

Introduction to American Mass Political Behavior & Elections

MU MVZ 449

Spring 2010

Masaryk University

Department of Int'l Relations &
European Studies

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MVZ 449
Spring 2010
First Meeting

- Course materials available on MU Information System (IS)
 - Lecture materials uploaded to IS along with many critical readings
- Today's agenda:
 - Distribution of syllabus, discussion of assignments, key dates, & course tasks; intro to key questions;
 - **MIDTERM EXAM DATE: Mid-April sometime**
 - **NO CLASS: Wednesday, 28 April 2010**
 - **READING WEEK & NO CLASS: Wednesday 31 March 2010**

Mass Behavior, Campaigns & Elections: An Introduction

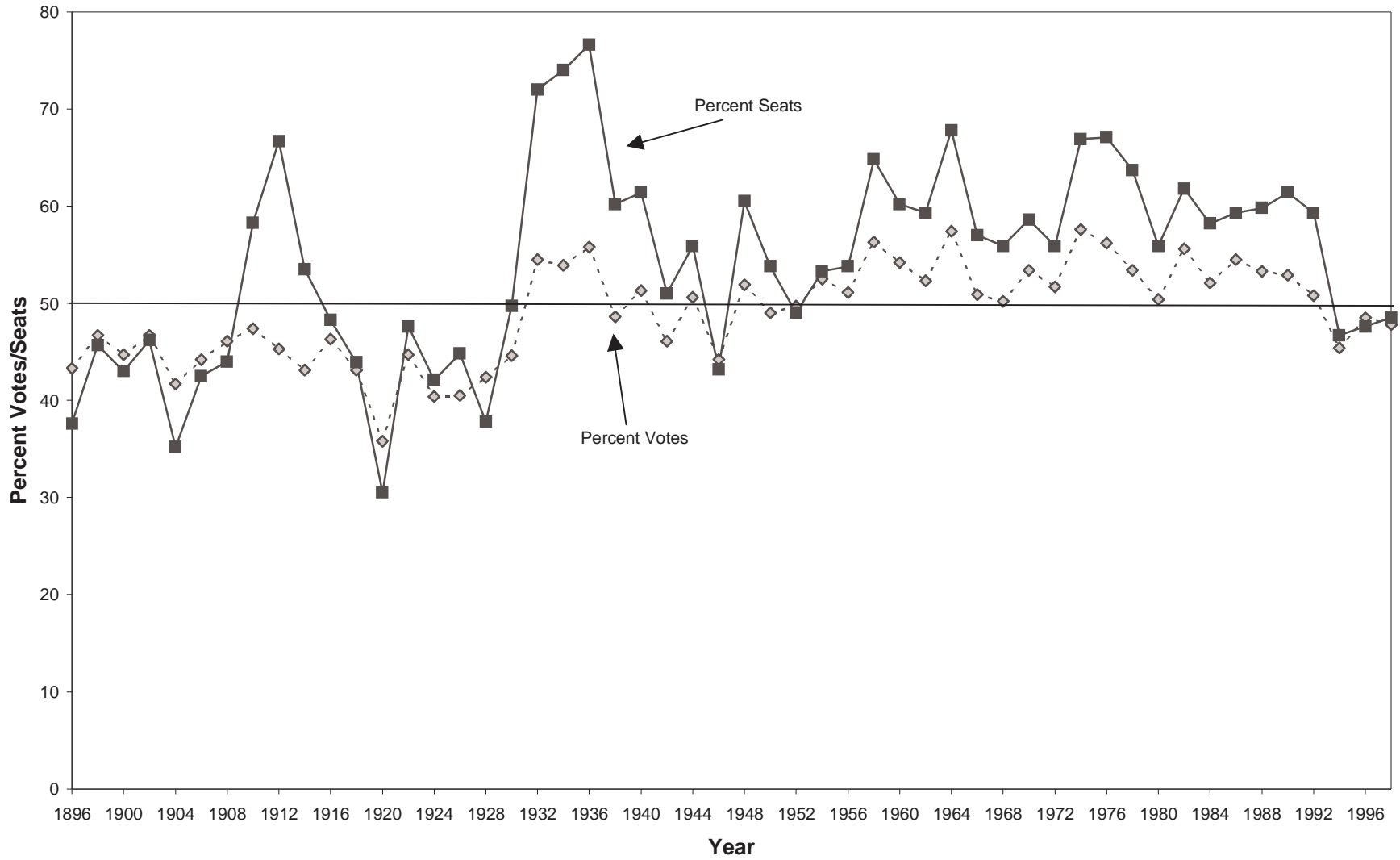
Several topics this semester:

- Rational choice behavior in political life
- The Spatial Model revisited – Electoral responsiveness
- The mechanics of the process: How do we choose our leaders?
- The campaign: Strategy, tactics, & consequences
- The role of the media
- Campaign financing structure
- How do people decide for whom to vote?
- The place of negative campaigning

The Spatial Model Revisited

- What does the Spatial Model look like in mathematical terms? In conceptual terms?
- Apply to Elections
 - Electoral system matters: PR vs. Plurality rule
 - Plurality rule system
 - One-dimensional policy space
 - Single-peaked utility function
 - Majority rule
 - **Prediction: Candidate convergence in elections**

Democratic Seats and Votes

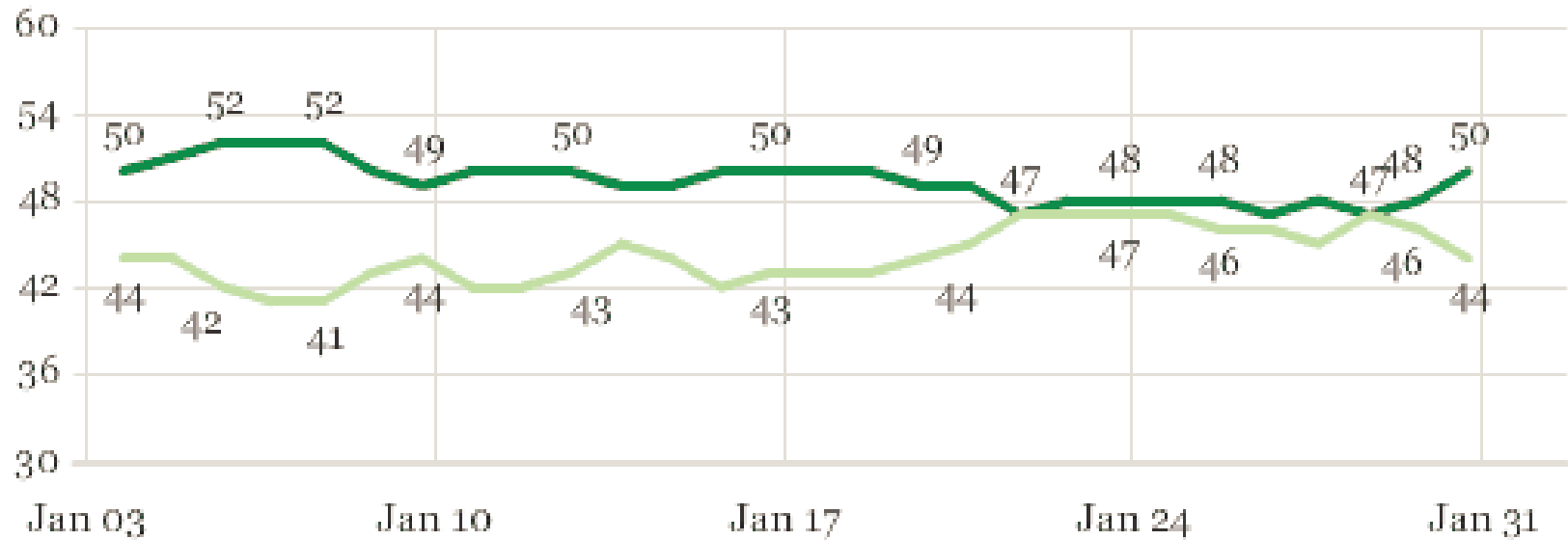


Obama Approval Numbers, #1

President Obama Job Approval -- Gallup Daily Tracking for January 2010

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?

■ % Approve ■ % Disapprove

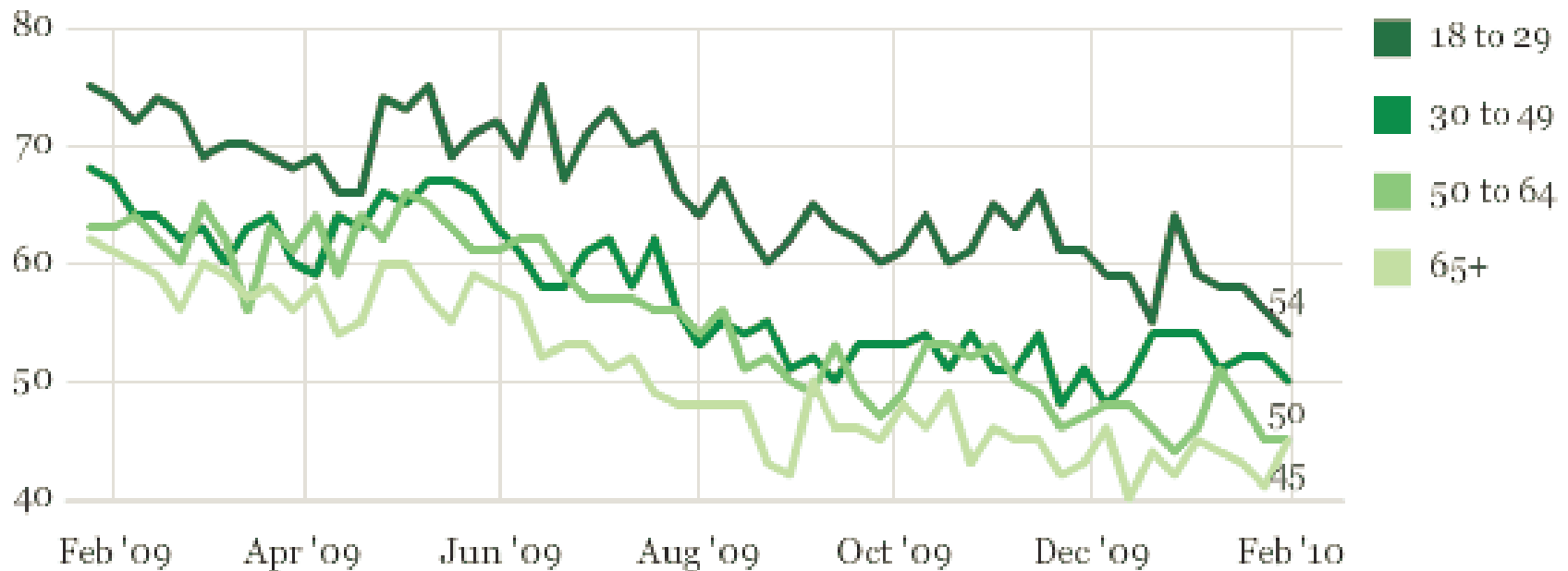


GALLUP®

Obama Approval Numbers, #2

Obama Approval by Age, January 2009-January 2010

Percentage who approve, based on weekly averages



Gallup Daily tracking

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Recent Obama Job Approval Numbers

Top 10 States, Obama Job Approval

	% Approve
District of Columbia	90.2
Hawaii	70.8
Maryland	68.5
Vermont	67.7
New York	67.2
Massachusetts	66.8
Connecticut	66.7
Rhode Island	66.6
Illinois	65.2
California	63.7

Gallup Daily tracking, 2009

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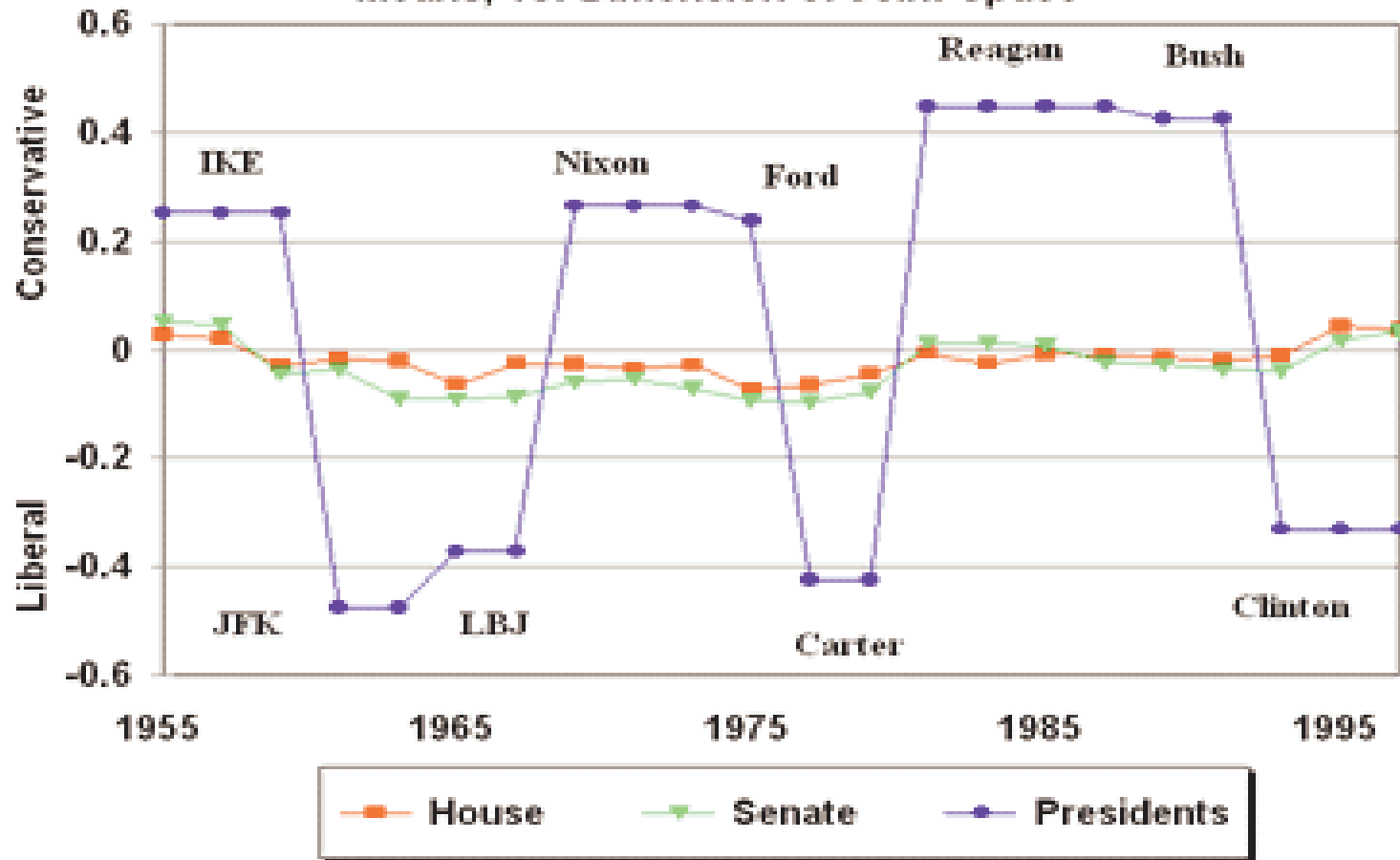
Bottom 10 States, Obama Job Approval

	% Approve
Wyoming	41.6
Idaho	43.3
West Virginia	45.9
Alaska	46.0
Utah	47.8
Oklahoma	48.0
Montana	48.1
Alabama	49.1
Arkansas	49.2
Louisiana	50.0

Gallup Daily tracking, 2009

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Presidents, and House and Senate Means, 1st Dimension of Joint Space



Where's the convergence?

- Presidential candidates?
- Congressional candidates?
- Why does the median voter theorem fail?
 - Primaries?
 - Candidate reputation?
 - Different distinct medians?
- Importance of parties

Political Parties in American Politics

- Parties serve goals of candidates
 - Parties regulate competition for office
 - Parties avoid chaos in Congress
 - “Party” in government can lead to “party” in the electorate
 - Parties can coordinate action across different levels of government
- Perverse consequences

Campaigns & Elections

- The importance of elections
- Elections ensure that government *can* be responsive to its citizens
- Properties of elections legitimate process
 - Elections are regular
 - Everyone gets one vote
 - Procedures are in place so we can (usually) agree who won

The Dynamics of the Electoral Campaign

- Winnowing
- The “Big Mo”
 - Election – The horserace
 - Pre-Election: Name recognition and money
- The Horserace
 - Creating Momentum