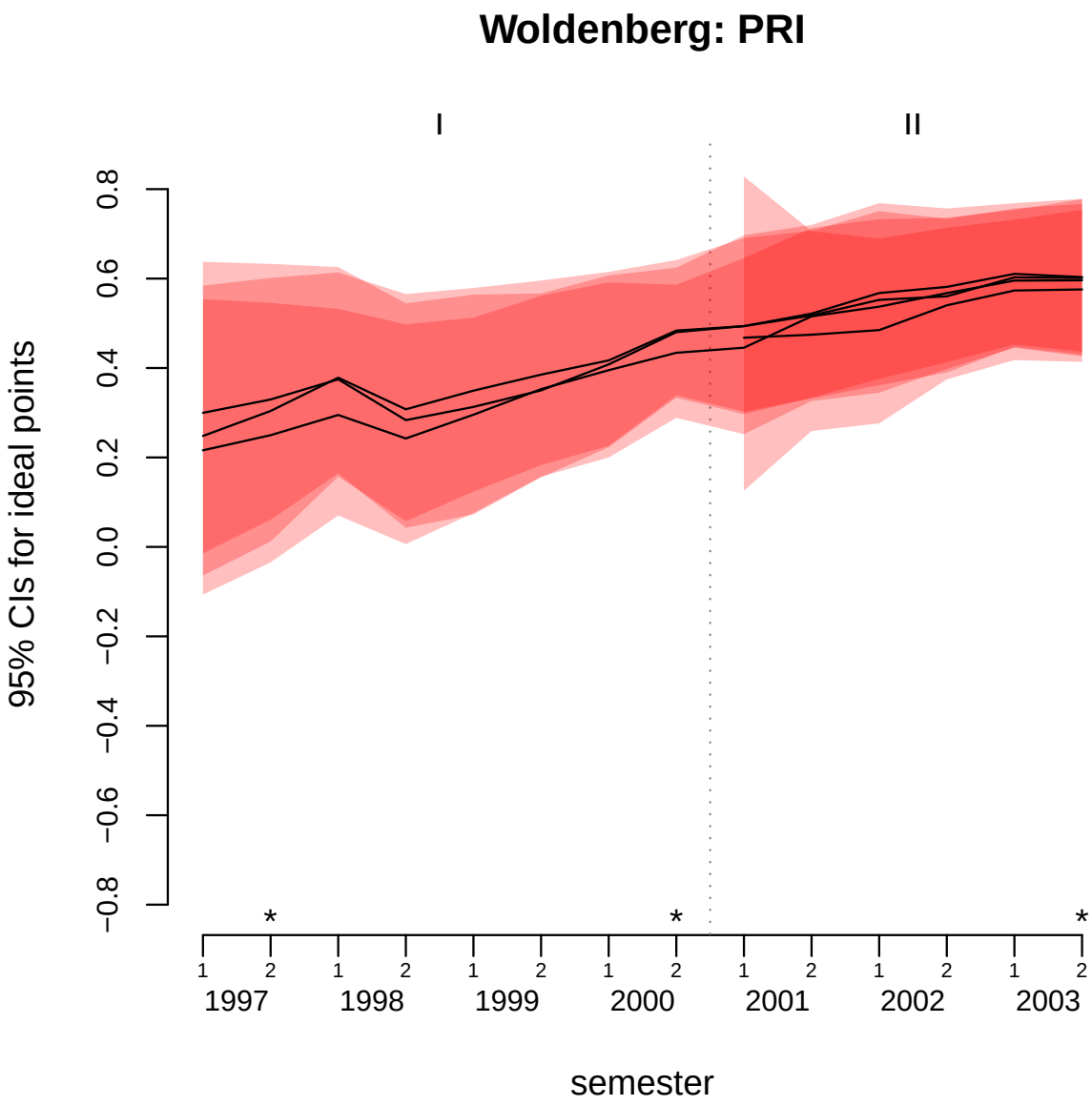

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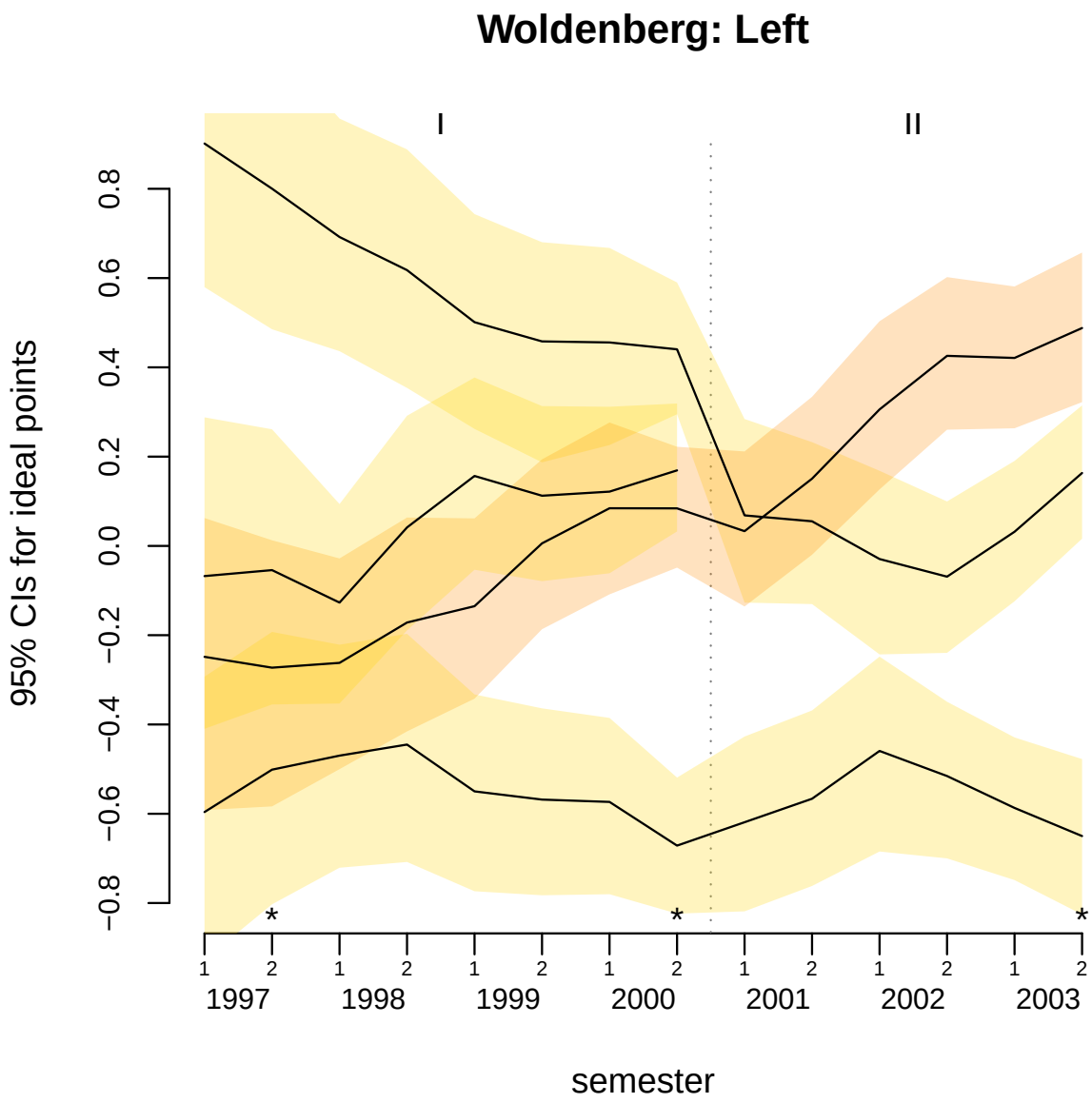

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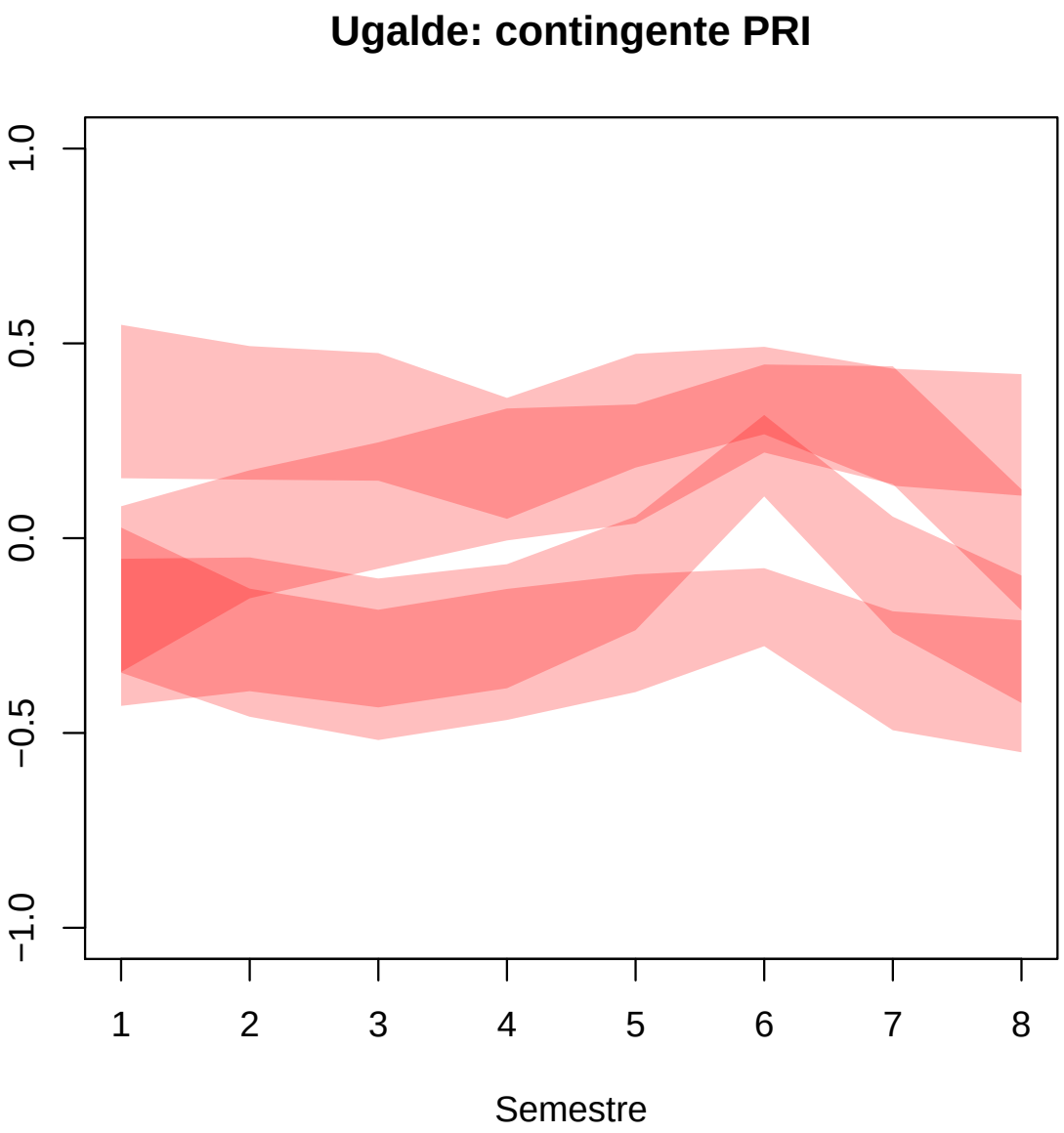

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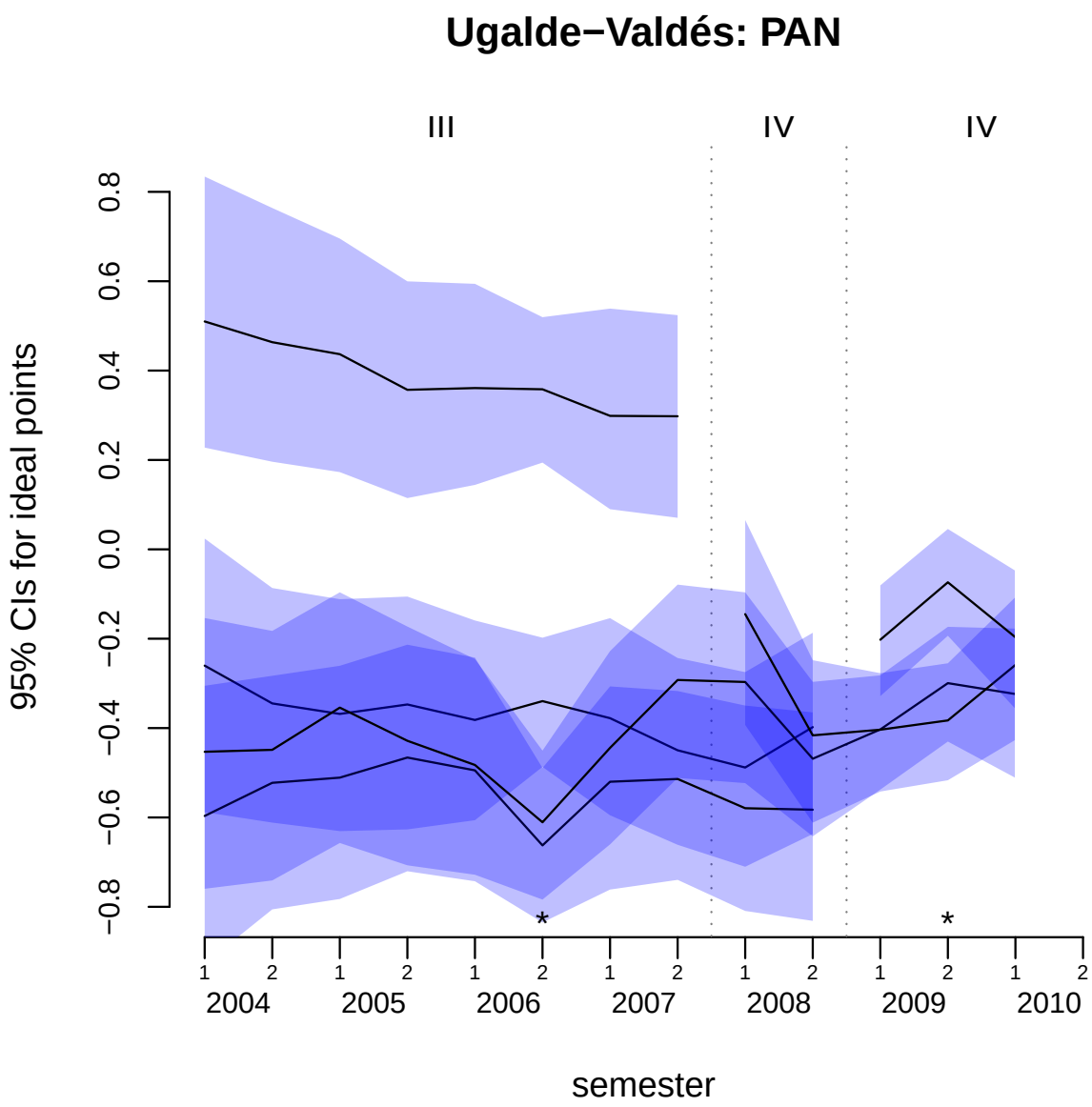

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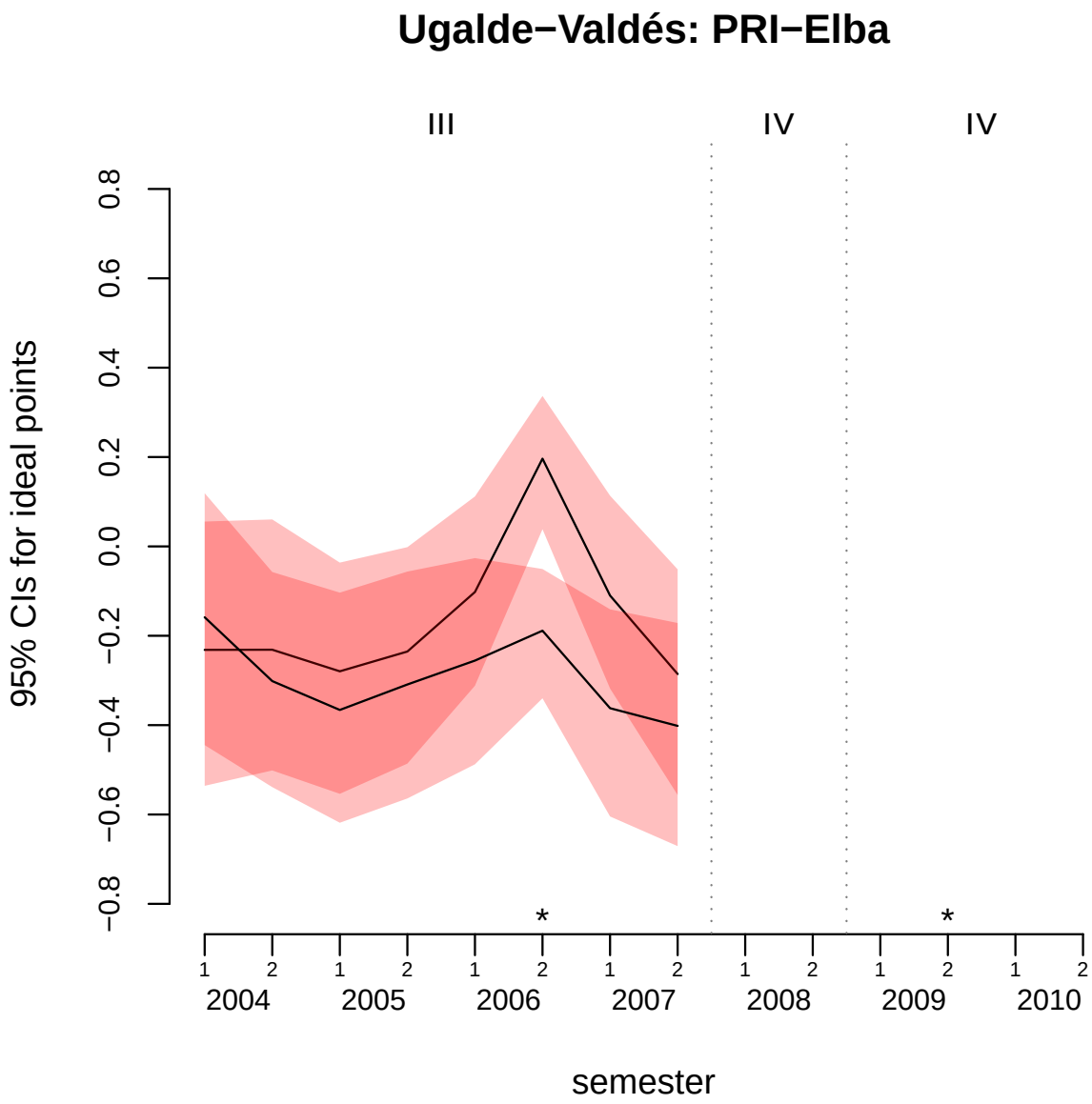

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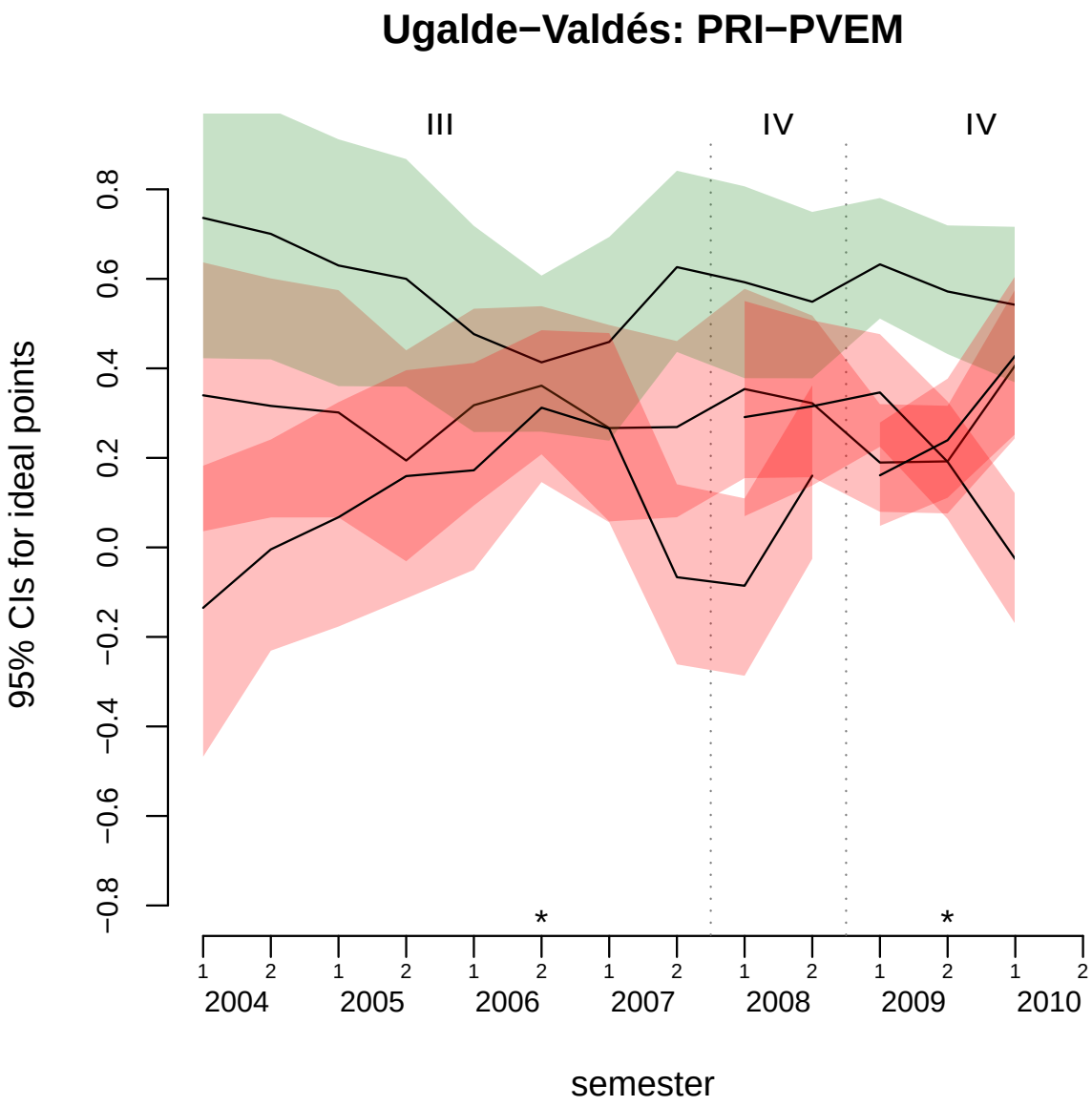
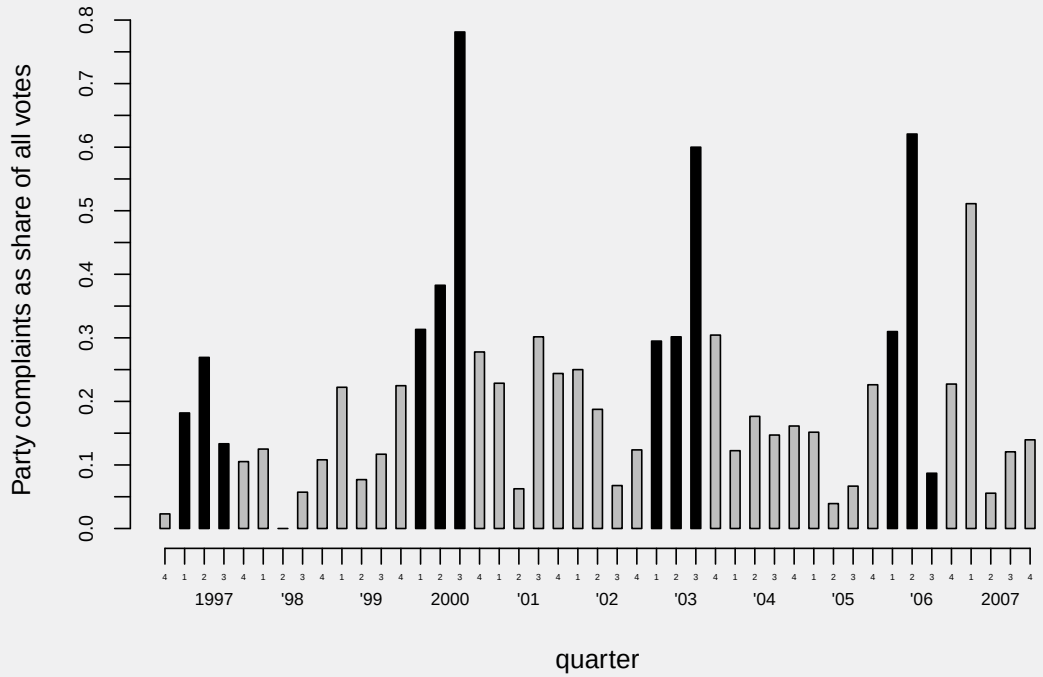


Possible empirical indicators

- New Congress (also party splits) $\rightarrow$ principals mutate
- Election periods $\rightarrow$ party complaints up, agenda control down

Party complaints filed as % of all votes



New principal and inter-semester change

	Posterior $\lvert x_{j,t+1} - x_{j,t} \rvert$	Mean	sd
a	New Congress semesters	.140	.115
b	Rest	.108	.084
c	Prob. a>b	.560	

Gatekeeping and signal-to-noise ratio

	Posterior $\lvert\texttt{signal}_i\rvert$	Mean	sd
d	Electoral semesters	2.802	1.652
e	Rest	2.484	1.628
f	Prob. d>e	.565	

	Posterior $\lvert\texttt{signal}_i\rvert$ with ci off zero	
g	Electoral semesters	64 %
h	Rest	46 %

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More possible tests

Contingent median polarization

	mean difference		
	election		rest
	Periods I and II		
PRI-PAN	0.155	$>$	0.091
PRI-PRD	0.417	$\approx$	0.413
PAN-PRD	0.262	$\approx$	0.323
	Period III		
PRI-PAN	0.639	$>$	0.369

Within-contingent cohesion

Puzzles

1. How do 3 instead of 2 parties affect delegation?
   - Party quotas $\rightarrow$ power-sharing
   - Collective principal appoints a collective agent ($\approx$ McNollgast)
   - Same in other 'autonomous' regulatory boards (telecomm, energy, education...)
2. Unstable environment
   - Principal out of business?
   - Auto-pilot analogy still flies?
3. Age structure
   - Mean at appointment 44 yrs, min 31
   - Young democracies?

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Wrap-up

1. Promising routes in preliminary inspection
2. Ideal points in IFE move considerably: Short-term shocks and long-term drift?
3. Movement tied to strategic considerations?

Thank you!

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Dynamics

Approach 1—Martin&Quinn (2002):

- For quarter t: $x_{j,t} \sim \mathrm{N}(x_{j,t-1}, \text{slack})$
- *Drawback*: votes vary considerably across quarters—ideal points sensitive to sheer volume of information (Desposato), so drift may be spurious

Approach 2—Bonica (2010):

- Allow estimates to vary over periods of very short duration: item $i \pm k$, $k = 15$
- Vote-by-vote estimation
- Periods mostly overlap, constraining short-term shifts
- IRT instead of OC

Back

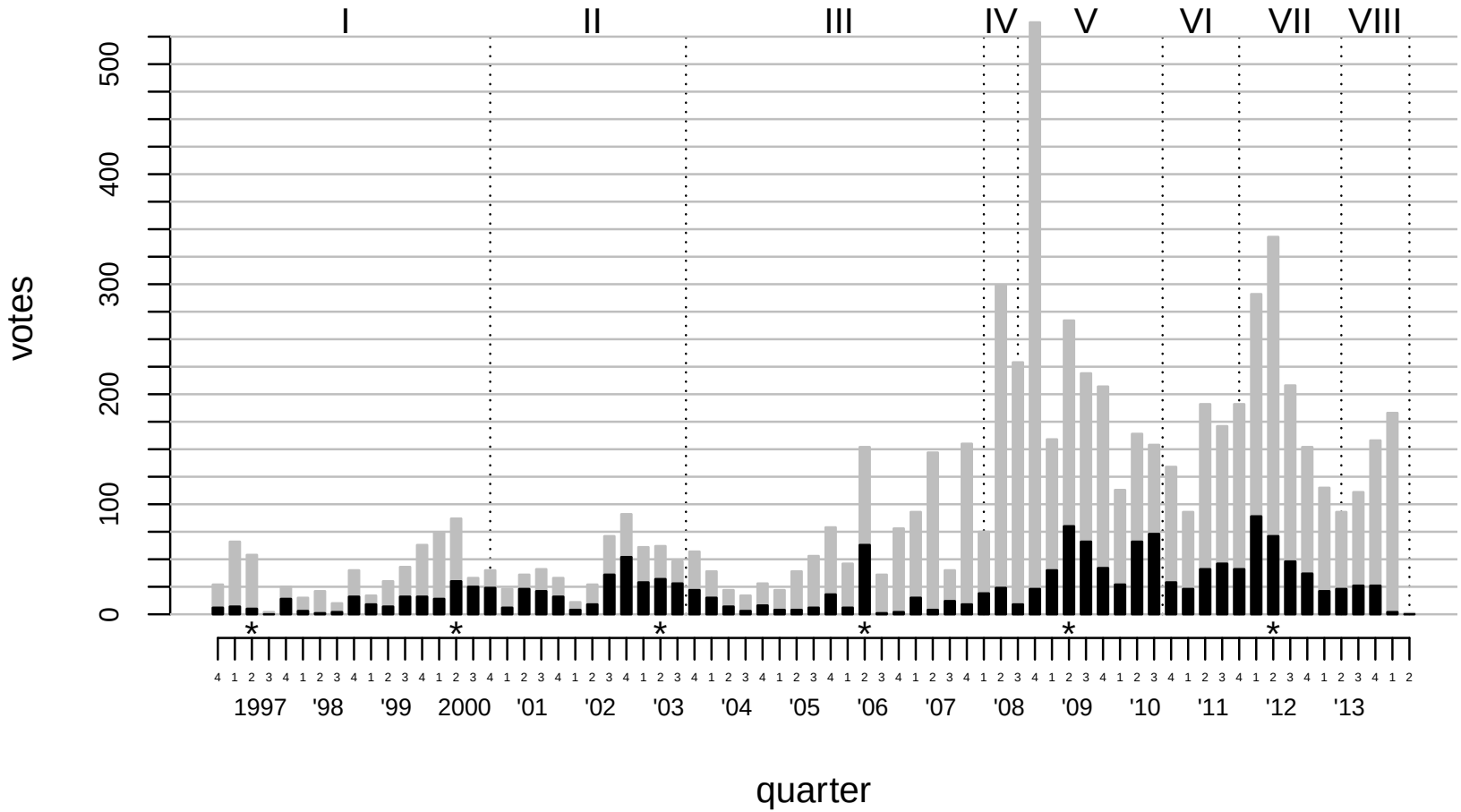
Table 5
Votes used to anchor policy space for each Council

Date (vote number)	Minority vote	Substance
Woldenberg I		
12/16/1997 (vote 28)	PRI, Barragán (Nay)	Agenda power for President (PRI-sponsored): should Council-General ratify President's appointee for one administrative office?
11/14/2000 (vote 228)	PRI, Barragán (Aye)	Scope of IFE authority: should PAN be held responsible and fined for the case of a clergyman who campaigned illegally on its behalf?
Woldenberg II		
4/6/2001 (vote 27)	Cárdenas, Cantú, Luken (Nay)	Money in elections: should IFE drop investigation of complaint by Alianza Cívica against the PRI for clientelistic practices in Chiapas?
5/30/2003 (vote 206)	PRI (Aye)	Scope of IFE authority: should PAN be fined for a TV campaign spot that PRI considers libelous?
Ugalde		
8/23/2004 (vote 33)	PAN minus Morales, Latapí (Nay)	Agenda power for President (PRI-sponsored): should candidate for top-level appointment, proposed by Council President without relevant commission's consent, be ratified?
1/31/2005 (vote 43)	Andrade, López Flores, Morales, Gómez Alcántar (Nay)	Scope of IFE authority: must PVEM statutes make party leaders accountable to rank-and-file?

Back

Data = contested votes (in black)

Votes: 5,202 unanimous, 1,640 contested (24 %)



Same members within each period (I, II, ...)

Back