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

- New puzzles emerge

→ Key pieces of the structure of delegation missing in Mexico:

1. Multi- vs. two-party system
2. Constant mutation vs. stability
3. Younger vs. mature bureaucrats

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How do IFE and parties relate?

From http://reforma.com.mx 8/29/2007

The Federal Electoral Institute

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

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
- 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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Puzzle 1

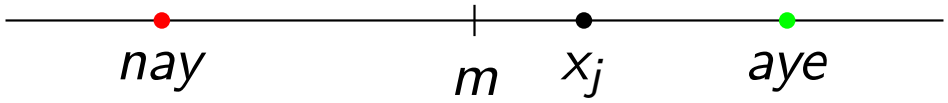
How do 3 instead of 2 parties affect delegation?

- Party quotas and veto system used (informal) $\rightarrow$ power-sharing
- Collective principal appoints a collective agent
- Common solution in other 'autonomous' regulatory boards (telecomm, energy, education...)

Puzzle 2

Unstable environment
What if the principal goes out of business?
U.S. has inherited some of this

Stochastic spatial voting



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

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

Small assembly: Bayesian estimation via MCMC simulation.

Dynamics

Approach 1—Martin&Quinn (2002):

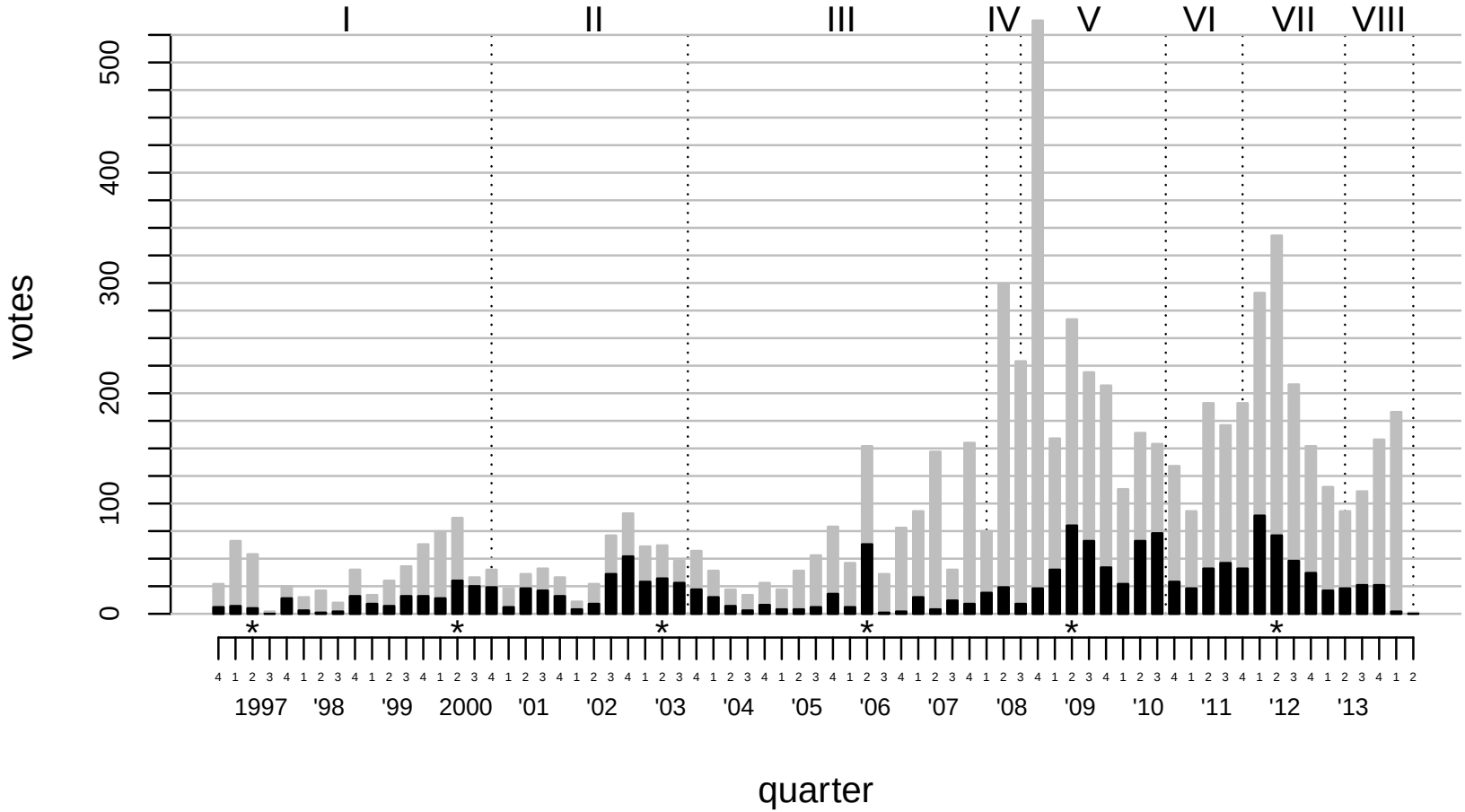
- For quarter t: $x_{j,t} \sim \mathrm{N}(x_{j,t-1}, \text{slack})$
- *Drawback*: votes vary considerably across quarters—ideal points sensitive to sheer volume of information (Desposato), so drift may be spurious

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

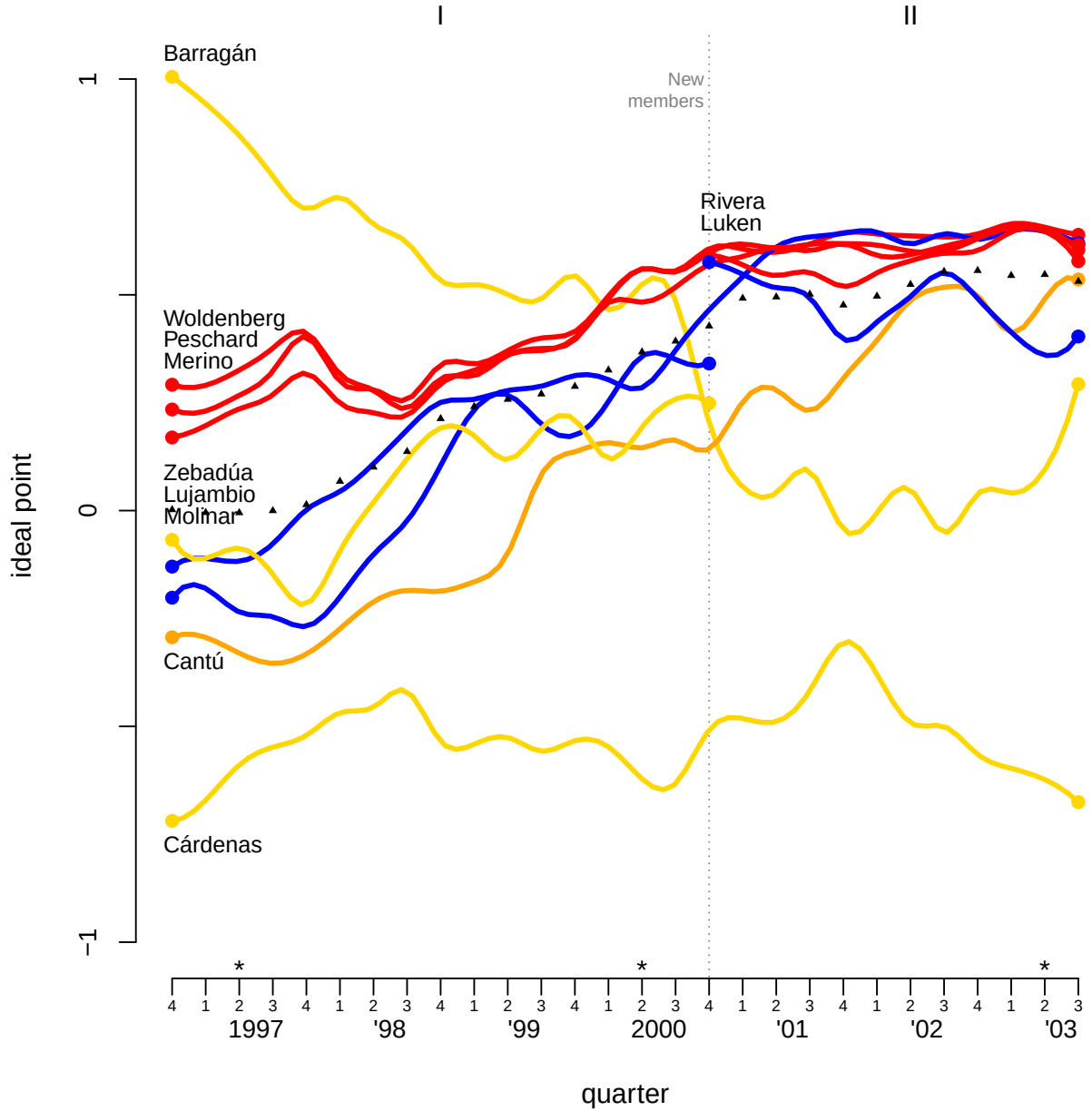
Data = contested votes

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

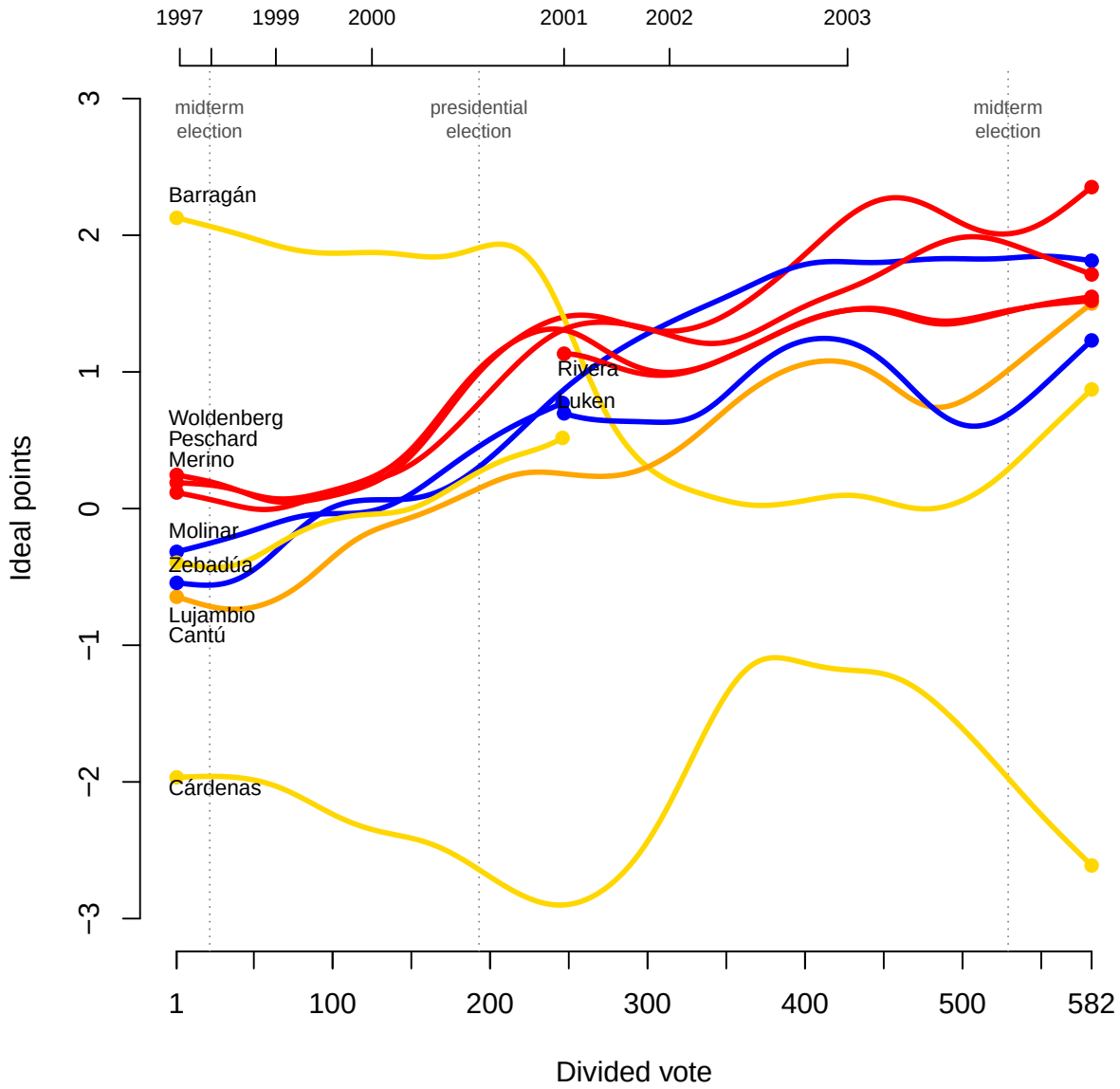


Same members within each period (I, II, ...)

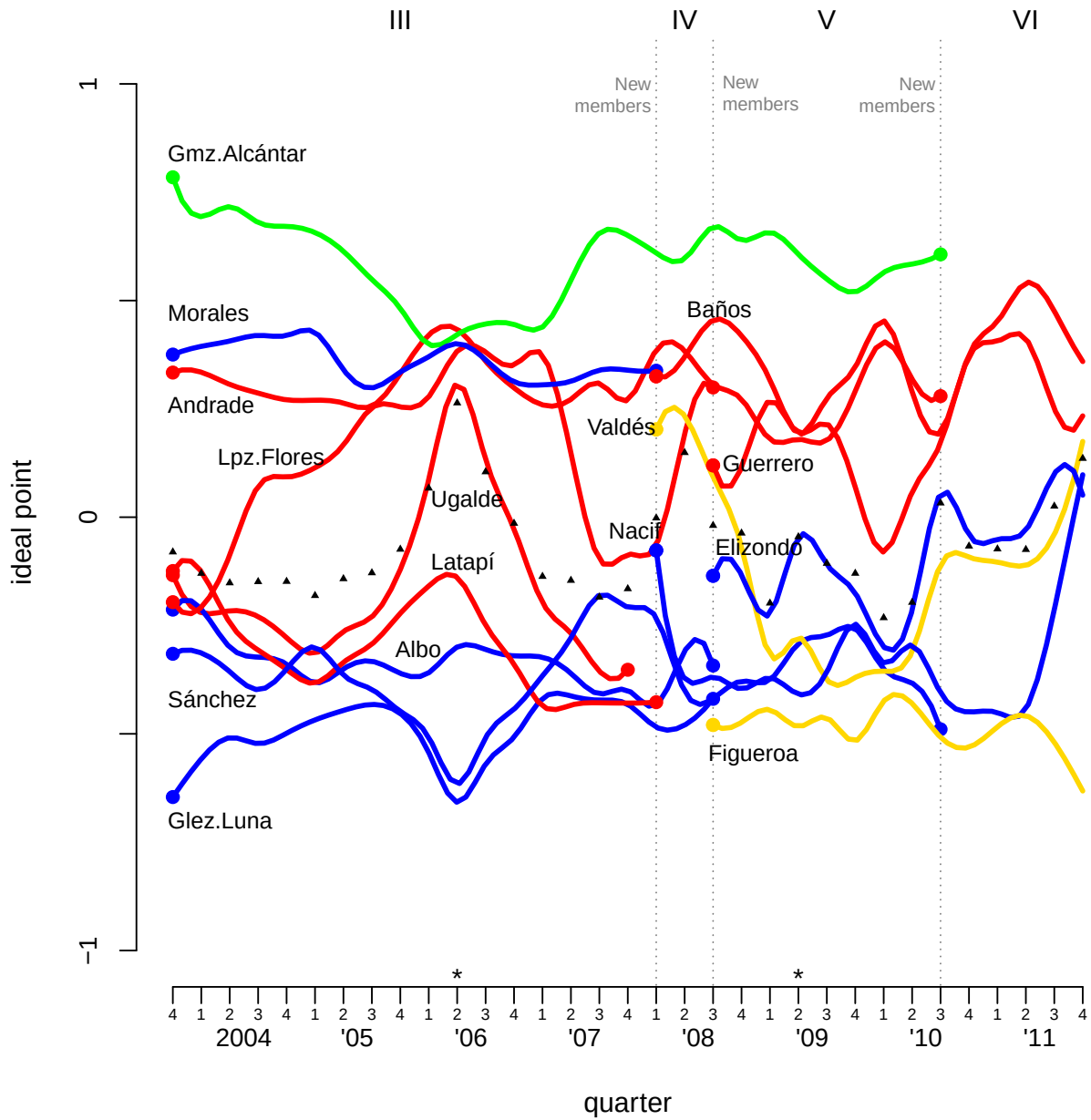
Results: 1996–2003 **quarterly**



Results: 1996–2003 **vote-by-vote**



Results: 2003–2011 **quarterly**



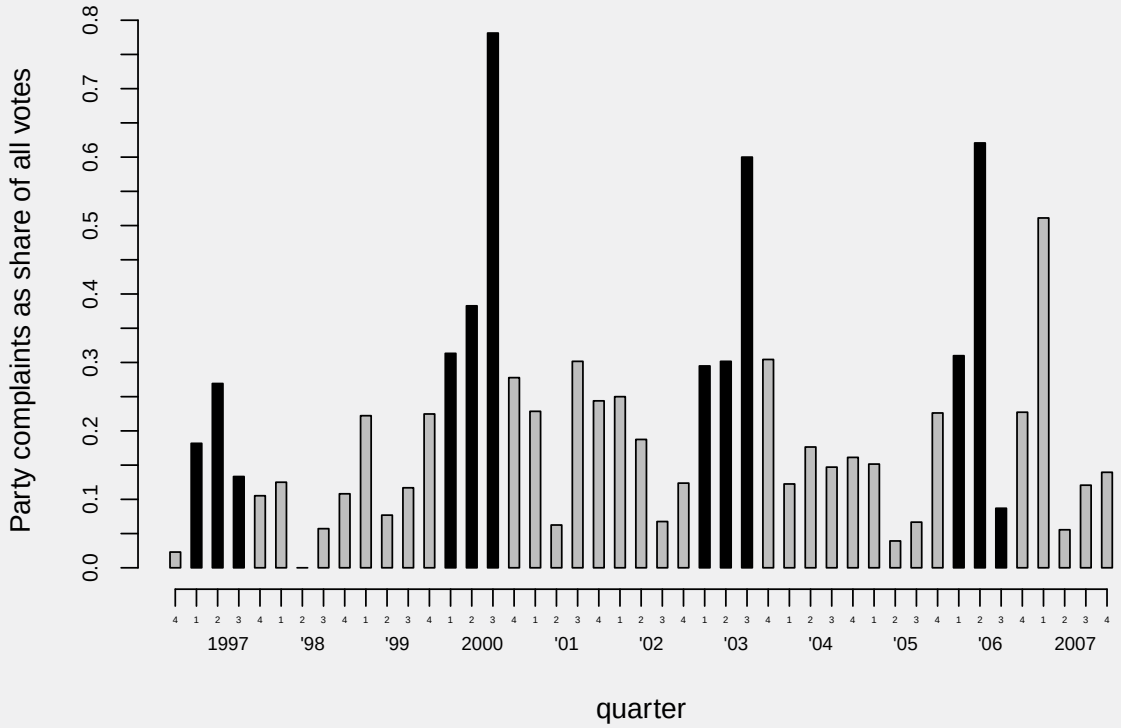
What lies behind drift?

	Type	*Effect on ideal points*
1.	Screening	Concomitant shifts among same-sponsor councilors
2.	Constituent pressure	Shifts should *follow* change in principal's situation (eg. new Congress)
3.	Gatekeeping	Removal of divisive issues pulls most together

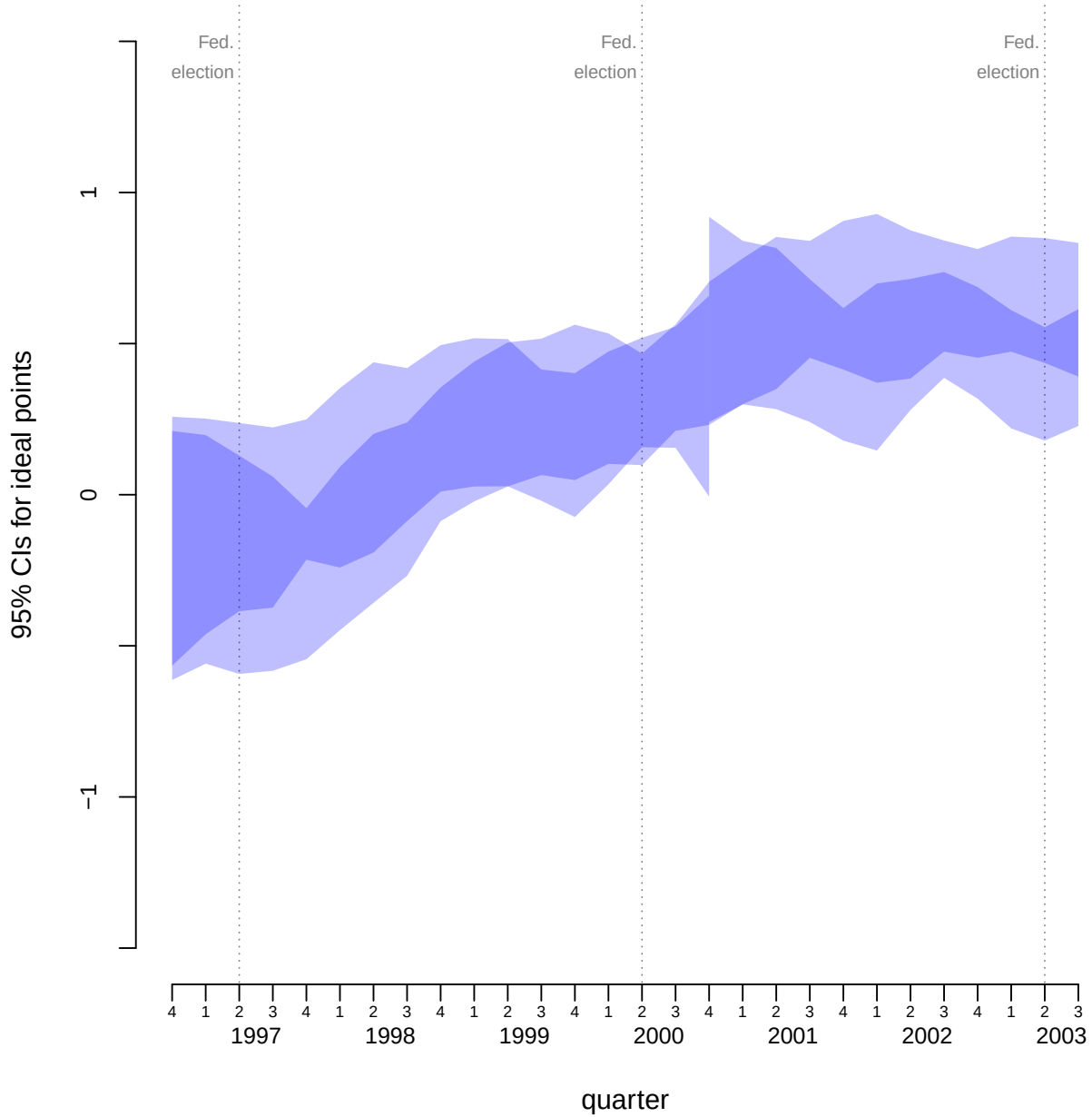
Some empirical indicators

1. New Congress = new principal
2. Congressional party split = two new principals
3. Election quarters = less agenda control by IFE (party complaints)

Party complaints filed as % of all votes



Results: overlapping



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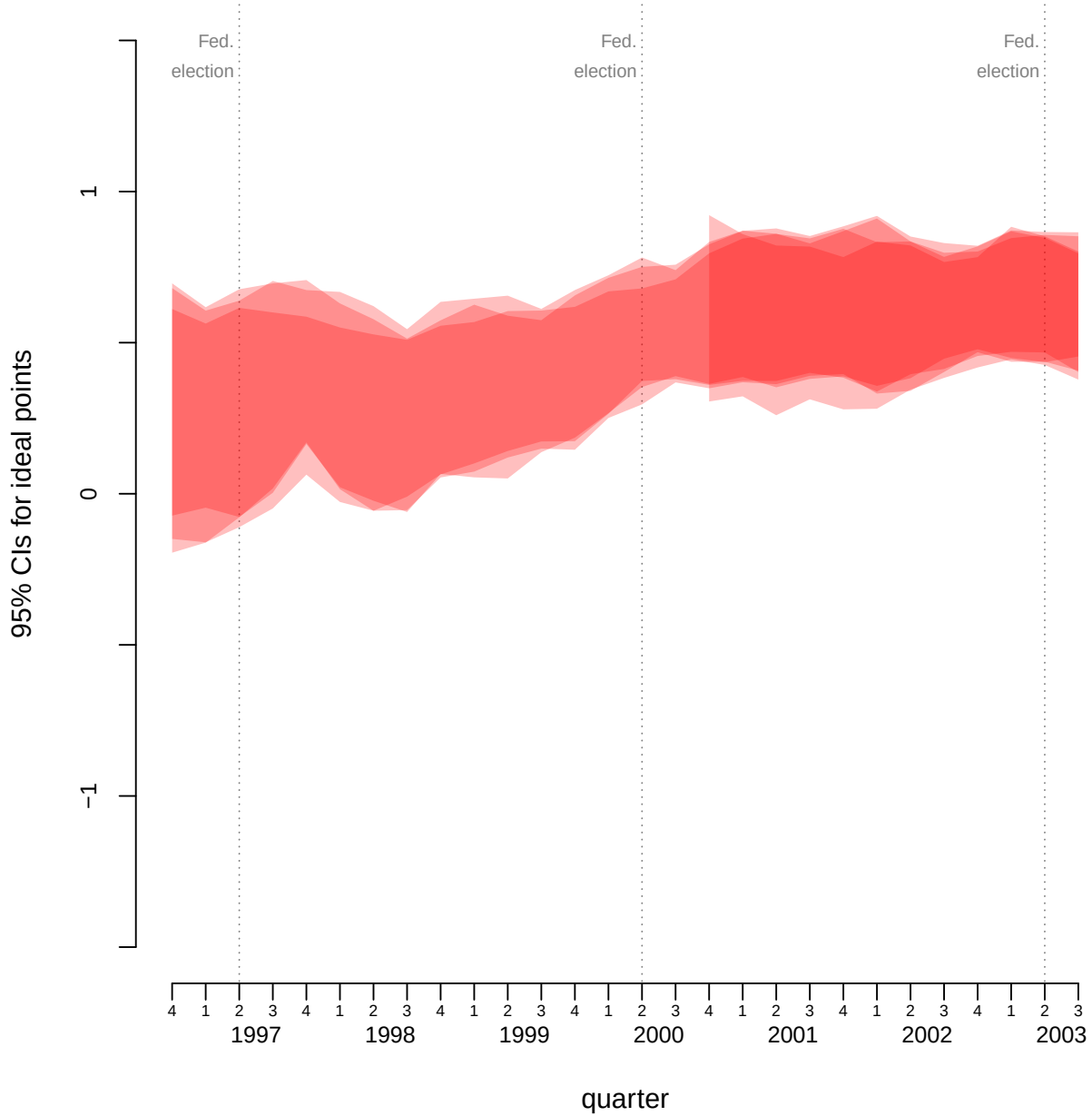

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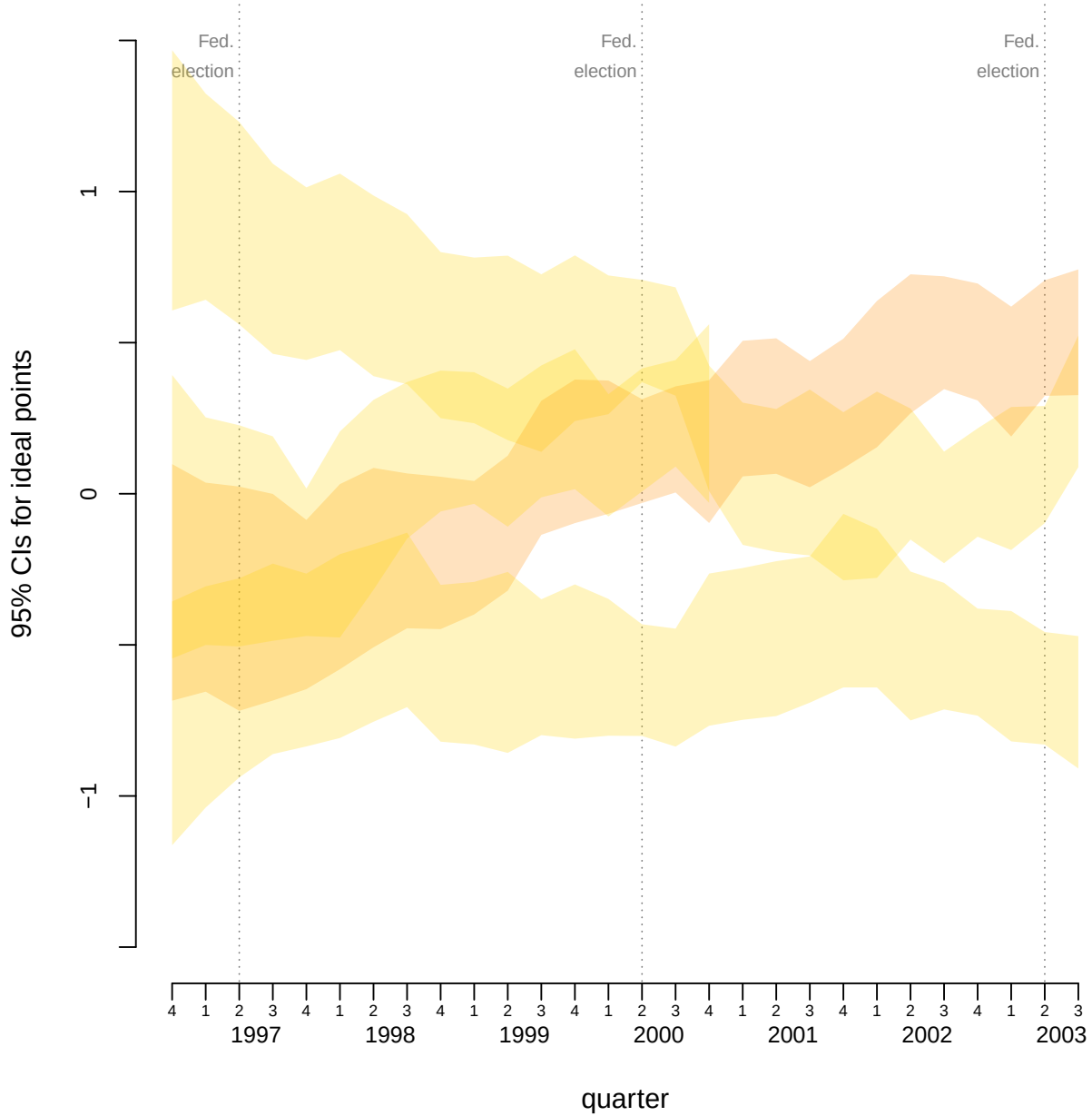
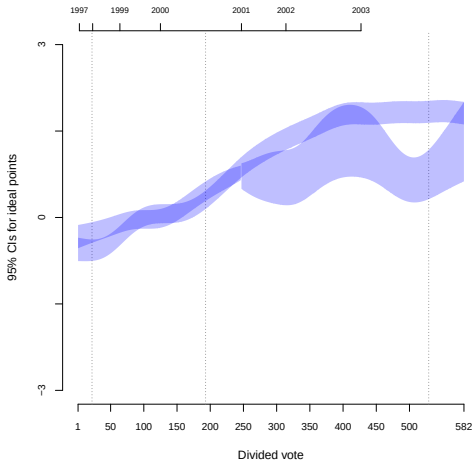
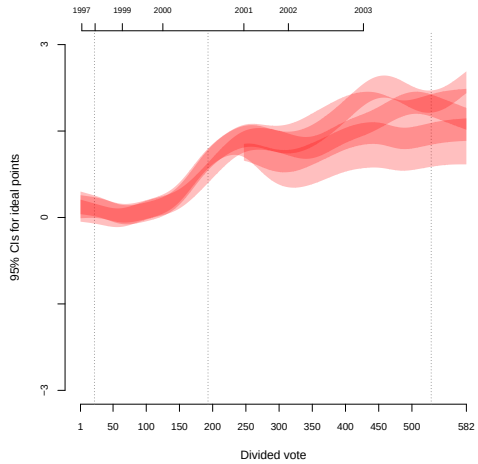
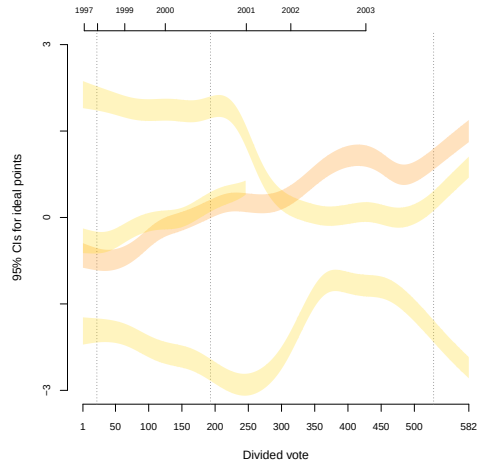
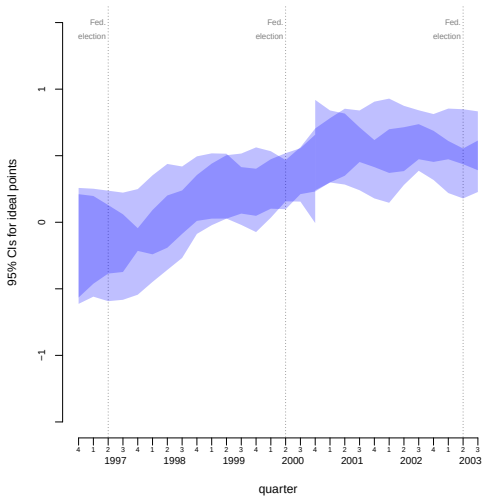


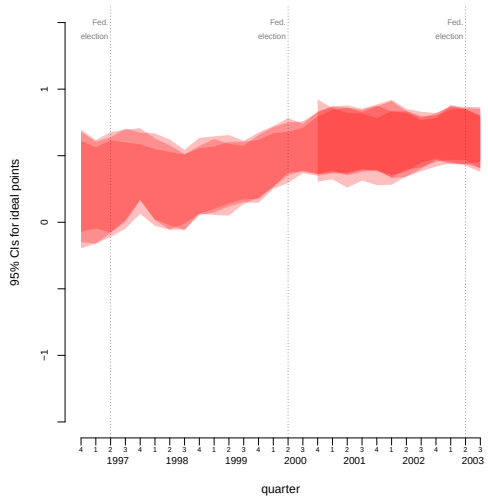
Results: overlap in two models

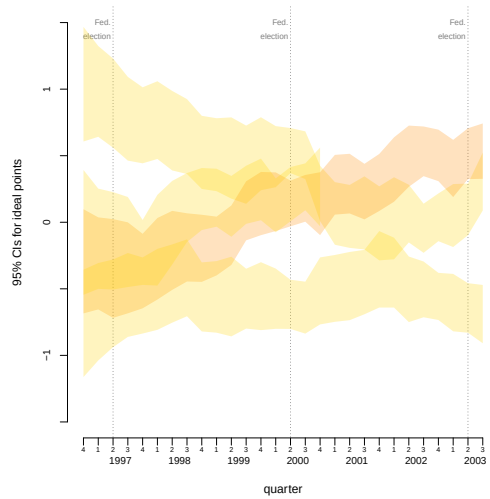












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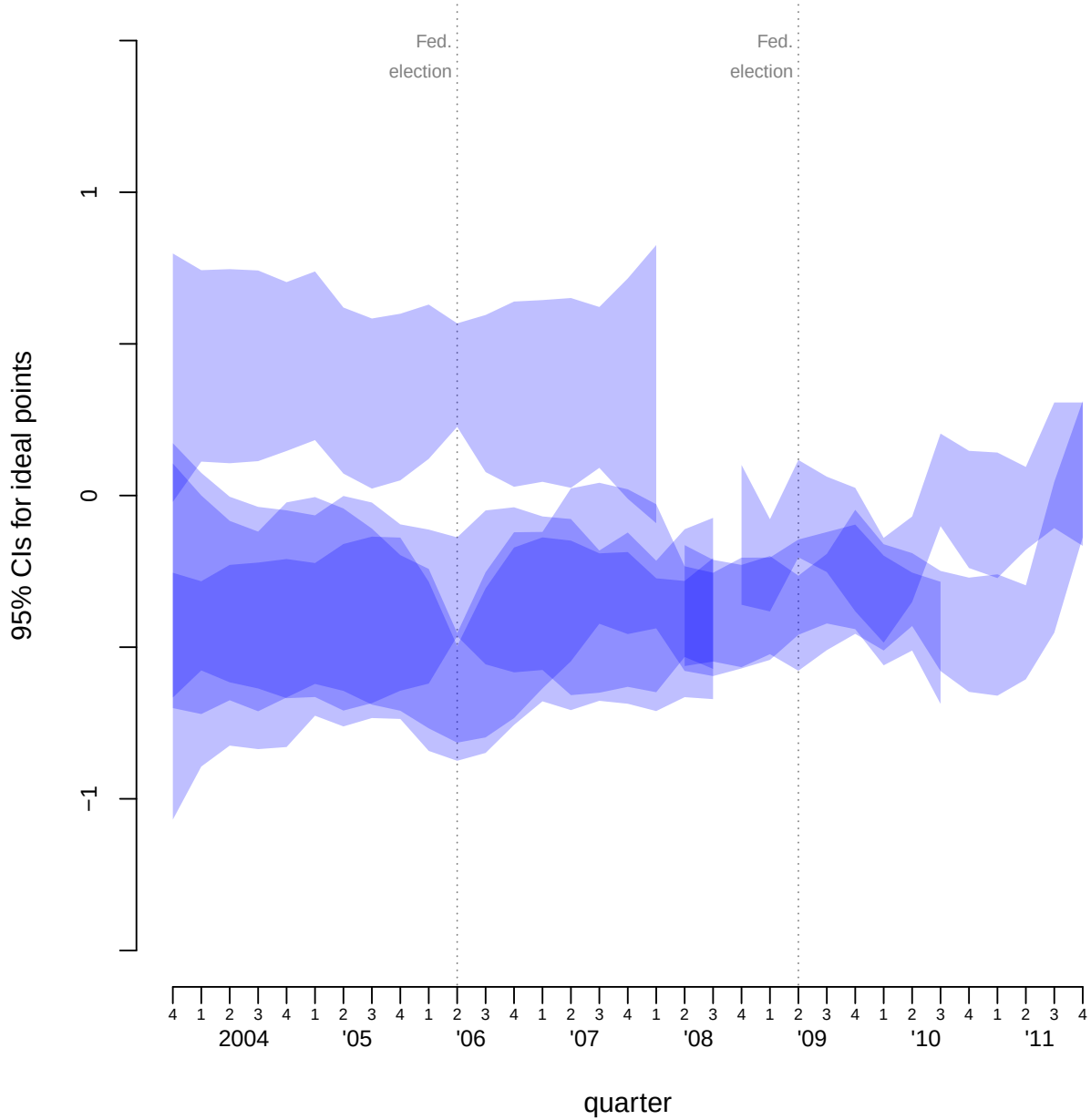

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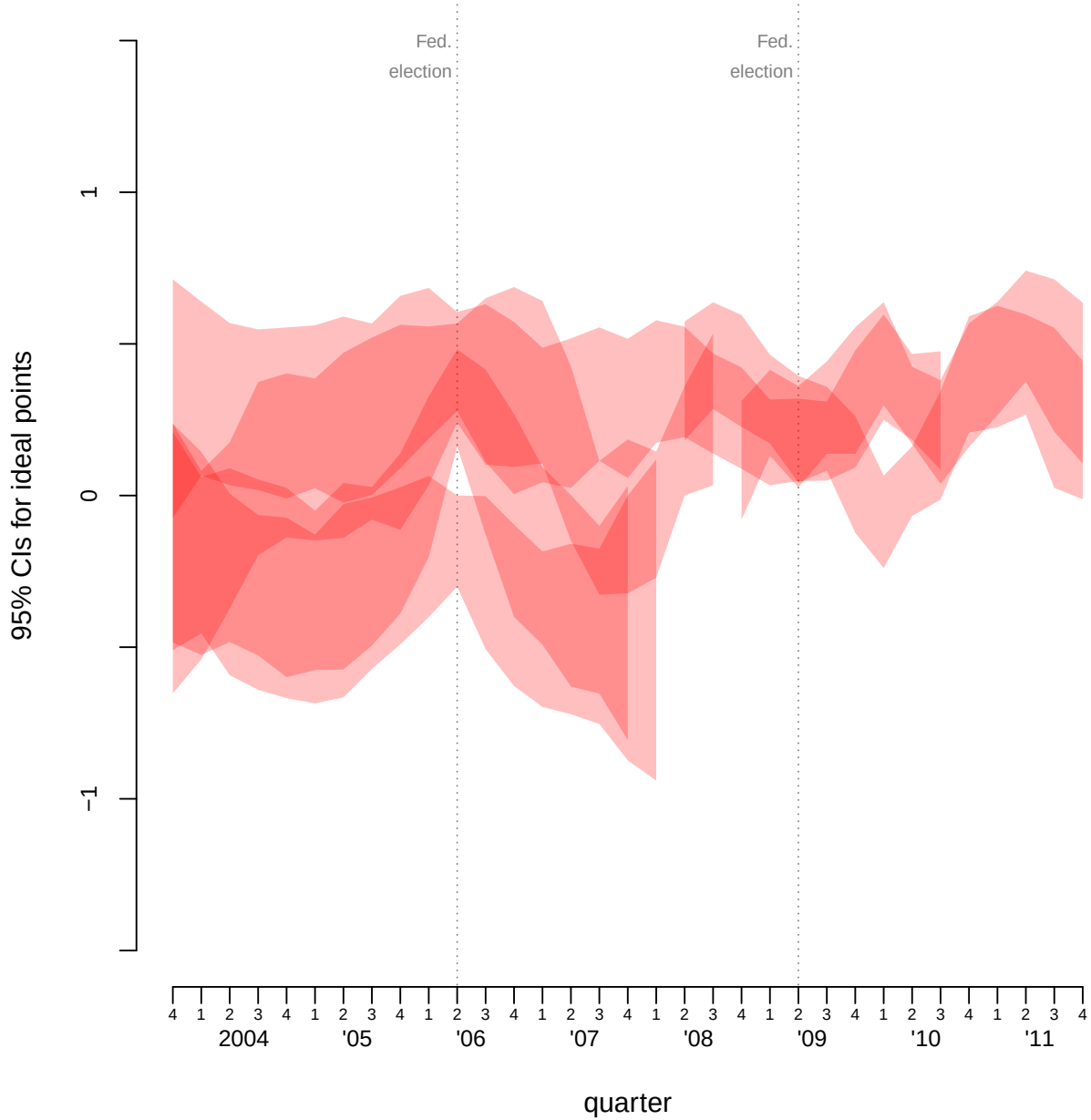

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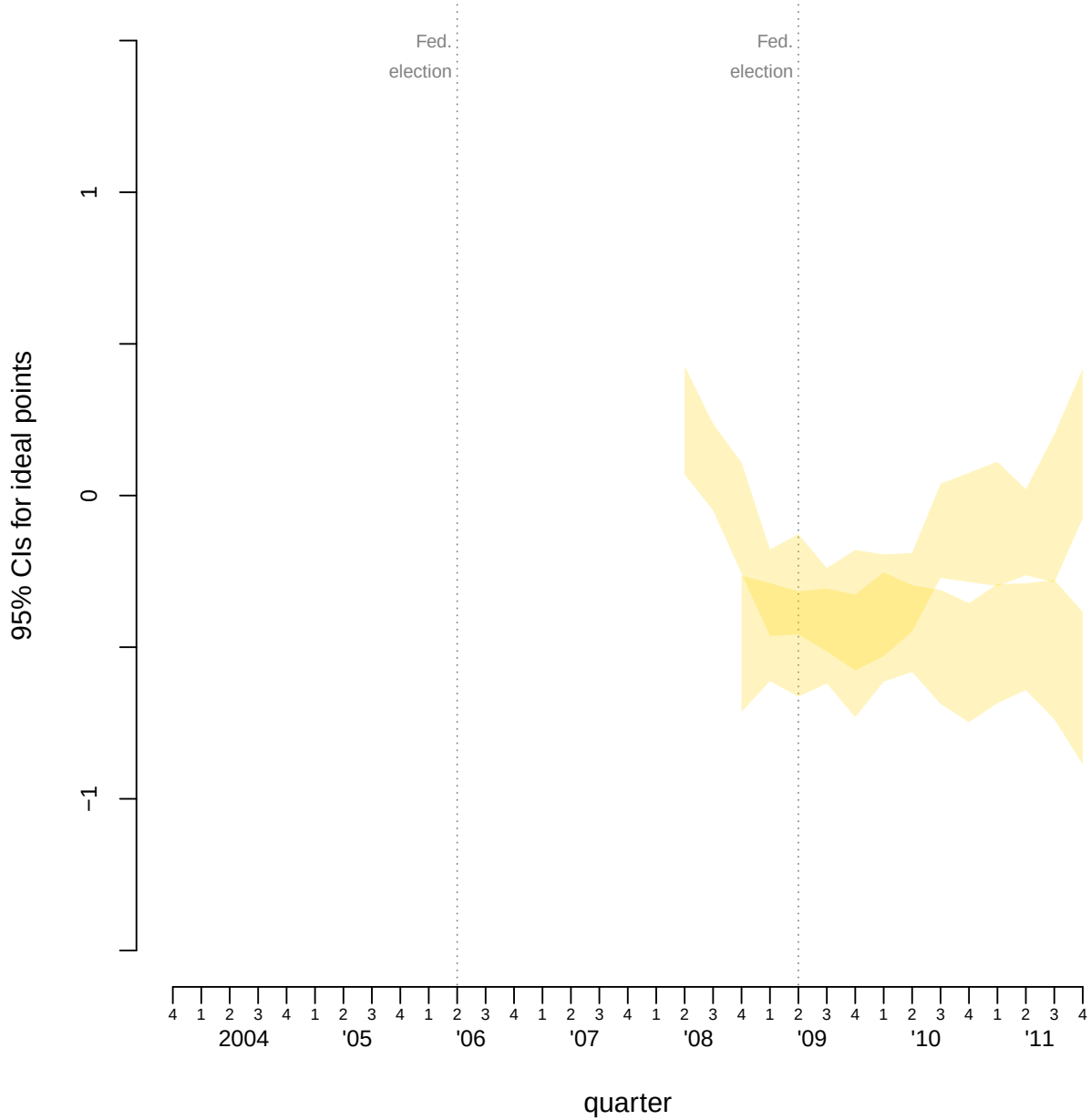

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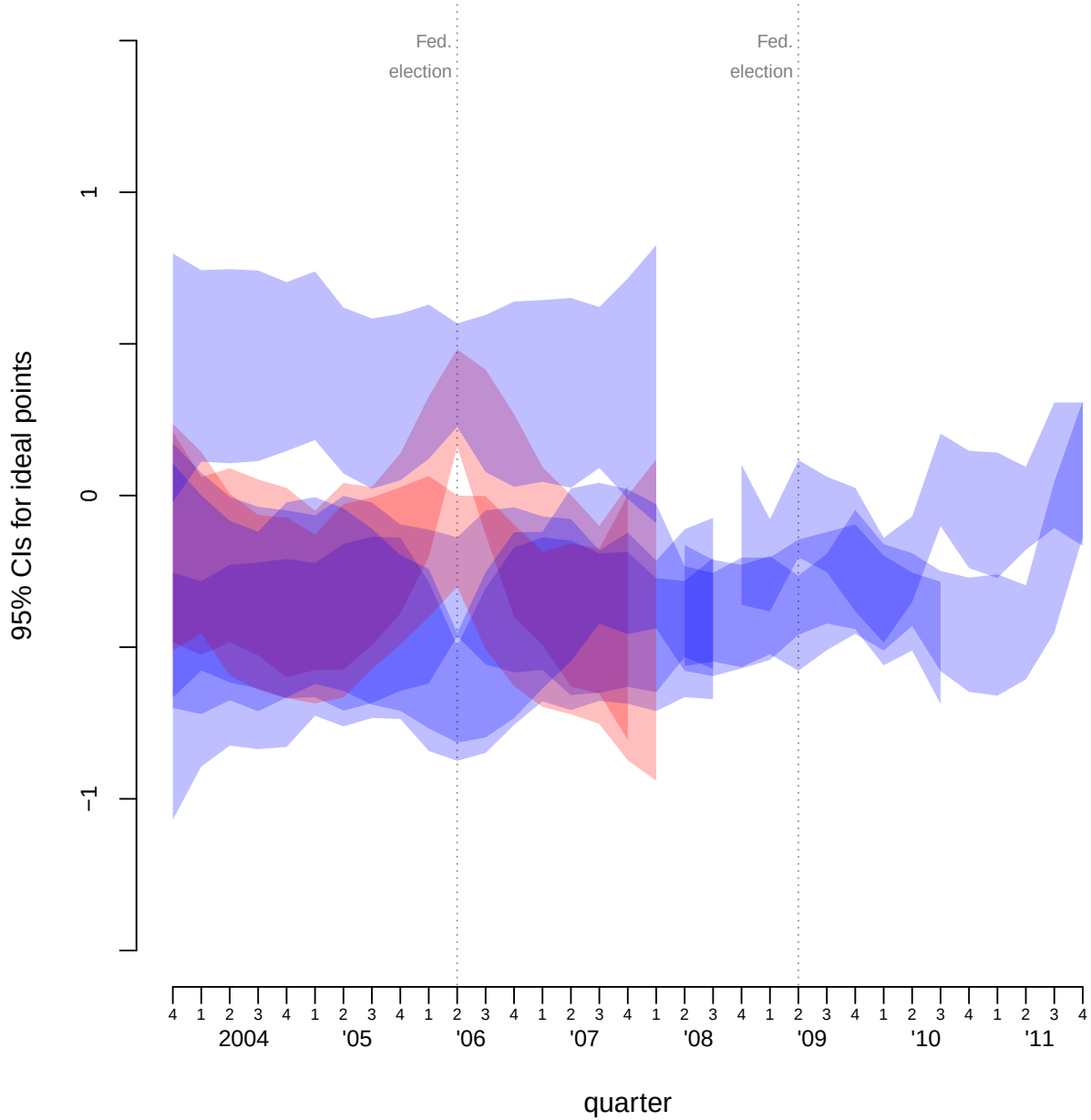

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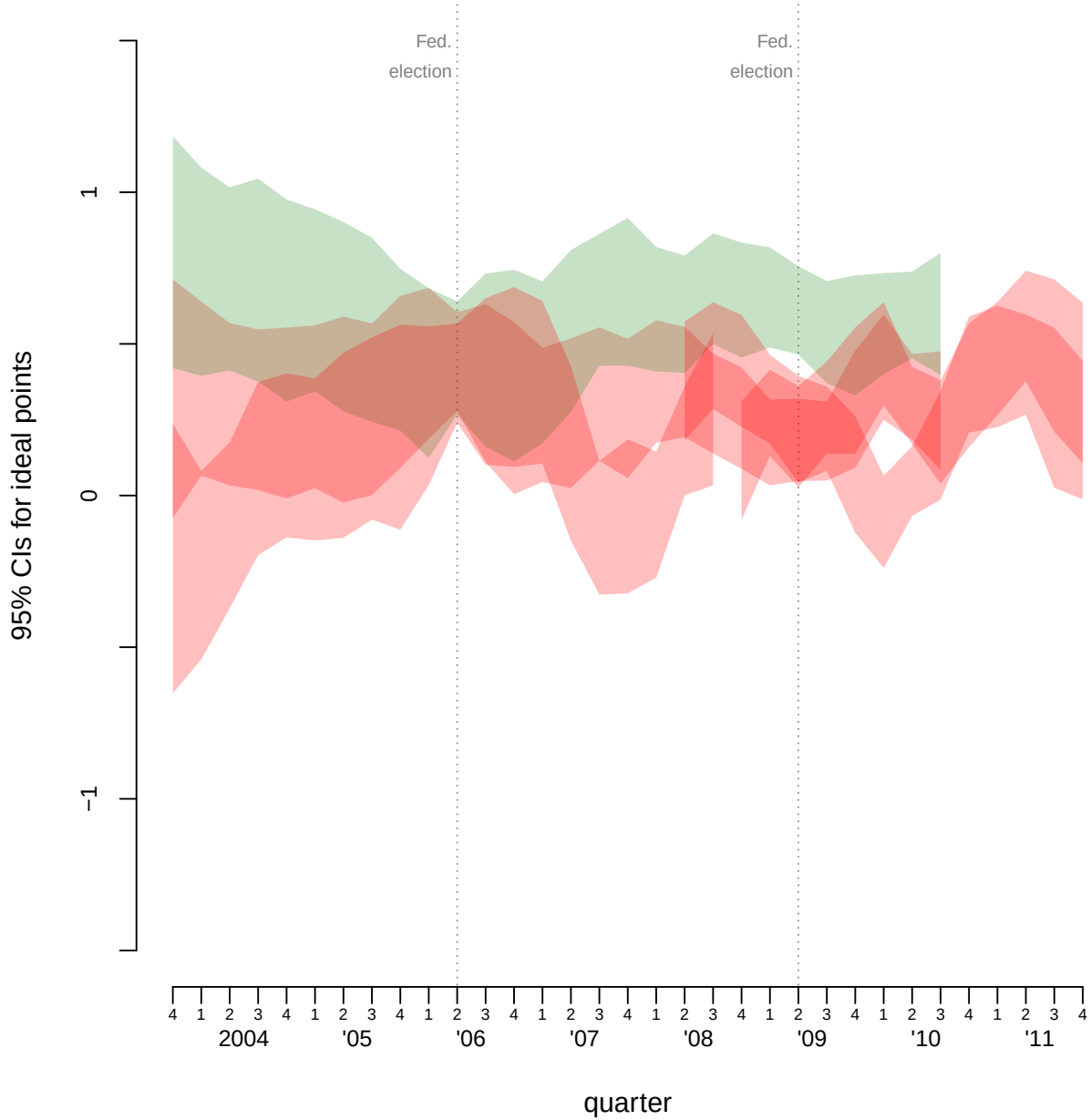

New principal and inter-quarter change

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

Gatekeeping and signal-to-noise ratio

	Posterior $\lvert\texttt{signal}_i\rvert$	Mean	Std. dev.
d	Electoral quarters	2.677	1.682
e	Rest	2.601	1.684
f	Prob. d>e	.565	

Posterior $\texttt{signal}_i$s with .95 ci off zero		
g	Percentage electoral quarters	53 %
h	Percentage rest	45 %

Party system influence

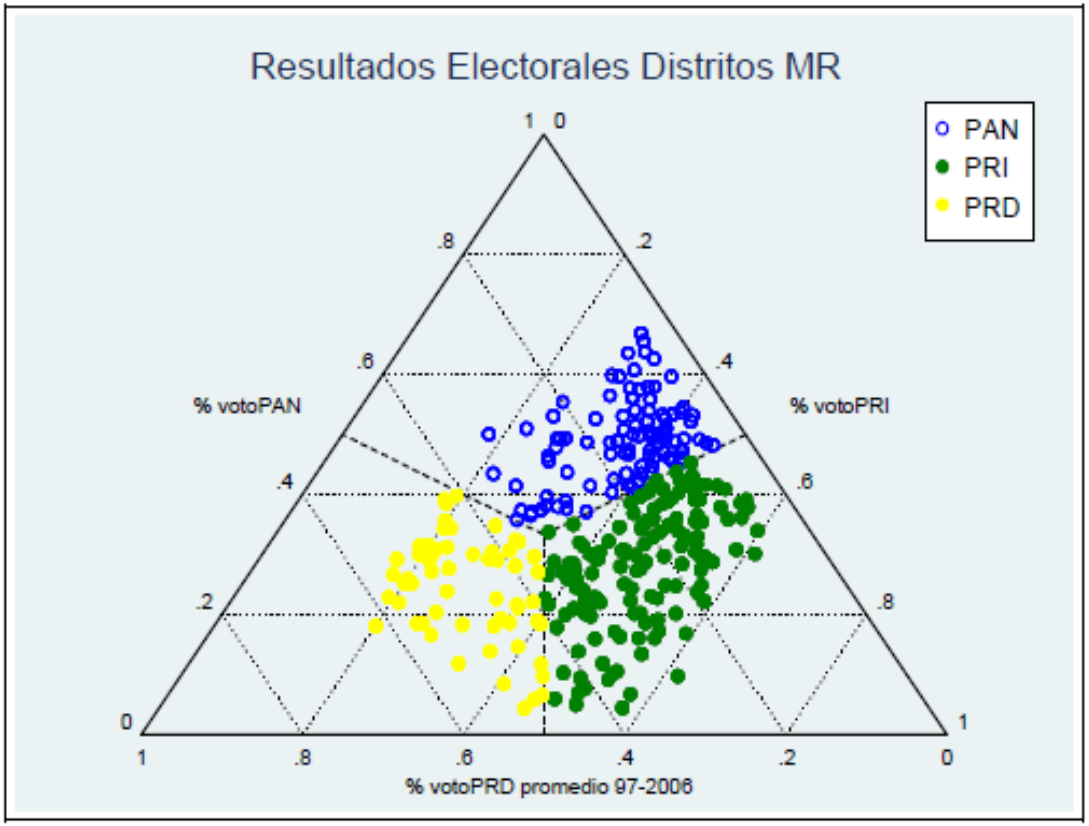

FIGURA 7. Porcentaje de votos promedio del PRI, PAN y PRD en distritos de mayoría relativa, 1997 – 2006.

Source: Aparicio&Márques (2010).

Wrap up

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2. Ideal points in IFE move considerably. Short-term shocks and long-term drift
3. Movement seems tied to representation considerations (change in principal; less agenda power)
4. Next: kernel smoother; committee-plenary interactions

Thank you!

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