

PACking in the Dollars: Using PAC Contributions to Track Conditional Party Government

Pamela Ban¹, Daniel J. Moskowitz², and James M. Snyder, Jr.³

Using PAC Contributions to Value Positions

- Conditional party government implies a shift in responsibility from committees to party leaders over time, as the preferences of the party caucuses become more homogenous and the distance between the party caucuses grow.
- Since the 1970s, scholars have largely characterized Congress as moving from the “text-book Congress” of the past to the “partisan Congress” of today.
- If there is a shift in responsibility from committees to party leaders over time, the flow of PAC contributions should reflect this shift as PACs value targeting MCs who hold more influence.

A Dataset Linking Leadership Positions and PACs

Using a dataset that links PAC contributions to majority and minority party leaders, committee chairs, and ranking members, we can follow the flow of PAC money to track any changes in how PACs value the different positions:

Party Leadership Positions:

- Speaker
- Majority/Minority Leader
- Majority/Minority Whip

Committee Positions:

- Committee Chair
- Ranking Member

$$\% \text{ PAC Contributions}_{it} = \frac{\text{PAC Contributions}_{it}}{\sum_i \text{PAC Contributions}_{it}}$$

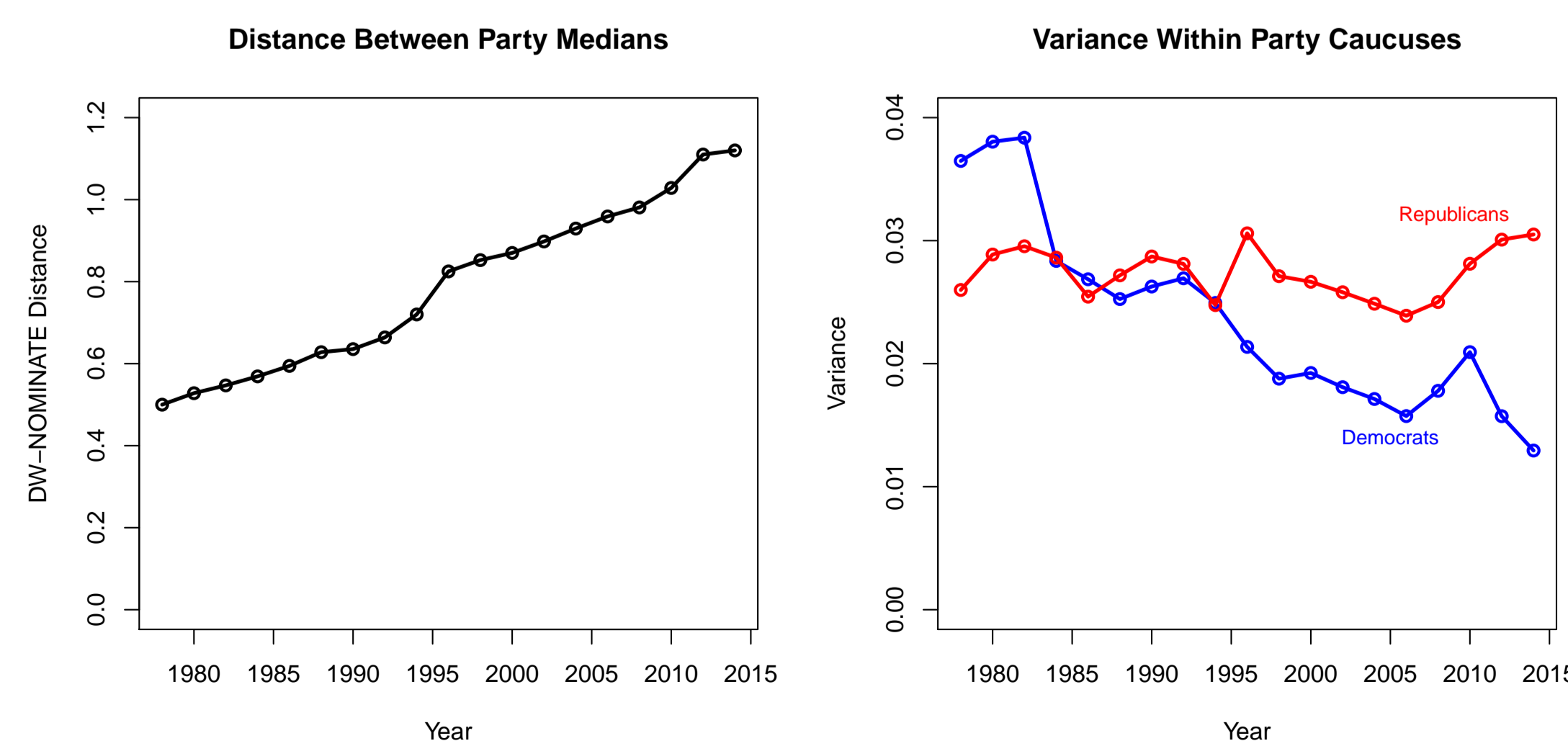
In other words, this is the amount of PAC contributions that a given MC receives as a share of PAC contributions to all MCs in that electoral cycle. Note that we restrict our sample to MCs who are running for reelection.

Growth of Party Leader vs. Committee Chair Values

Majority party leaders are valued around 10 times more than committee chairs. Time trend versions of the variables confirm that the value of majority and minority leadership positions has greatly increased across time relative to that of committee chairs and ranking member positions.

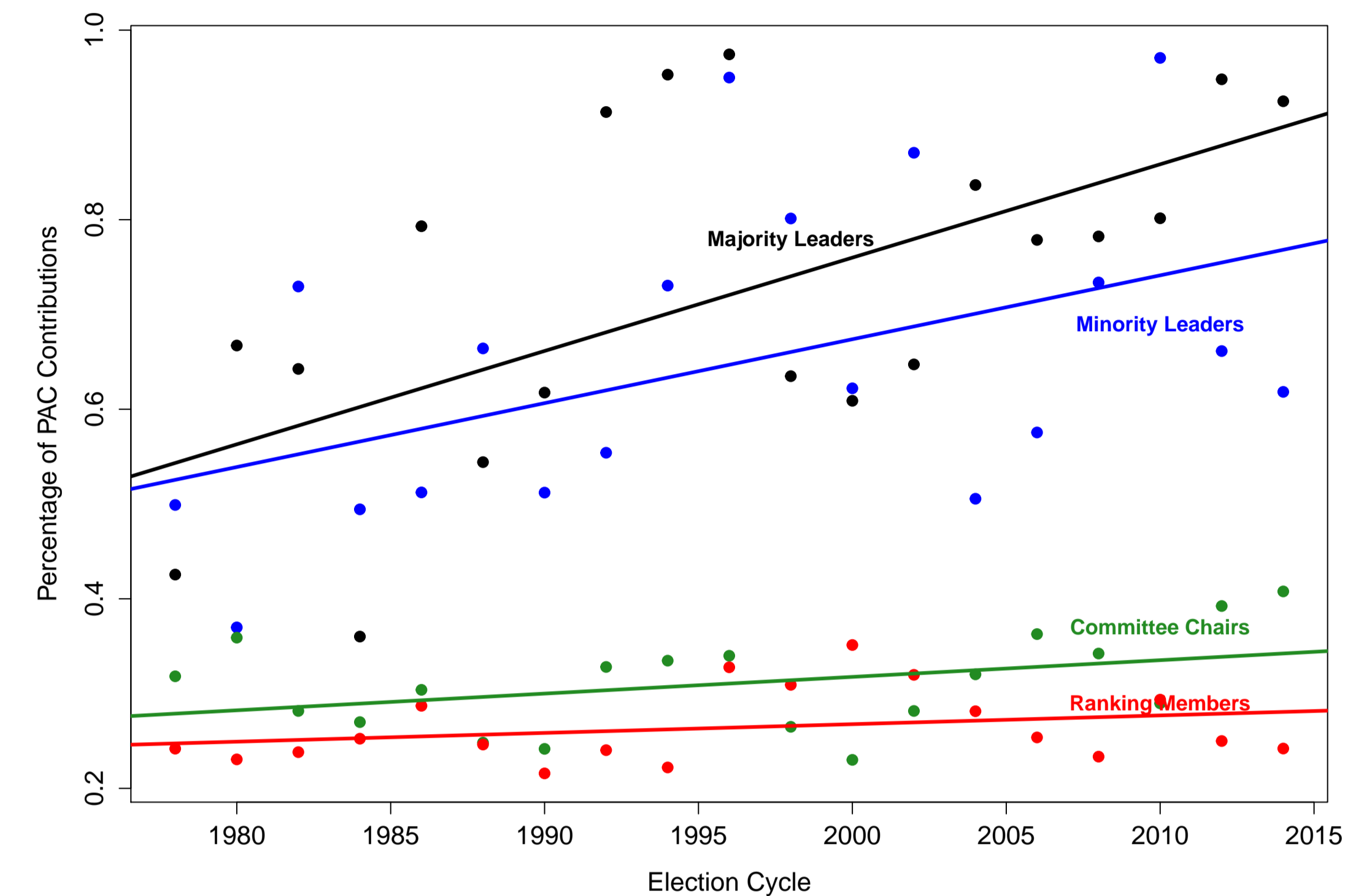
	Effect on % PAC Contributions
Majority Leader	0.300
Minority Leader	0.281
Committee Chair	0.035
Ranking Member	0.004
Majority Leader <i>trend</i>	0.010
Minority Leader <i>trend</i>	0.007
Committee Chair <i>trend</i>	0.002
Ranking Member <i>trend</i>	0.001
Rank and File	-0.293
Rank and File <i>trend</i>	-0.0004

Growing Distance Between Party Caucuses

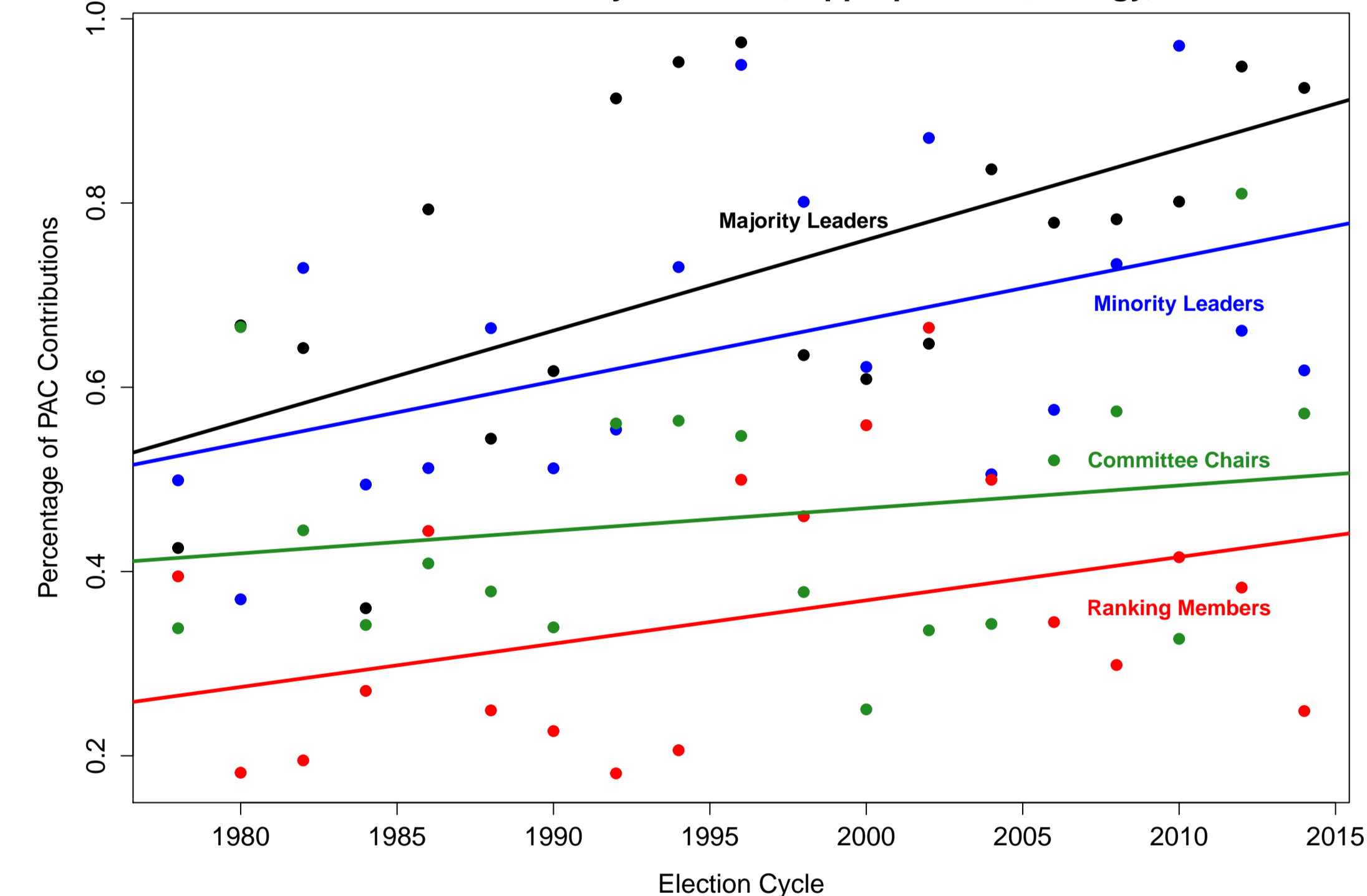


Changes in Position Valuations Tracked Across Time

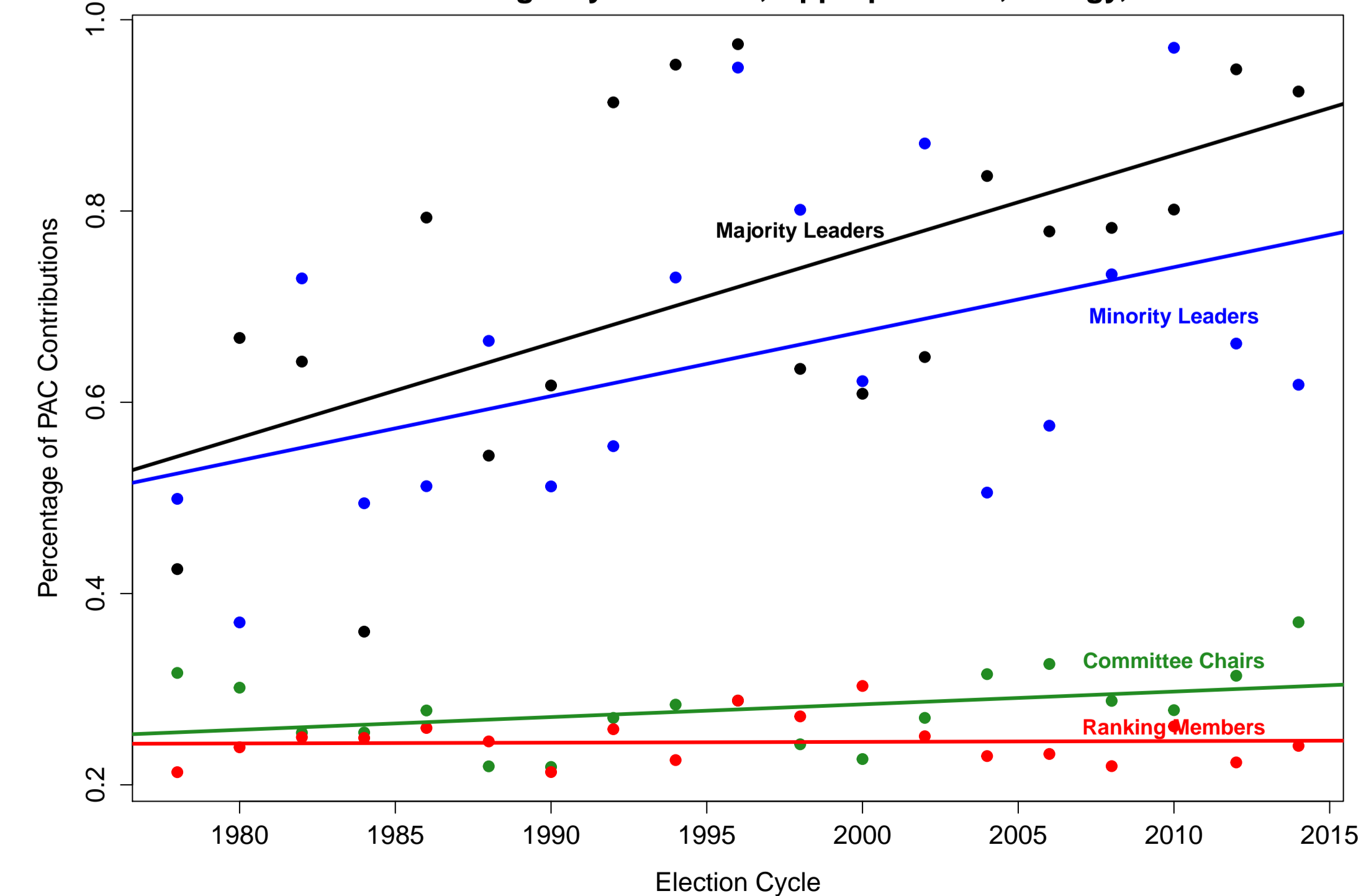
Share of PAC Contributions to Party Leaders vs. Committee Chairs / Ranking Members



Share of PAC Contributions to Party Leaders vs. Committee Chairs / Ranking Members Committees Restricted to Ways & Means, Appropriations, Energy, and Rules



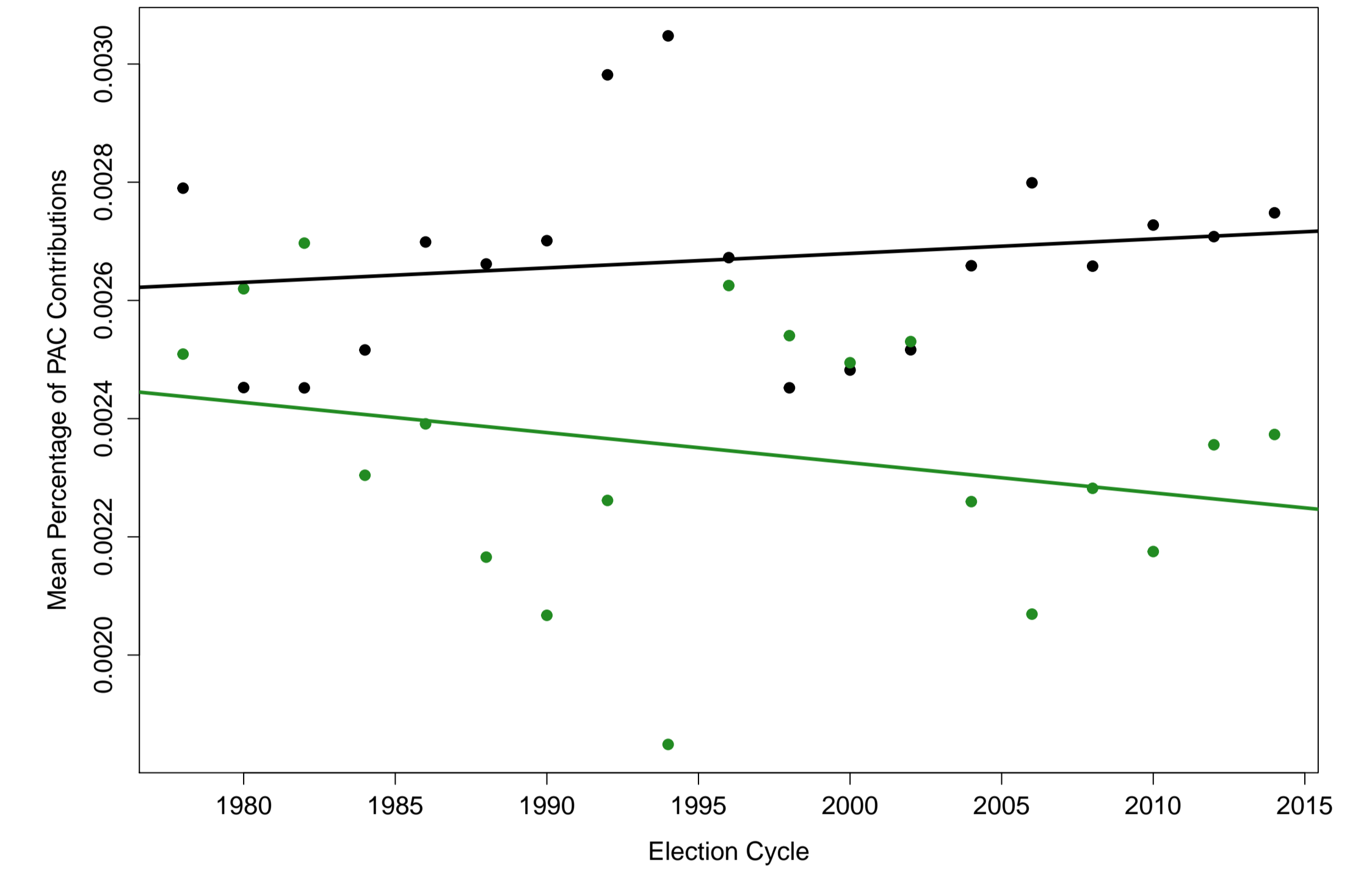
Share of PAC Contributions to Party Leaders vs. Committee Chairs / Ranking Members Committees Excluding Ways & Means, Appropriations, Energy, and Rules



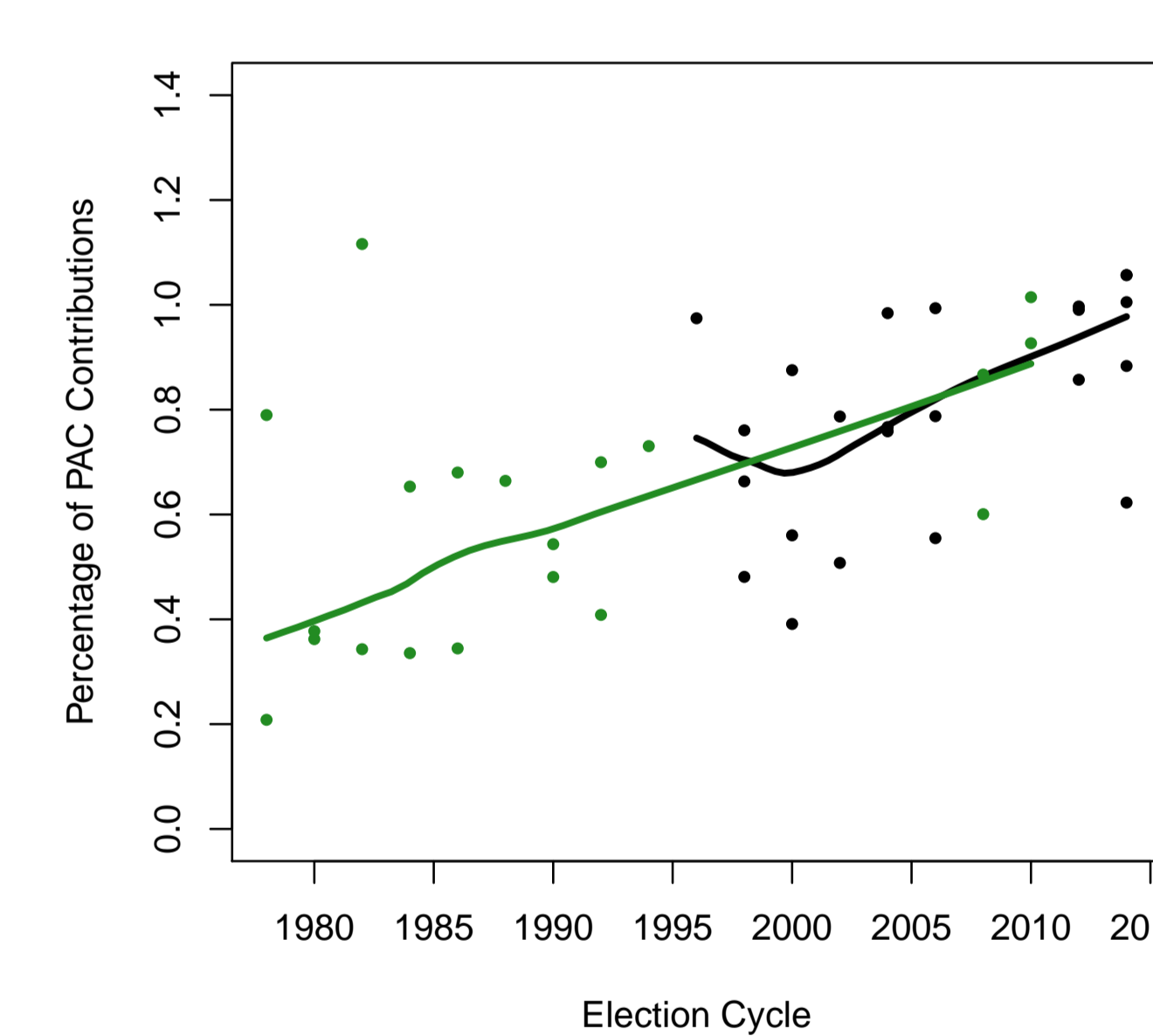
Value of Majority Party Status

There is a very small effect of majority party status (shown in black in the figures below) on the share of PAC contributions received. For party leaders, majority party status does not seem to stall the trend of increasing shares of PAC contributions received by Republican party leaders.

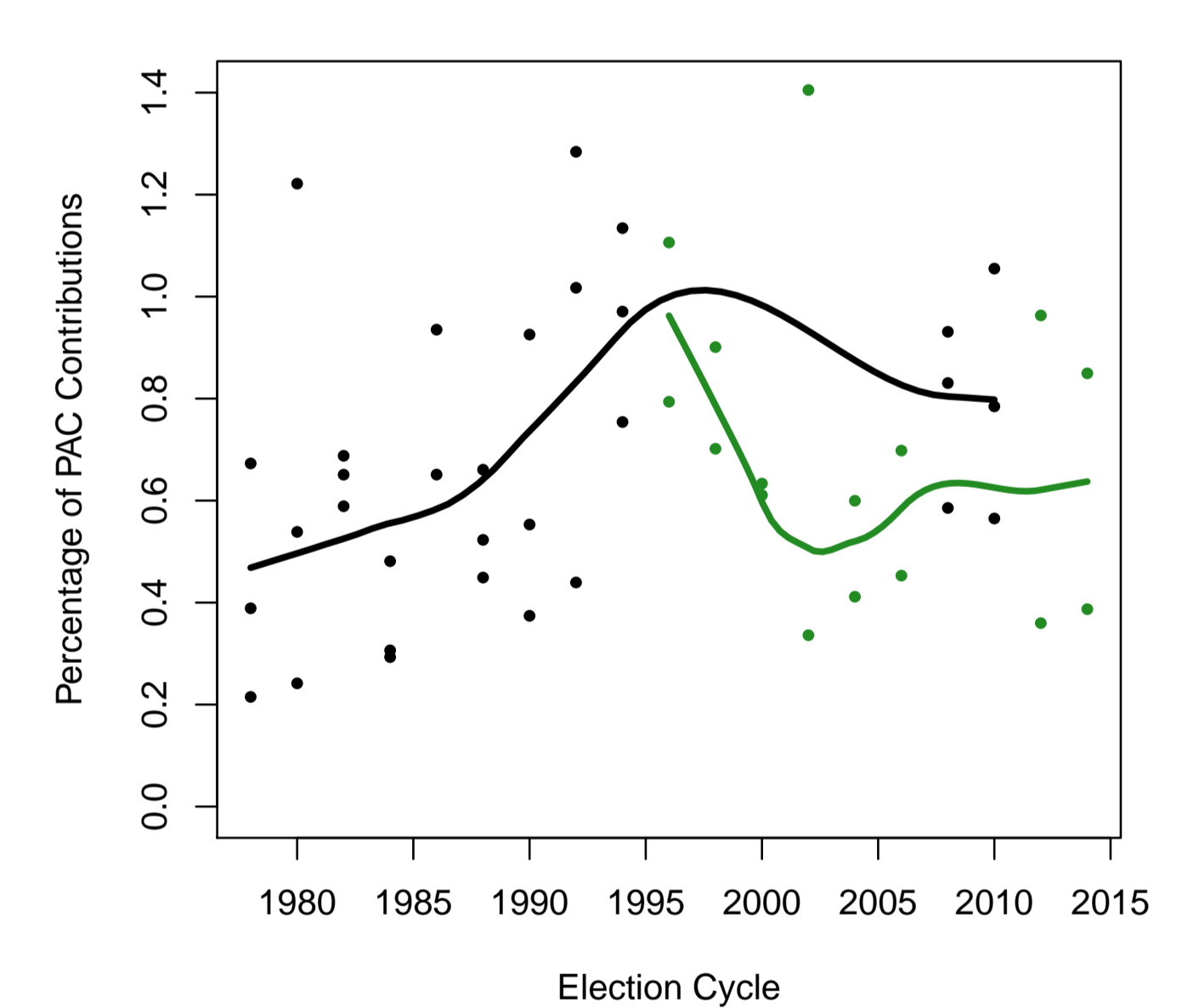
Mean Share of PAC Contributions during Majority and Minority Party Status



Republican Party Leaders by Majority Status



Democratic Party Leaders by Majority Status



Looking Ahead

- Control for electoral competitiveness and vulnerability.
- How might changes to campaign finance laws affect the importance of PAC contributions? How can we take advantage of any changes for our analysis?
- Has the relative importance of being in the majority party grown?
- Are there any changes in institutional power for party leaders or committee leaders that we can investigate to see if any institutional power changes are also reflected by a change in PAC contributions?
- Do access-oriented groups anticipate swings in electoral fortune and give to minority members if there is a likely shift in chamber control?
- How should we treat donations to leadership PACs?

¹Ph.D. Candidate, Harvard University

²Ph.D. Candidate, Harvard University

³Leroy B. Williams Professor of History and Political Science, Harvard University