

# Congressional Elections, 2018 and Beyond

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**2018 Conference by the Hobby School of Public Affairs,  
University of Houston**

**Triple Play: Election 2018; Census 2020; and redistricting 2021**

# Topics

- Why big election waves surprise
- Polarization and its effect on congressional elections
- The GOP's structural advantage in electoral politics
- Predicting the electoral future is not easy

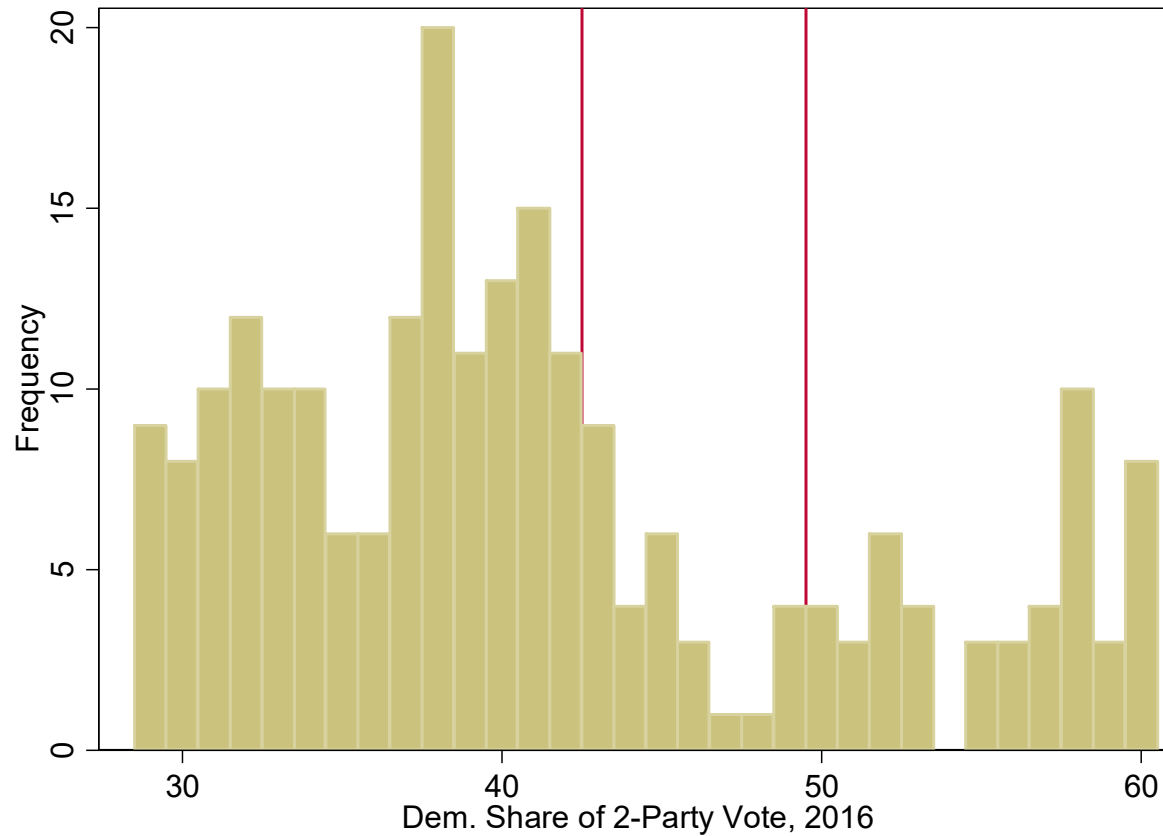
# Why are Wave Elections (like 2018) such surprises (even when sorta anticipated)?

- In 1994, the GOP easily took over the House (+54 seats) and Senate. Virtually nobody saw that coming,
- In 2006, the Democrats comfortably won back the House (+30 seats) and Senate. Nobody saw that as possible until the final two weeks.
- In 2010, the GOP routed the Democrats (+63 seats) and took Congress back. It seemed likely at the time, but not by that margin.
- In 2018, the Democrats easily took back the House (~+40), but not the Senate. Observers saw this coming but were wary and not such a gain.

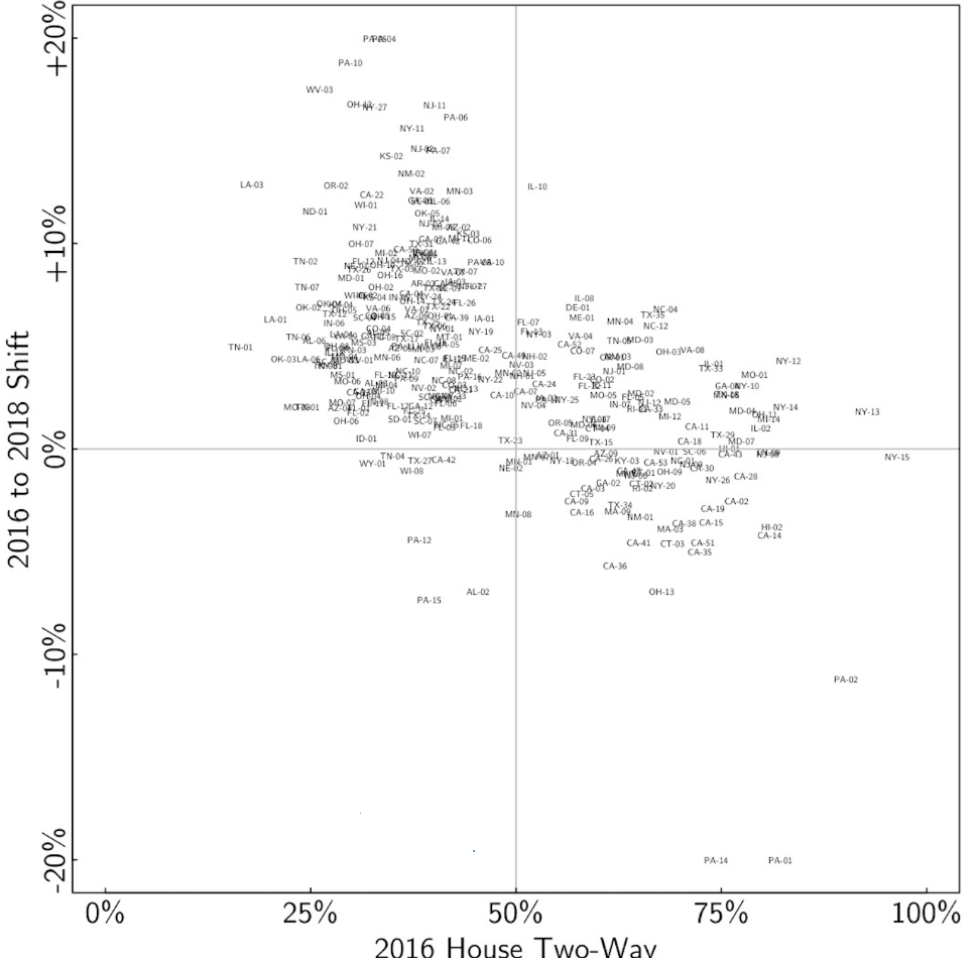
# Why are Wave Elections (like 2018) such surprises (even when sorta anticipated)?

- In most (that is, non-wave) elections, there are very few competitive seats, in part because nearly-competitive seats are generally ceded to the dominant party. Why try hard to only get close? A party should protect what it can hold.
- When a wave starts, one party is expected to make major gains
- The wave party builds upon this expected gain by its new energy and effort at winning contests that had been just out of reach.
- The wave party wins many of these previously out-of-reach seats.
- The size of the wave surprises political observers because these seats had seemed safe (although they had been “safe” partly due to a lack of opposition).
- Lets look at the plausibility of a 2018 Democratic wave when looking at the district-level vote back in 2016

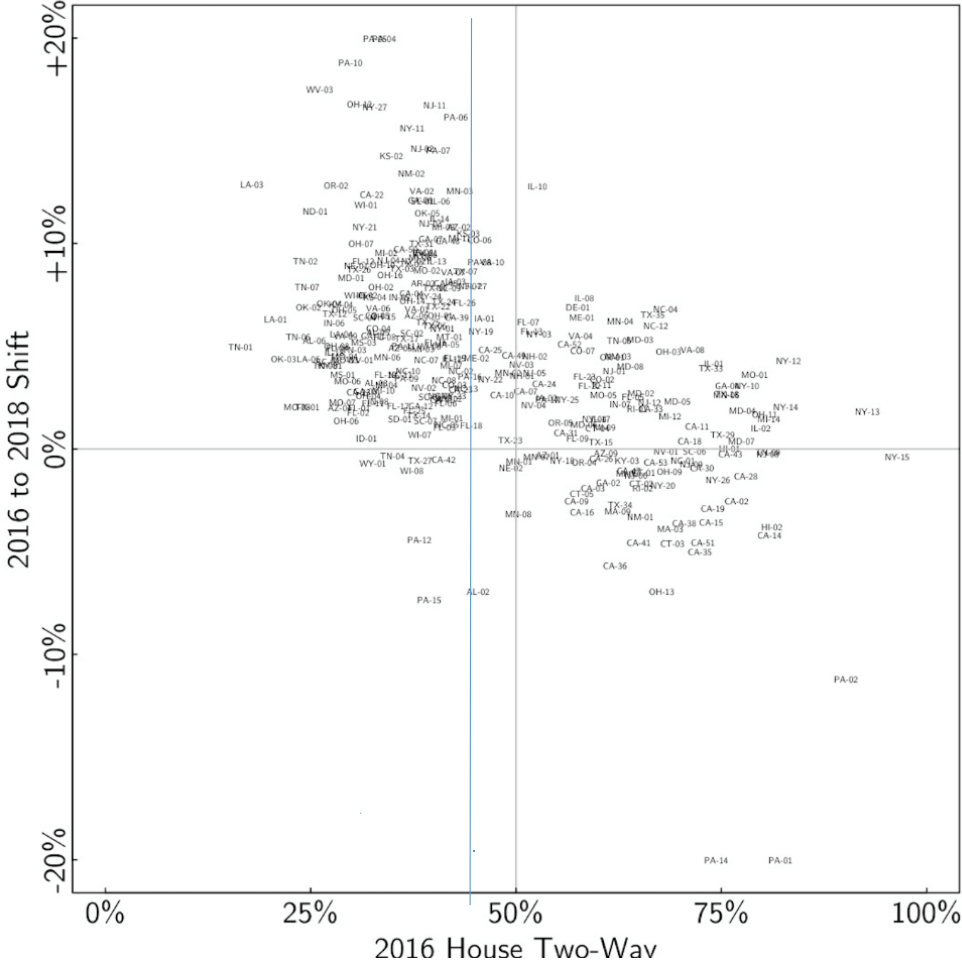
# Distribution of the Dem. Vote, 2016



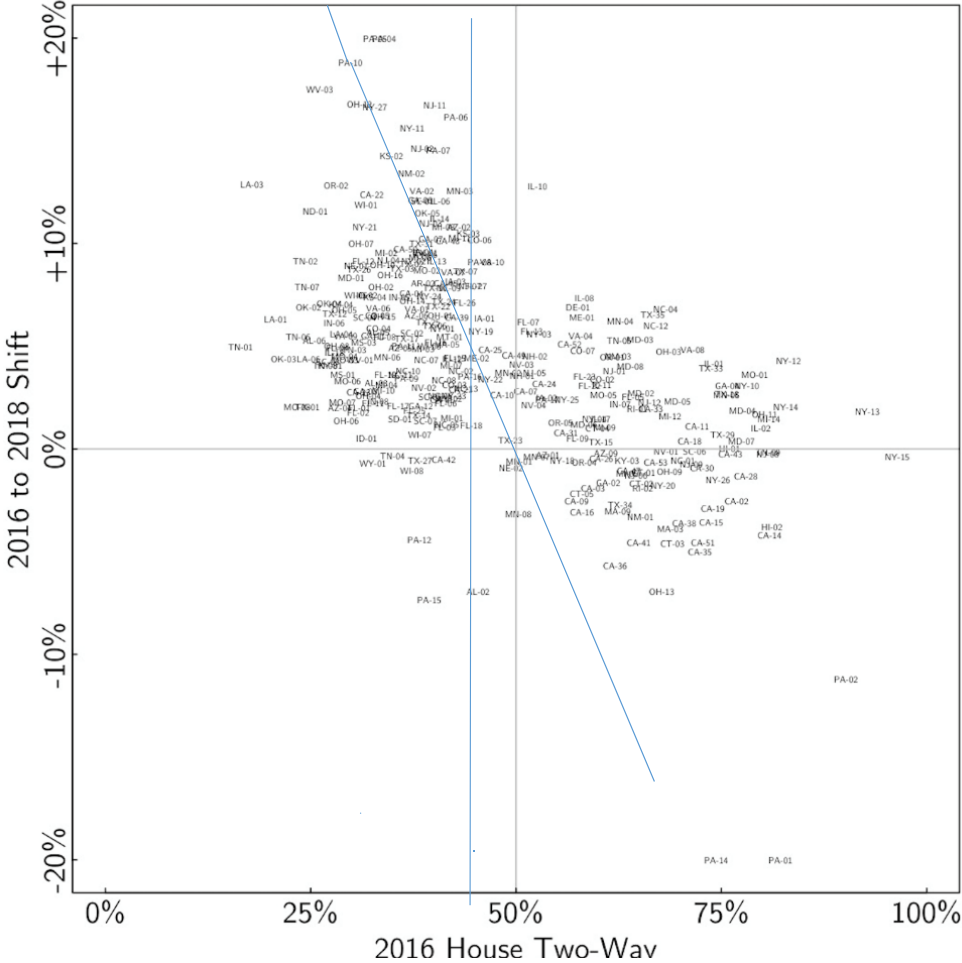
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- Given pro-GOP gerrymandering, election outcomes based on partisanship help the GOP in the long run.
  - Democratic candidates can no longer run strong campaigns that blur party lines.

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The Electoral College is just a crap-shoot when the national vote is close, but not biased. To win the House or Senate, the Democrats must win over the median voter (at 50%); they must win the voter at the 53<sup>rd</sup> percentile of conservatism.

Midterm vote does not predict the next presidential election

