

Determinants of Career Longevity in U.S. Congress

PROJECT GIT-SOY

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INTRODUCTION

Research question: Which factors appear to shape career longevity more strongly: age at entry, chamber, or party affiliation?

We hypothesize that the age of entry will have the strongest relationship with career longevity.

Our research is motivated by a
broader interest in
understanding how structural
and individual factors shape
political careers over time.

OUR DATA

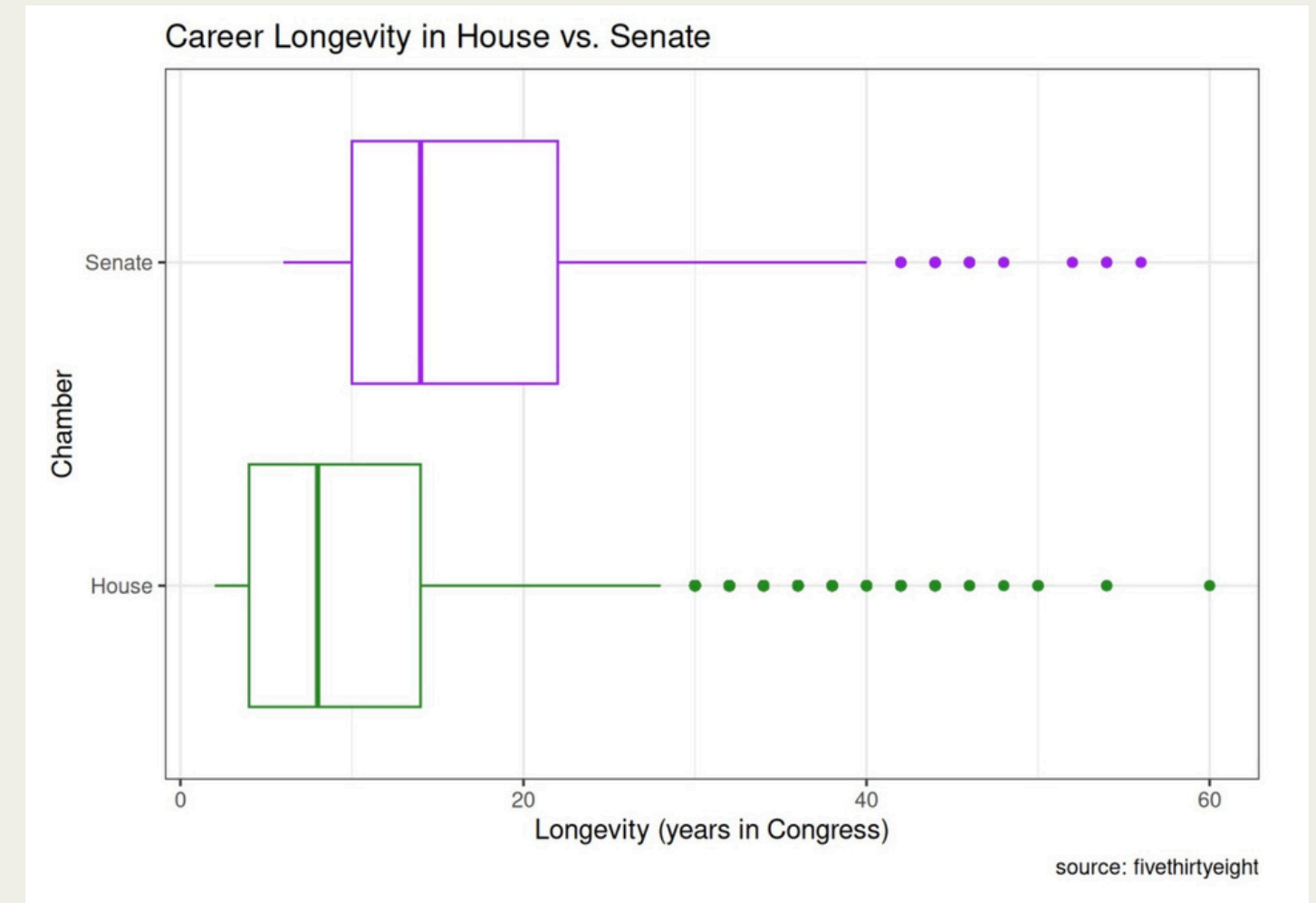
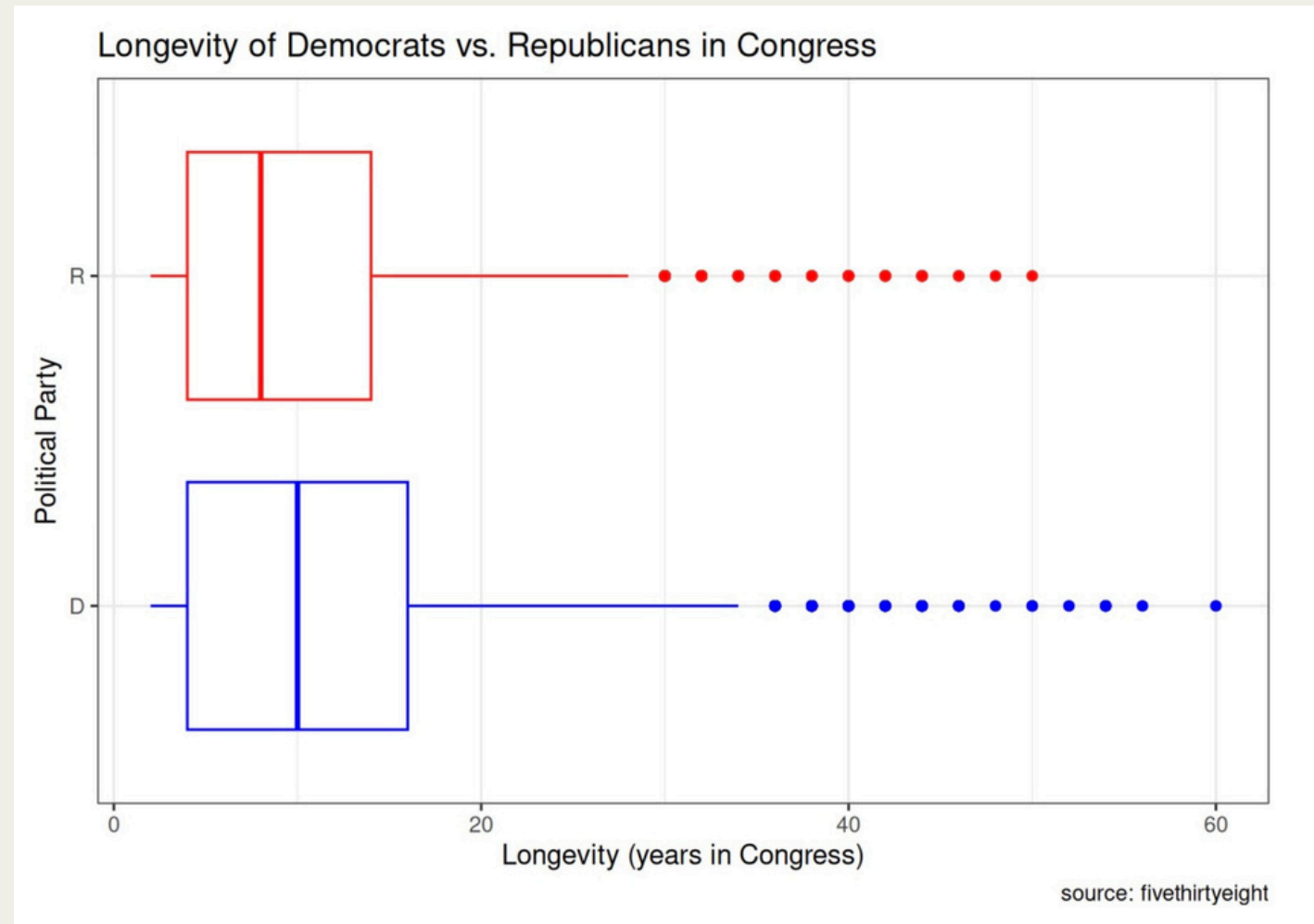
Source: FiveThirtyEight

- Created from public biographical websites
- Covers all members of Congress (1919–2025)
- Contains start date, chamber, party, and age
- Limitation: Doesn't contain current congress

+5,000
entries

106 Years
of Data

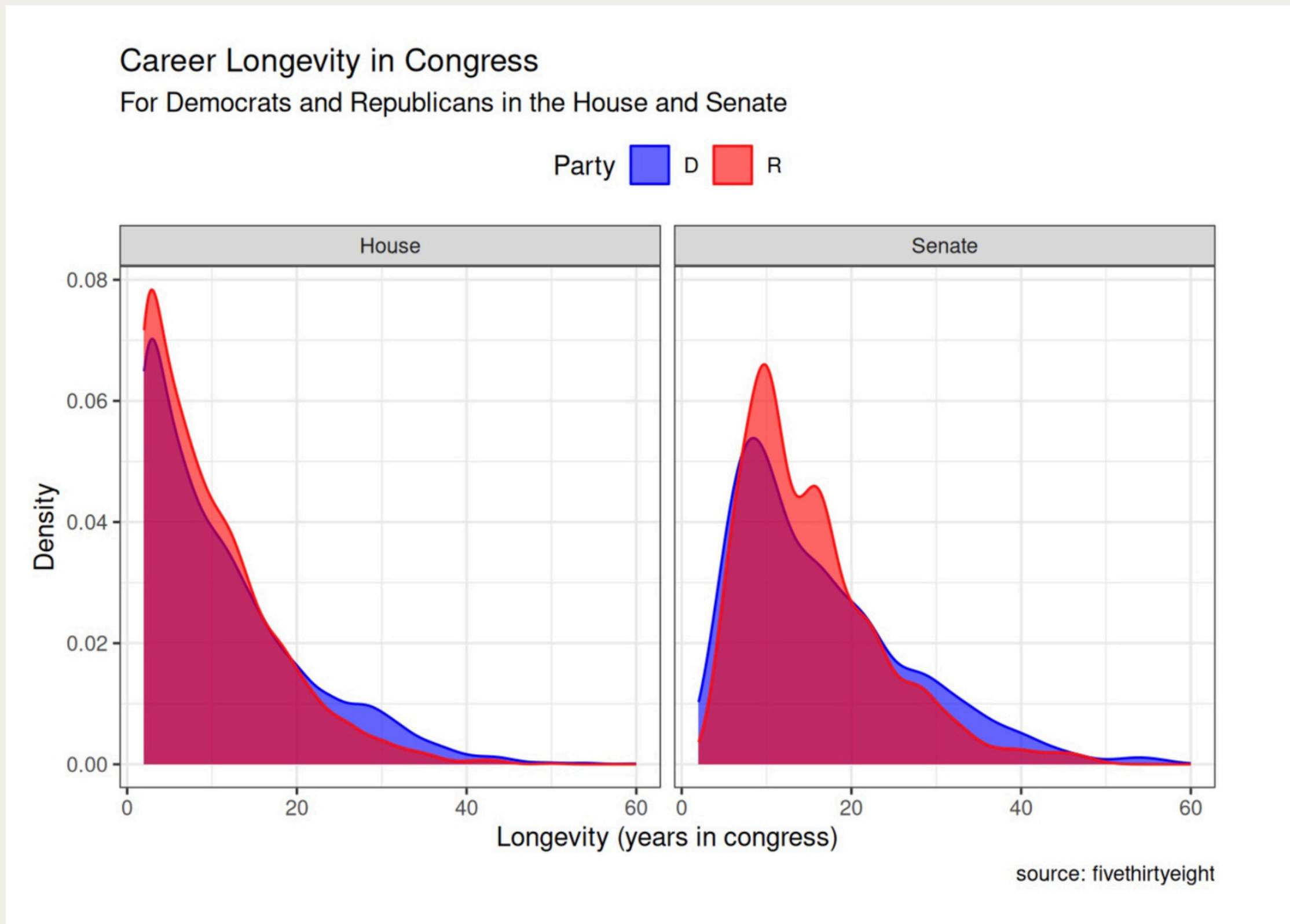
LONGEVITY - PARTY AND CHAMBER (SEPARATELY)



- Career longevity of Dems. vs. Reps.
- Similar distributions of career length
- most members are serving relatively short terms (with a few long-term outliers)
- **Key Takeaway:** party affiliation does not appear to strongly impact career longevity

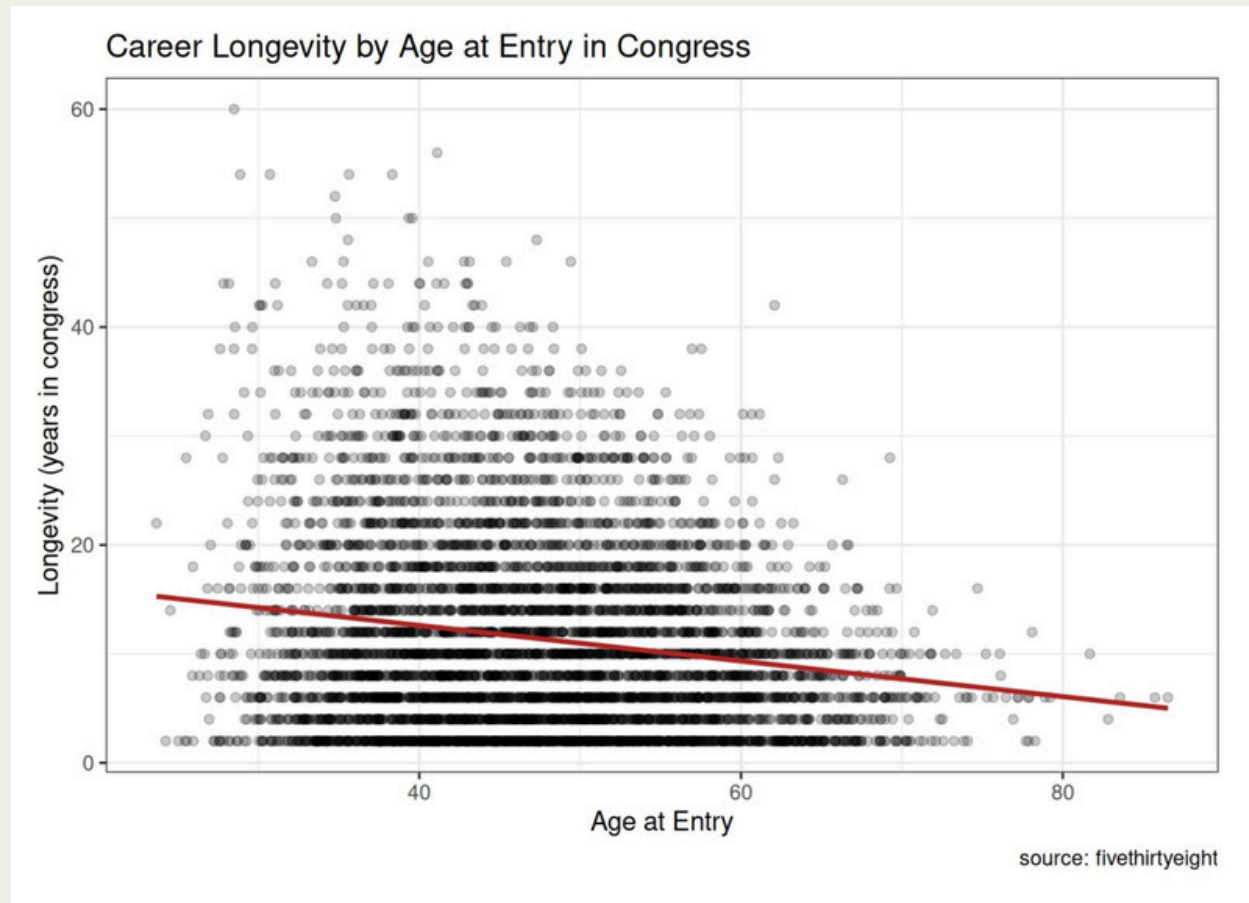
- Career longevity in House v Senate
- senators generally have longer careers than House members (higher median)
- **Key Takeaway:** Chamber does matter, Senate careers tend to last longer than House careers

LONGEVITY BY PARTY IN HOUSE AND SENATE

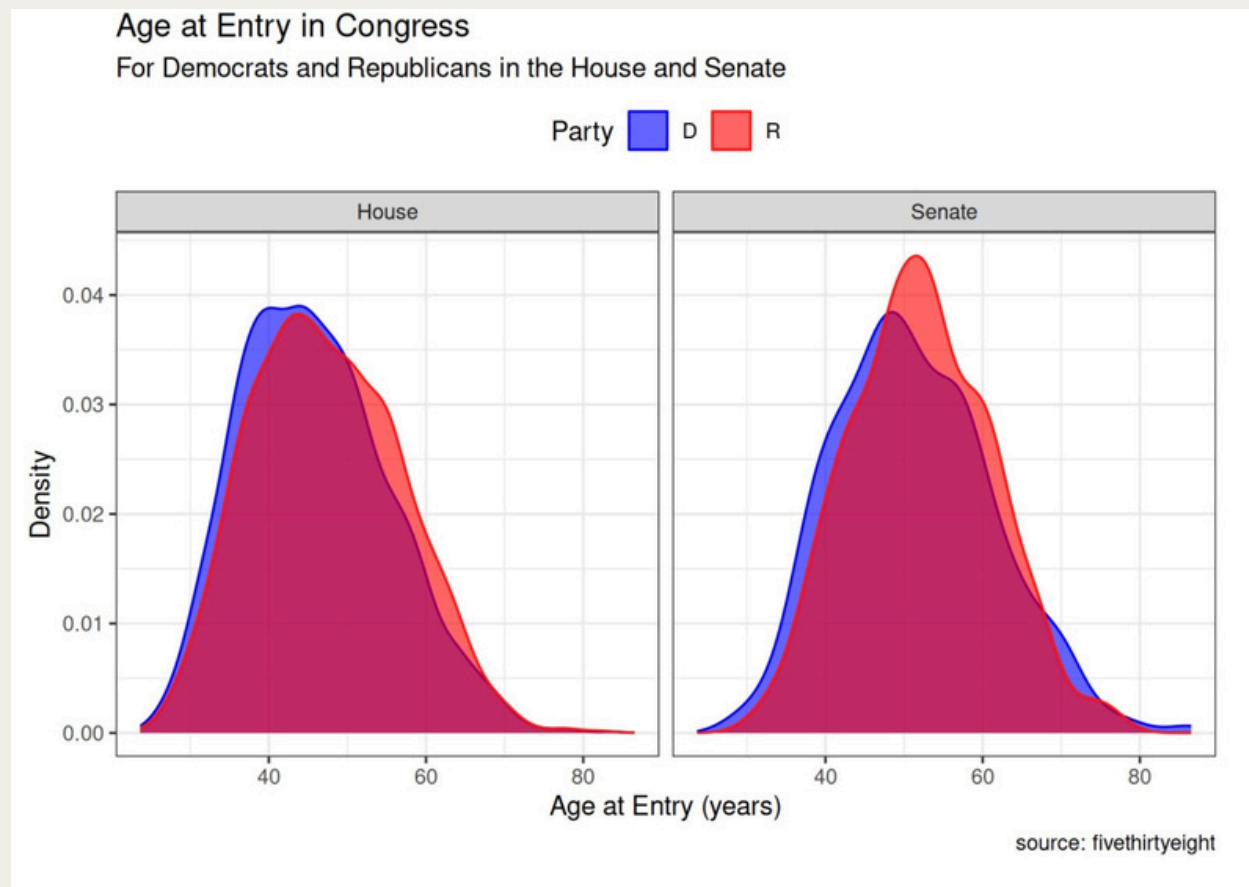


- House: concentrated at short careers, with two curves almost entirely overlapping
- Senate: Rep. sharp peak at lower end; Dem. flatter distribution
- **Key Takeaway:** Heavily right-skewed = short careers dominate
- **Key Takeaway:** House = party affiliation shows no difference in career longevity; Senate = slightly more distinction
- **Key Takeaway:** Chamber has some association with career longevity = Senators serve longer

AGE OF ENTRY



- Most enter in their late 30's to early 50's, with very less entering extremely young or old
- slight negative relationship
- people who enter earlier tend to have longer careers
- **Key Takeaway:** There is a consistent “typical entry age”
- **Key Takeaway:** significant decline in longer tenures as age increases



- Democrats and Republicans have similar age distributions
- Senators tend to enter slightly older than House members (potentially the second stop in their careers)
- Republican curve is slightly higher; more clustered around the same age entry
- **Key Takeaway:** age matters a little, but not as much as chamber

CONCLUSION

Key Findings:

1) Chamber matters most

→ Members of the Senate serve longer than those of the House

2) Age of entry is similar across parties

→ Higher age of entry in the Senate

3) Party affiliation has little impact on career longevity

→ Relatively similar trends in D. vs R. comparisons

Thank you!

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