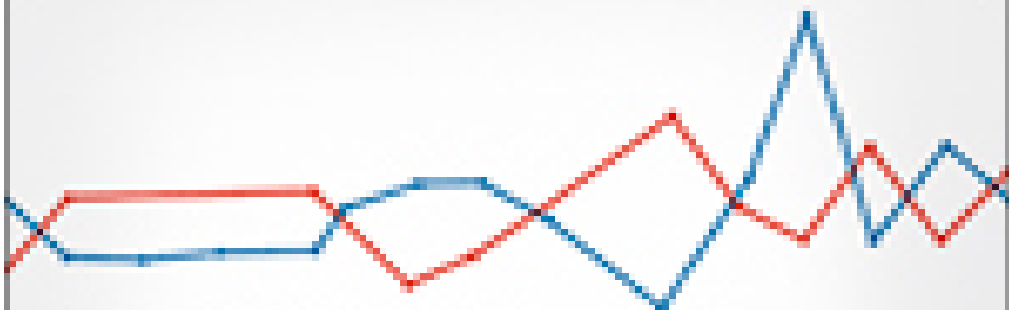


The Timeline of Presidential Elections

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**THE TIMELINE OF
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**



**HOW CAMPAIGNS DO
(AND DO NOT) MATTER**



**ROBERT S. ERIKSON
AND CHRISTOPHER WLEZIER**

What Happens on Election Day?

The “Internal” Fundamentals

- Most voters tend to vote for the same party year after year.
 - Party identification.
 - Match between interests/preferences and candidates’ positions.
- Even true despite the growth in Independents, that is, because what has grown are the Independent “leaners,” who vote very much like partisans, and the percentage of “pure” Independents actually has shrunk.

Referendum Judgments

- The “floating voters,” who support candidates for president from different parties in different years, mostly decide on evaluations of the incumbent president.
- Referendum judgments matter even if the incumbent is not running, as in 2016.

“External” Fundamentals

- The Big E: Economic conditions.
 - Aggregate trends – “sociotropic” voting – not our personal pocketbooks per se.
 - Especially the slope of the economy – the direction and magnitude – not so much its level. That is, are things getting better? Are they a little better or a lot? Large positive growth benefits the incumbent.
- Other factors
 - National security.
 - “Cost of ruling.”
 - Reflected in the president’s approval rating, that is, public evaluations of presidential job performance.

The Choice also Matters

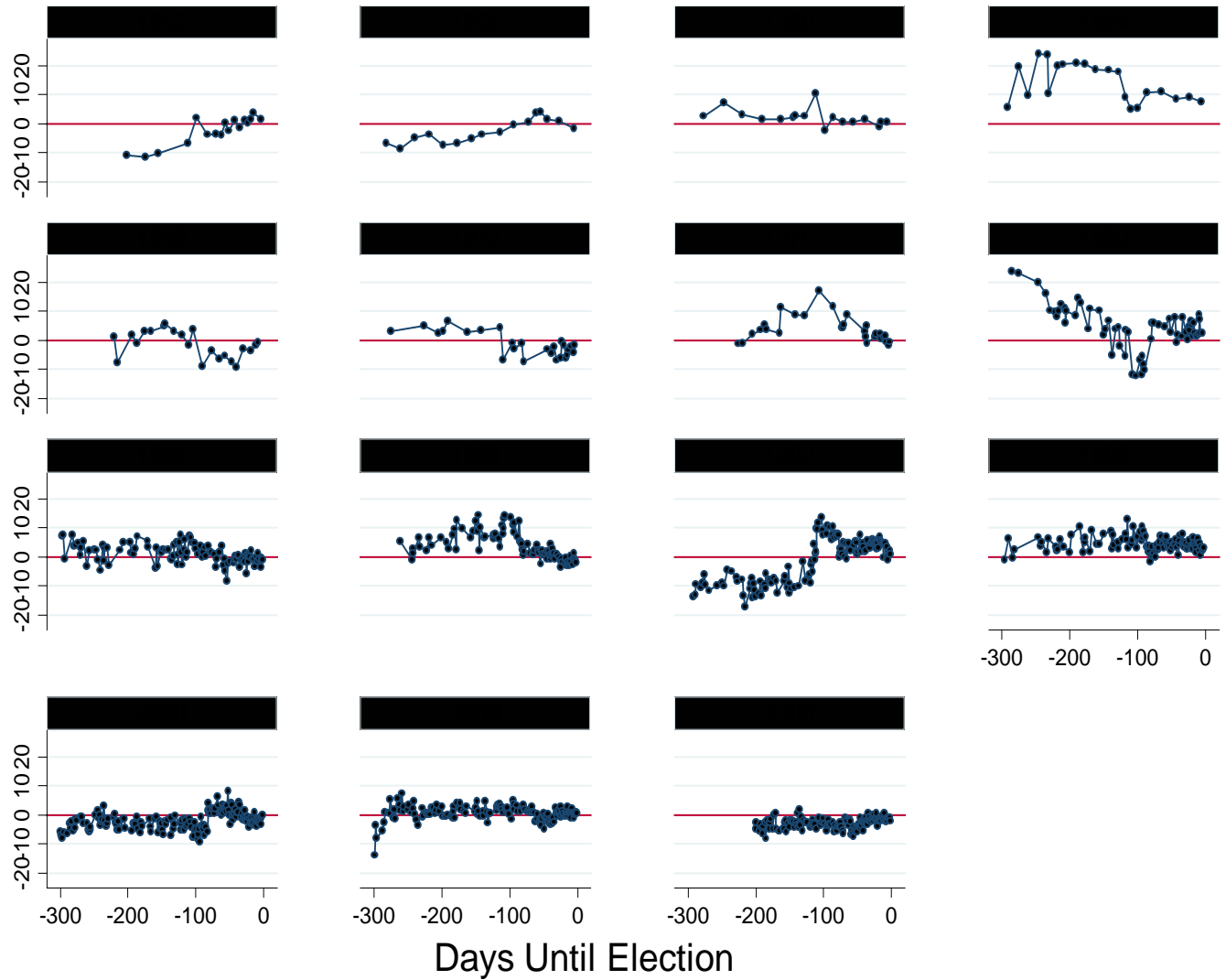
- Ideological/issue proximity.
 - Voters in the middle tend to reward candidates closer to the middle, and punish those off left or right.
 - The Bush-Gore election as an example.
- Other characteristics, e.g., competence.
- But, basic referendum judgments tell most of the story.
 - Is all of the attention to the nominations much ado about relatively little – the choice voters will face in the general election?

The Timeline of Presidential Elections

- Imagine the timeline of a presidential election.
 - E.g., from last election (2012) through Nov 8, 2016.
- We have “trial heat” polls of voter preferences between pairs of candidates at different points in the timeline.
- What do these poll results tell us about the eventual outcome of the November election?
- What happens to change voter preferences?
- What role does the election campaign play?

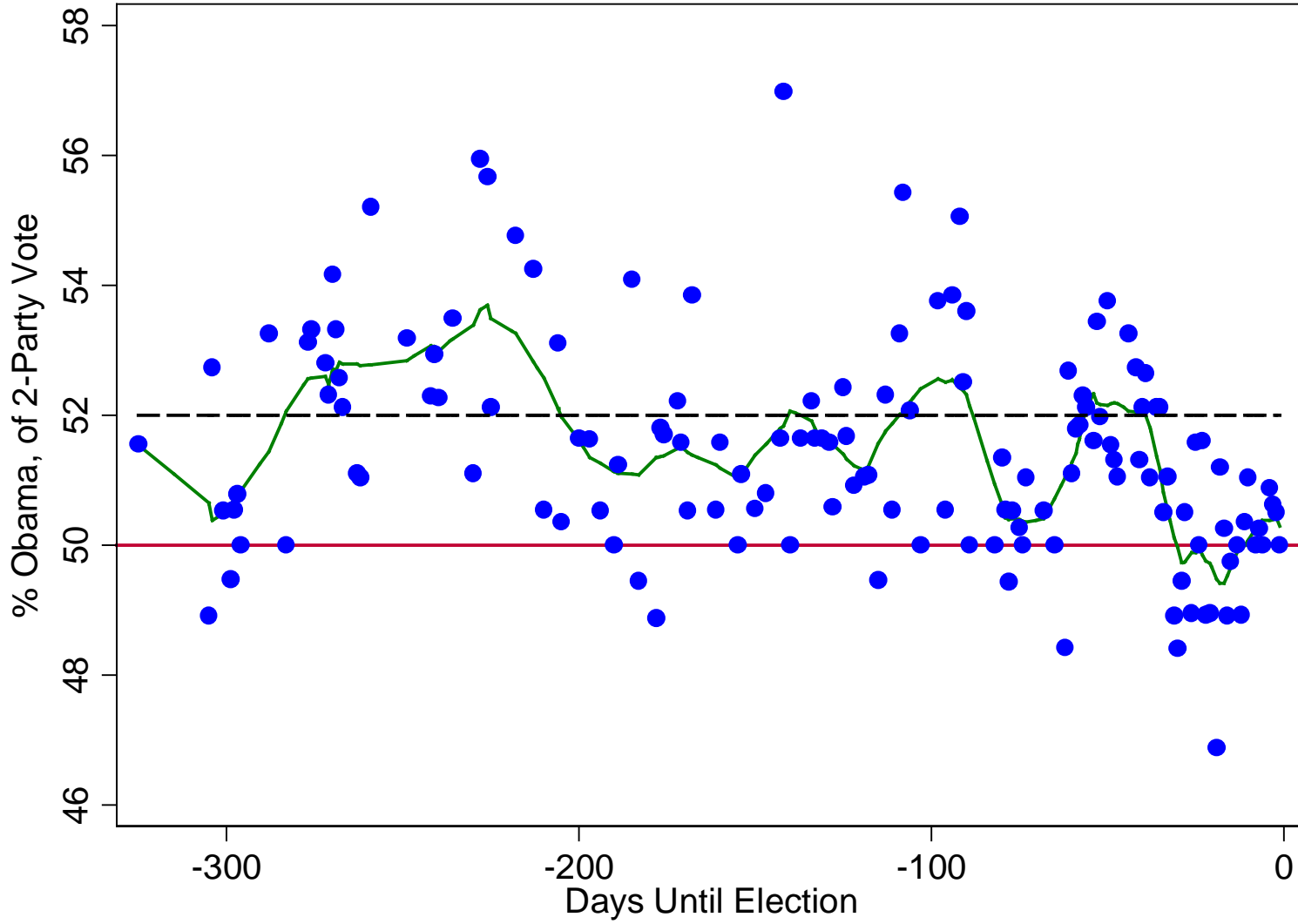
Trial Heat Preferences for Final 300 Days of Campaign, 1952-2008,

Democratic Vote in Polls (as deviation from Actual Vote)

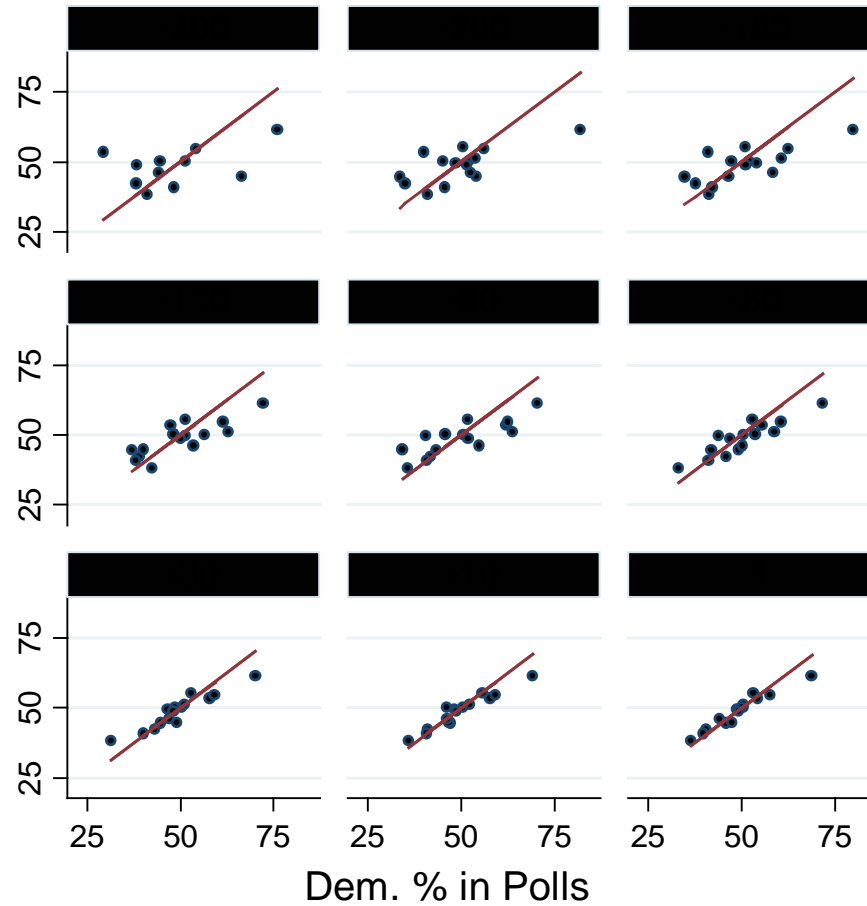


Graphs by year

Trial Heat Preferences During 2012

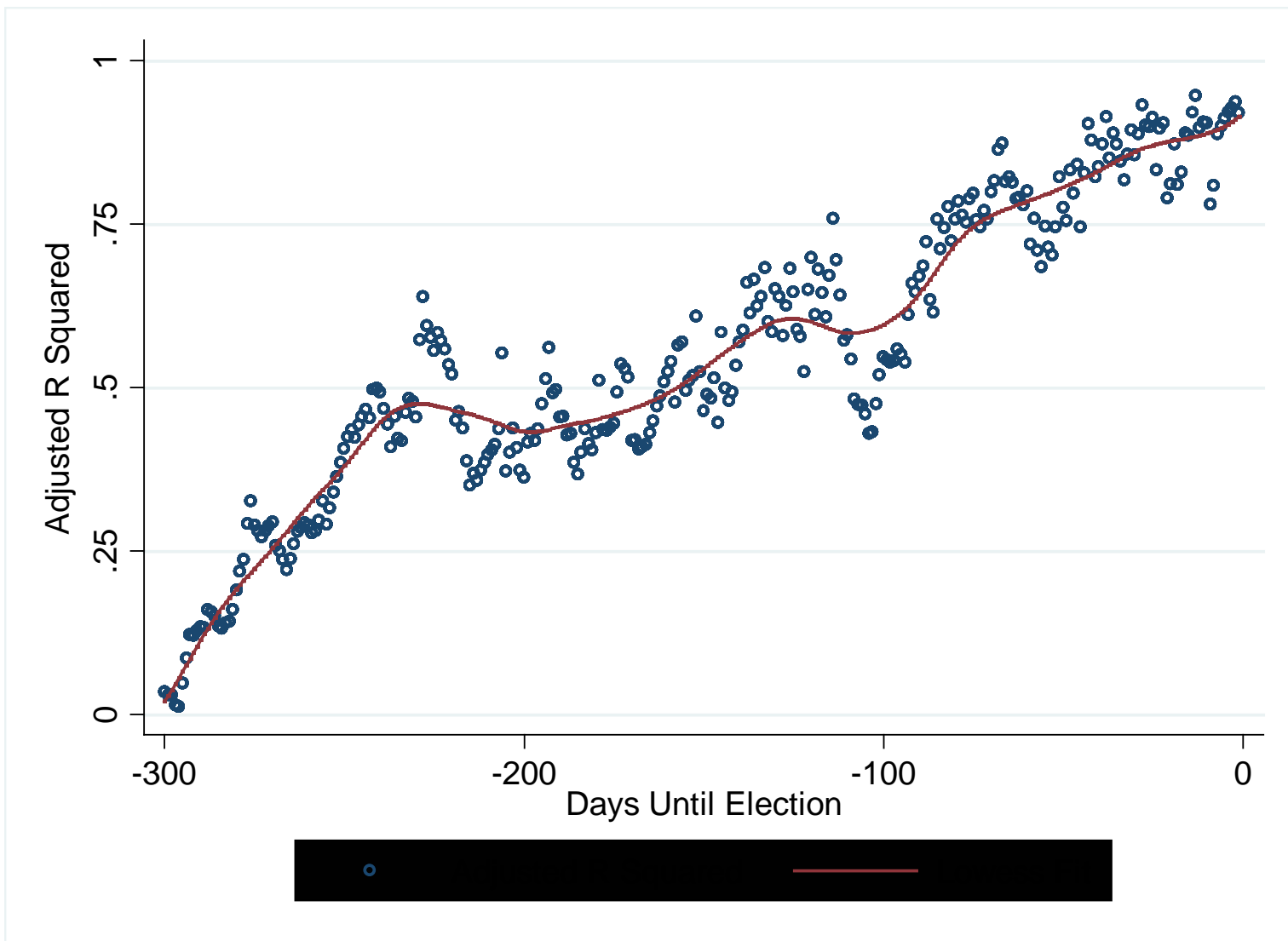


Polls and the Vote, by Days Until the Election

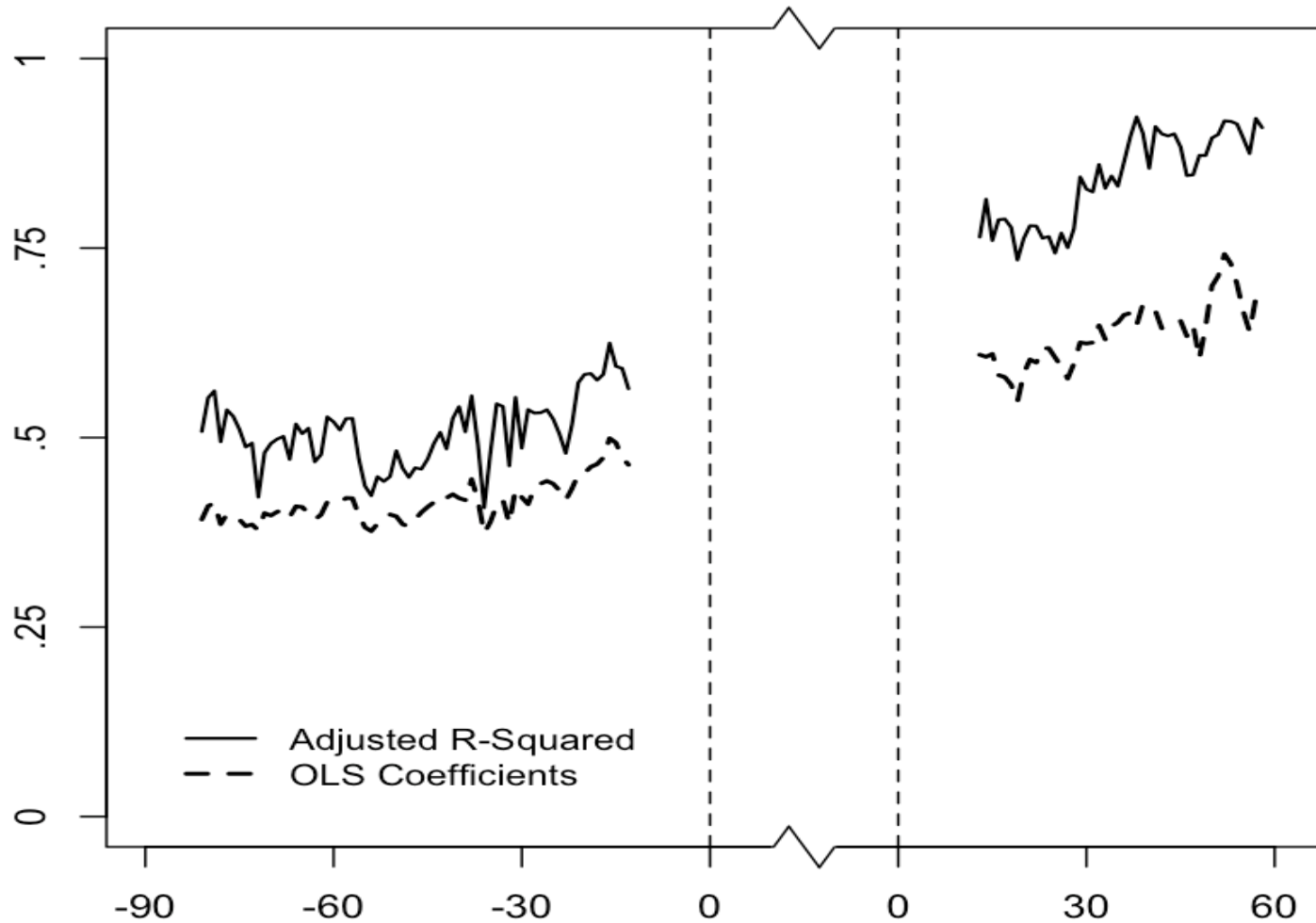


Graphs by Days before Election

Polls-Vote Prediction by Days to Election for the Final 300 Days: From Low to High Predictability

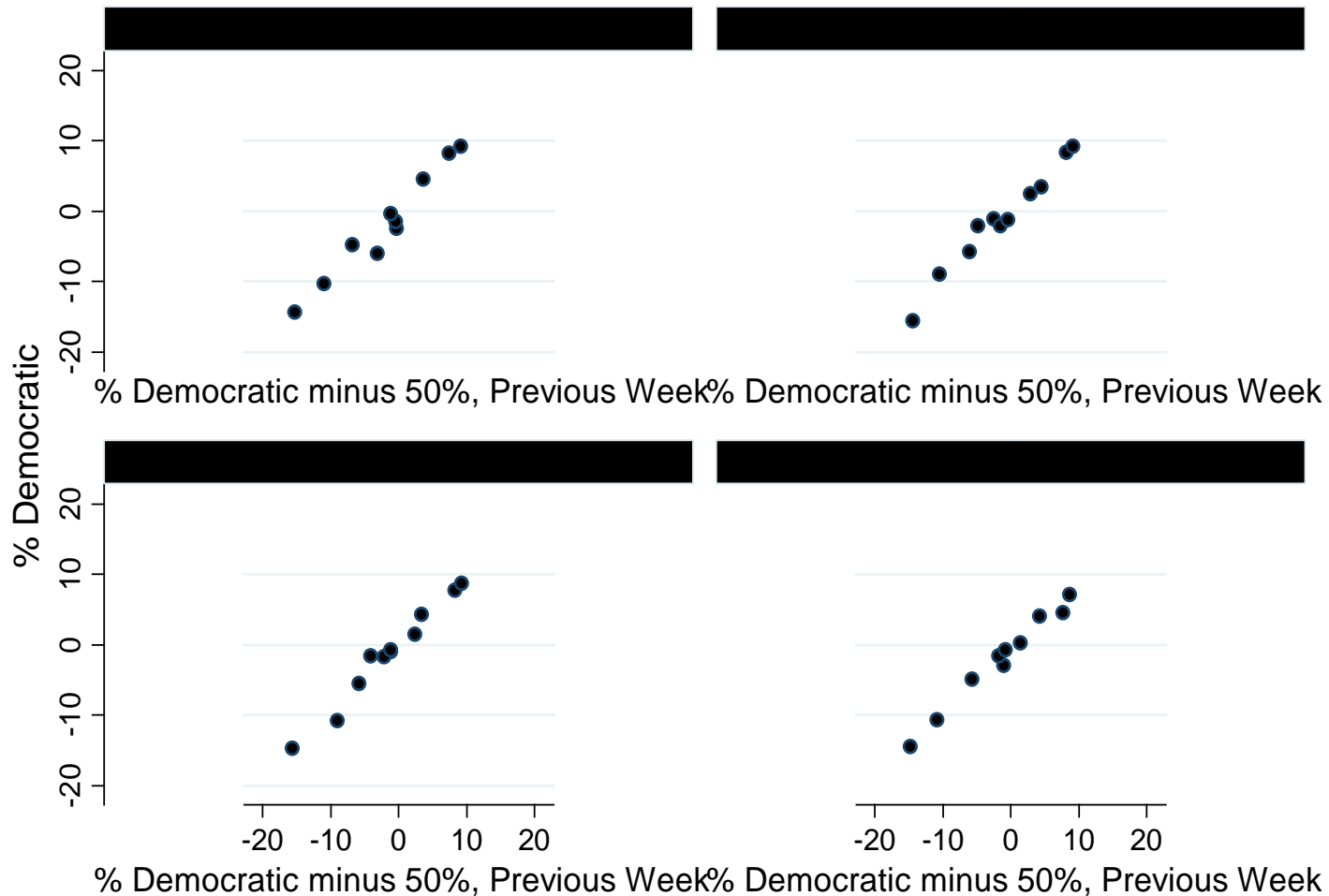


Polls-Vote Prediction by Days Before and After the Party Conventions



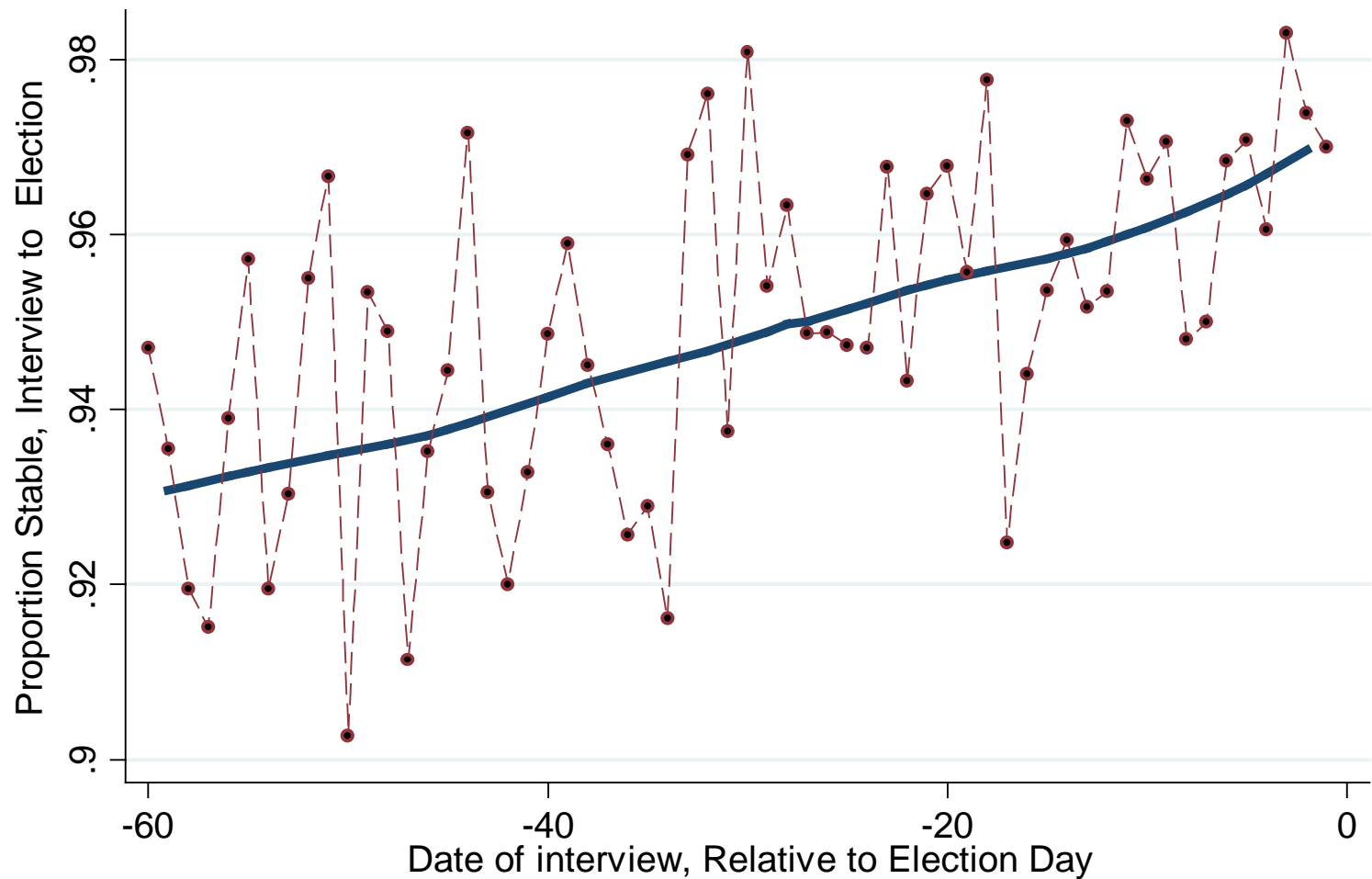
Days Before the First Convention or After the Second Convention

Weekly Vote Intentions by Lagged Weekly Vote Intentions, Final Four Weeks of the Campaign

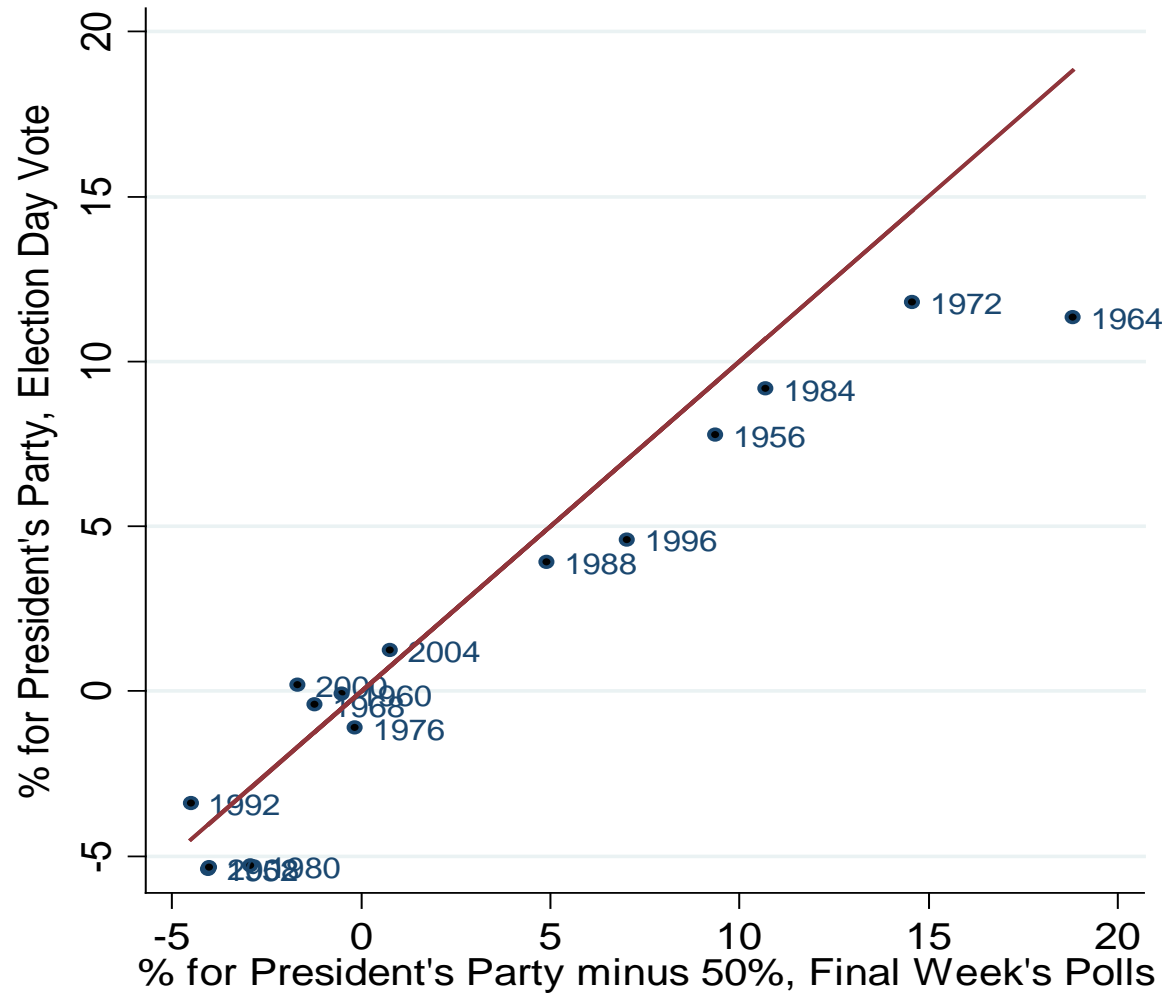


Graphs by Week

Stability of vote choice over the campaign (National Election Study 1952-2008)



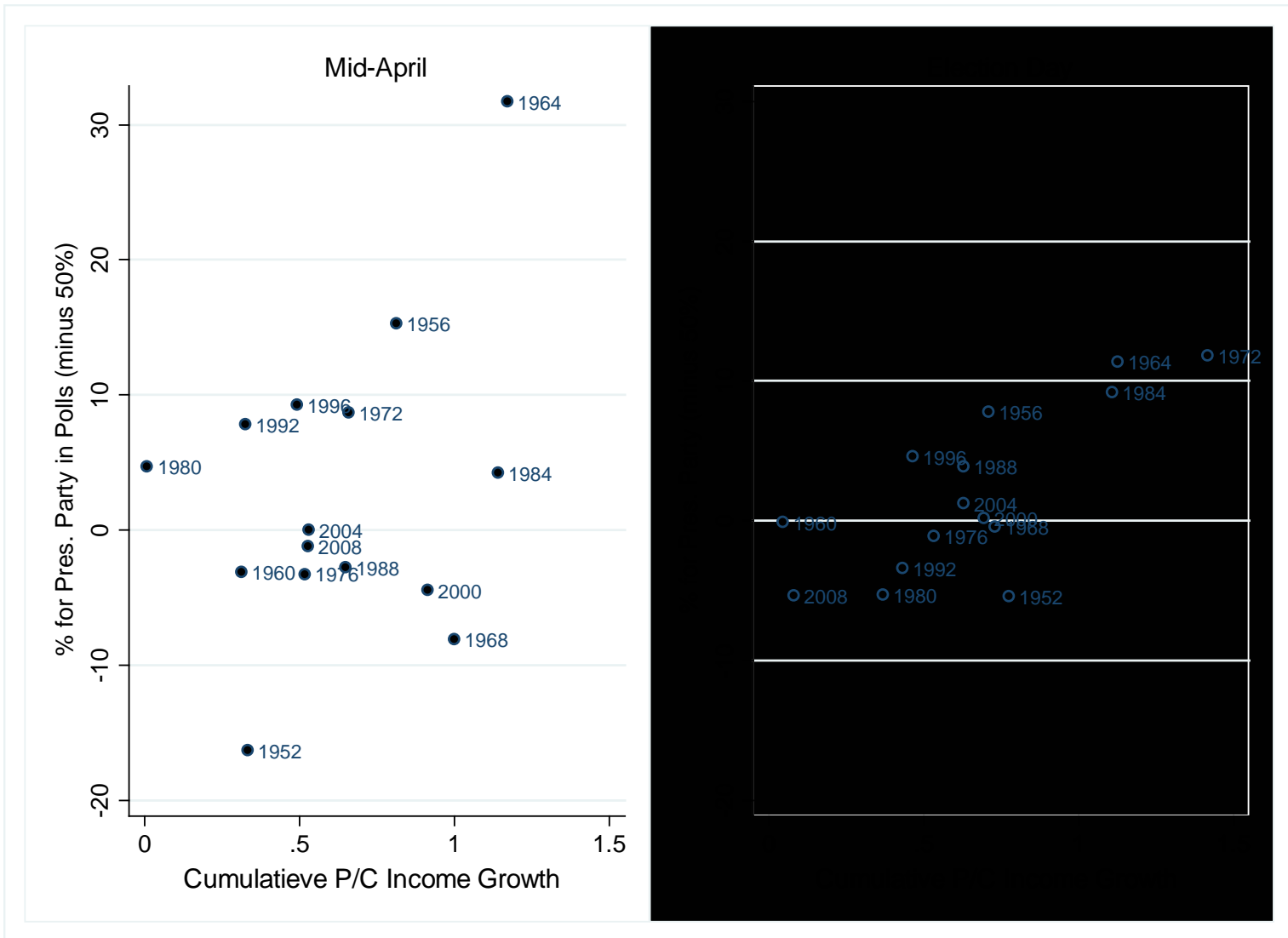
From the Final Week to Election Day: Vote for the *President's* Party



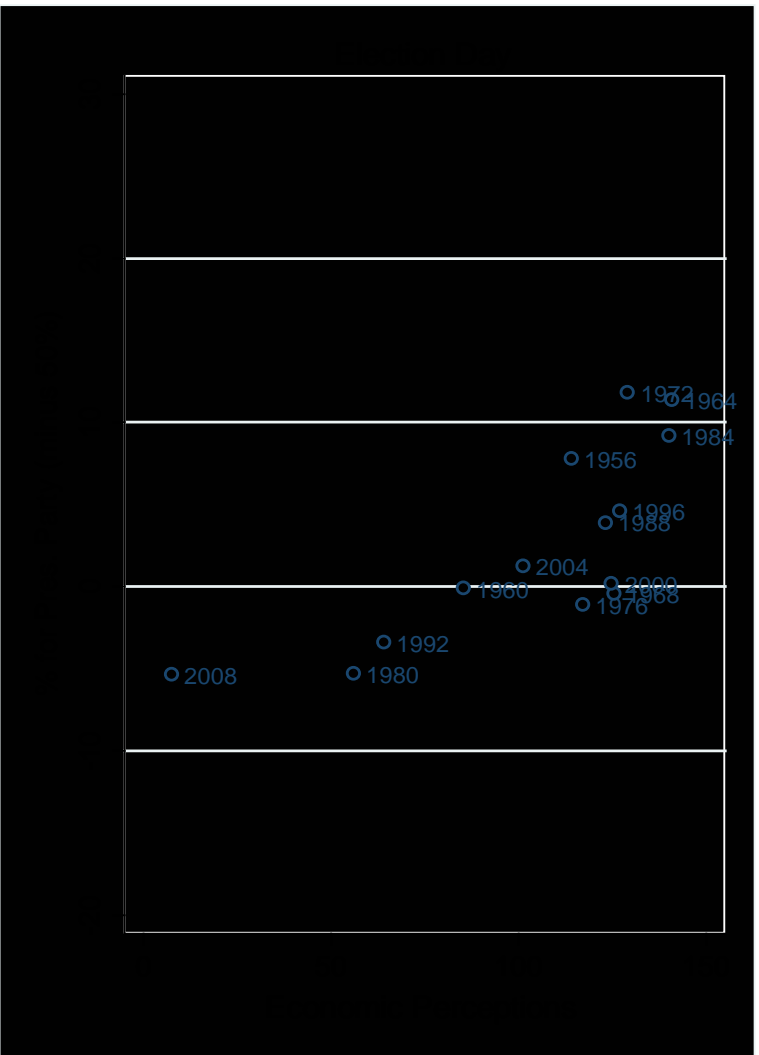
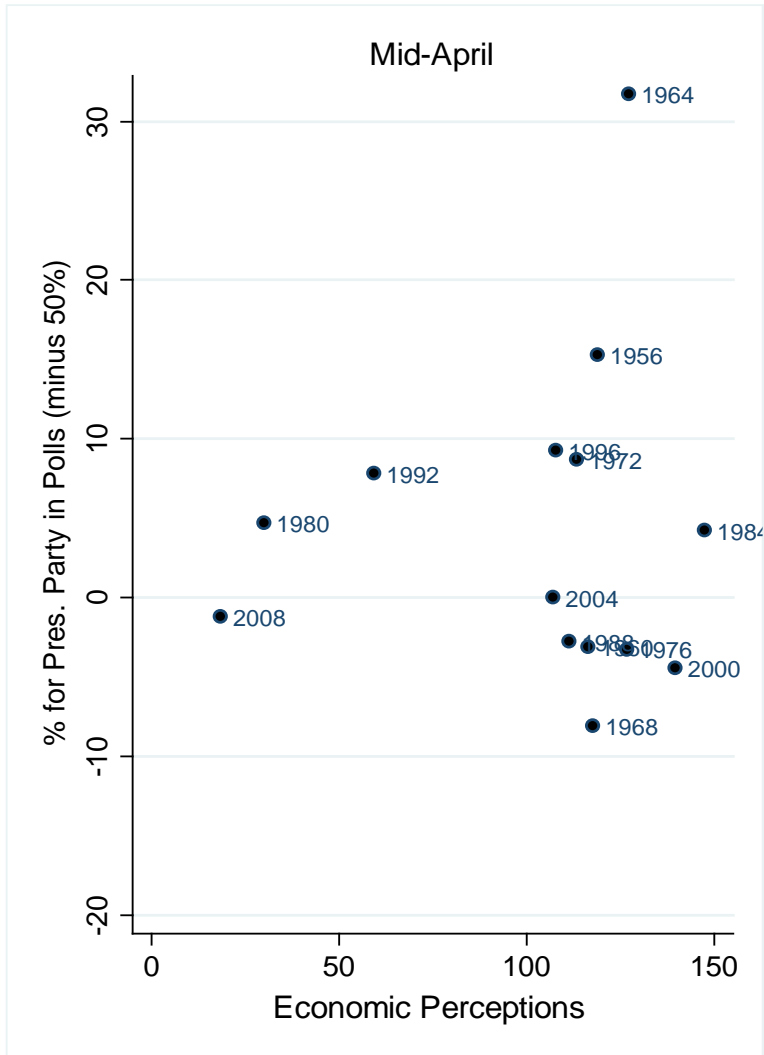
Predicting the Polls and the Vote

- Two different economic indicators.
 - *Objective*: Per capita quarterly income growth, with each quarter weighted 1.25 times the previous one in the election cycle (Hibbs)
 - *Subjective*: Percent saying “Business Conditions” have improved over the past year minus the percent saying they have gotten worse (on a 0-200 scale, from Survey of Consumer Finances, University of Michigan)

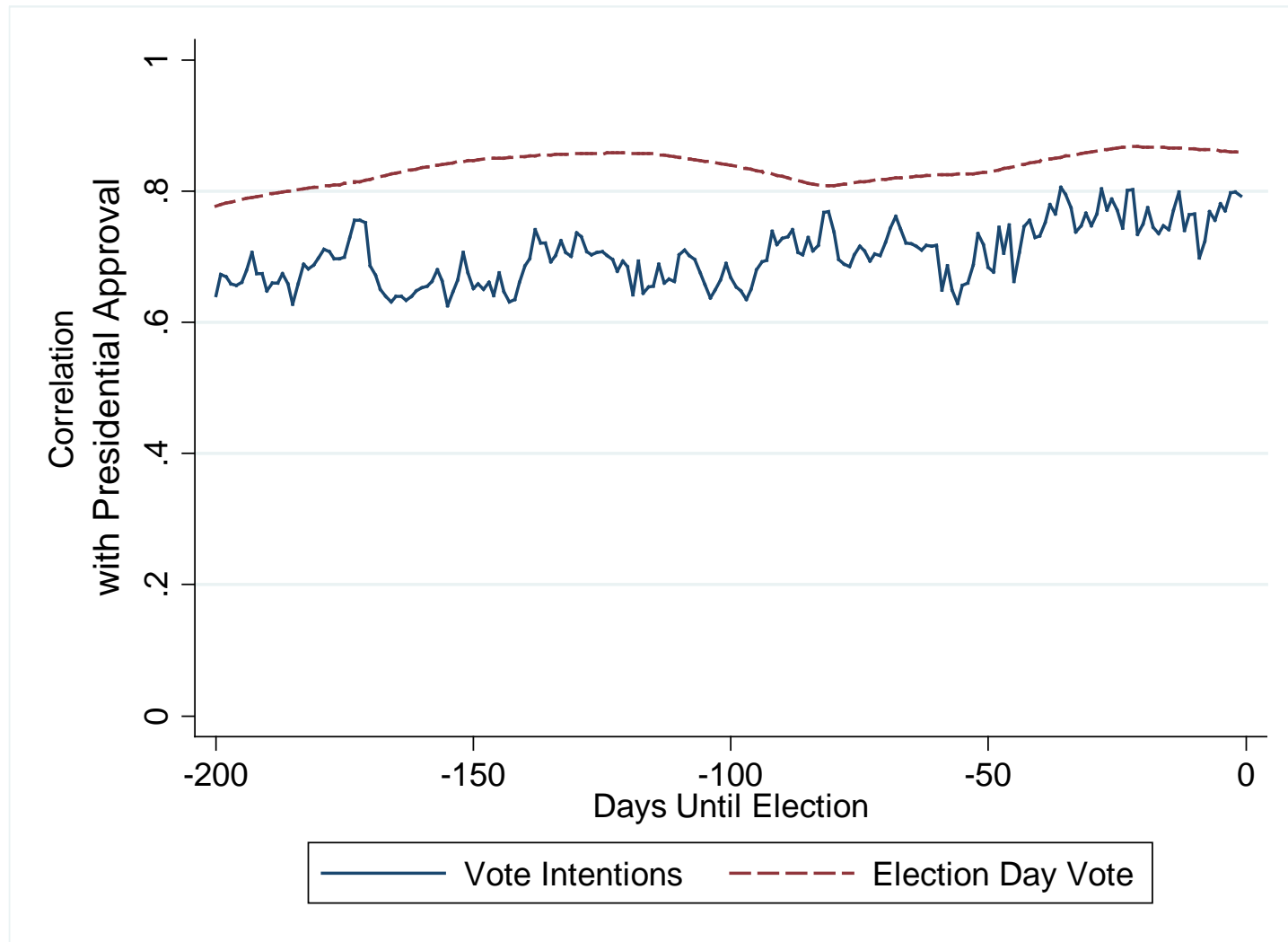
Income Growth and the Polls and the Vote, April to November



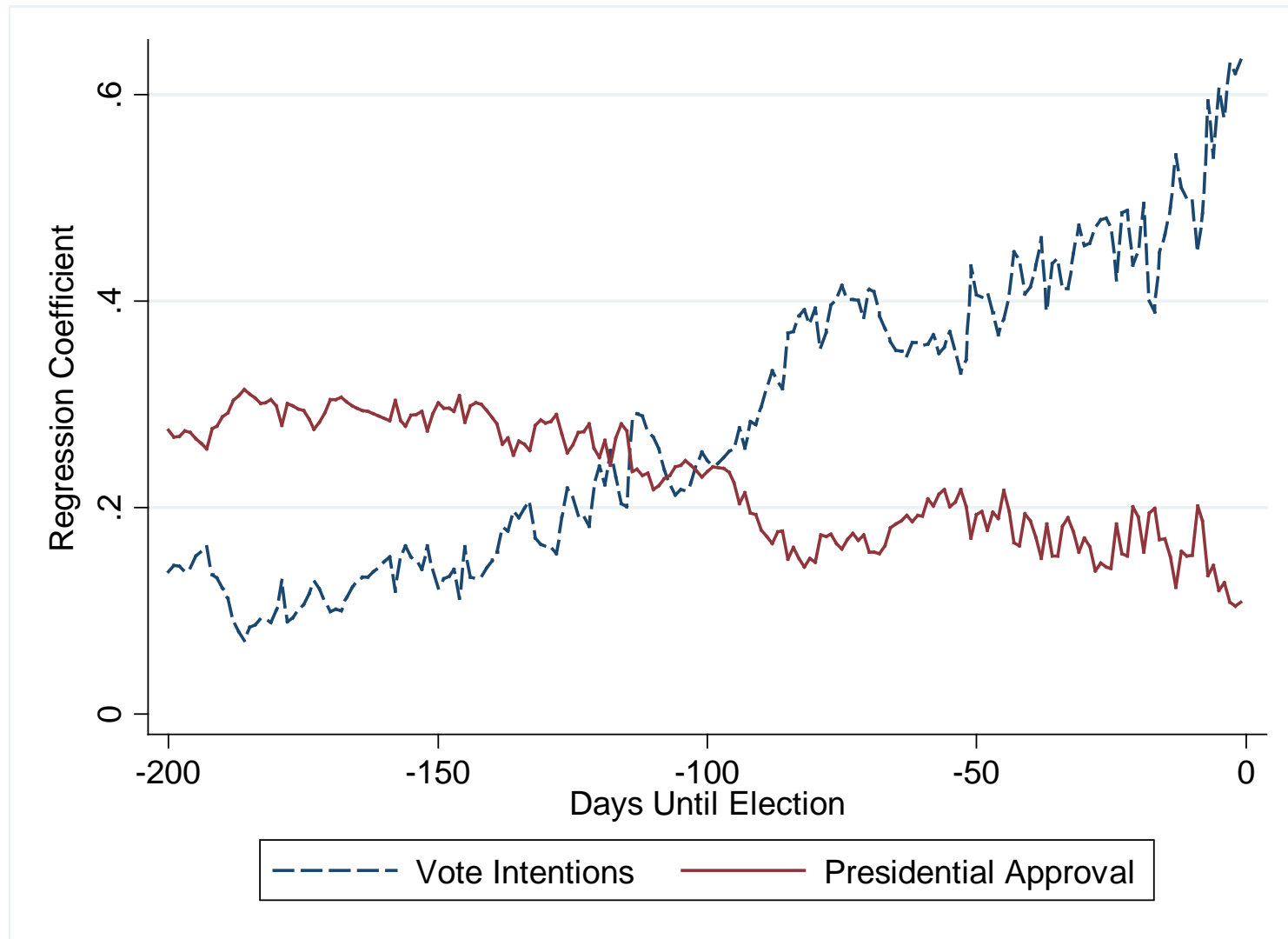
Perceived Economy and the Polls and the Vote, April to November



Correlations between Presidential Approval and Vote Intentions and the Election Day Vote



Predicting the Vote from Vote Intentions and Presidential Approval



Candidate positions and the Public

- Recall that it's not just a referendum.
- Public preferences for policy matter.
 - Public shifts to the left (right) benefit Democrats (Republicans);
- Candidate positions matter.
 - Candidate shifts to the left (right) benefit Republicans (Democrats).
- This really registers with voters during the convention season.

On Election Campaign Effects

- Conventions matter, and quite a lot.
- Debates not so much, if at all.
- Other events matter, but small effects, though ones that add up to influence the final vote.
- But most of the effect of the election campaign is to “deliver” the fundamentals.
 - Internal, mostly partisan dispositions.
 - External, mostly referendum judgments.

Questions to Ponder as the 2016 Timeline Unfolds

- How will the economy evolve?
- What about presidential approval?
- Which candidates will win the nominations?
- What positions will they take?
- Will the campaign deliver the “fundamentals”?

- Time and the information it reveals will tell.

Thank you