



“Ideological Scaling”

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POLS 4620E
Lecture #15
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Ideological Scaling: Outline

I. Introduction

- a. Updates
- b. Background Section

II. Ideological Scaling

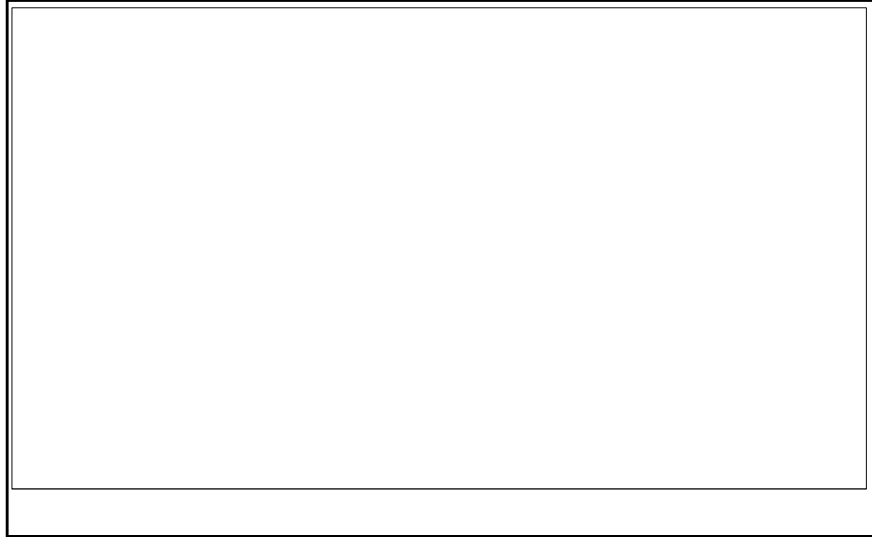
- a. The 2017 American Health Care Act
- b. What is Ideological Polarization?
- c. How do we Measure It?
- d. Why is this Flawed?
- e. Why have we Done? How do we Solve the Problems Facing Congress?

III. Conclusion

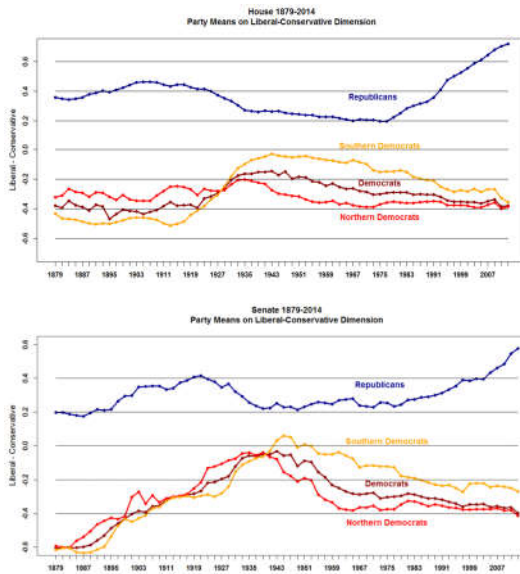


Above: One Biden, Two Ice Cream Cones

Polarization in Congress



Polarization in Congress



Political scientists have demonstrated the two political parties in Congress are more polarized than since the years leading up to the Civil War.

This is commonly treated by the media as being solely driven by ideology.

Polarization in Congress



If polarization is solely ideologically driven, the solution to fixing it is straight forward: “Vote the bums out! (and replace them with less ideological bums.)”

This has not been an effective strategy. And there are many reasons to believe polarization is not ideologically driven.

2017 American Health Care Act



In November 2016, after holding their majorities in both the House and the Senate and winning the White House, Republican Party leaders declared their top priority would be to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

The House had cast over 50 roll call votes on the floor to repeal President Obama’s signature healthcare act by March of 2014 and made it a focal point in campaigns.

One House Republican cited this as an “ironclad commitment” to repeal the law.

2017 American Health Care Act

The American Health Care Act was unveiled on March 6, 2017.

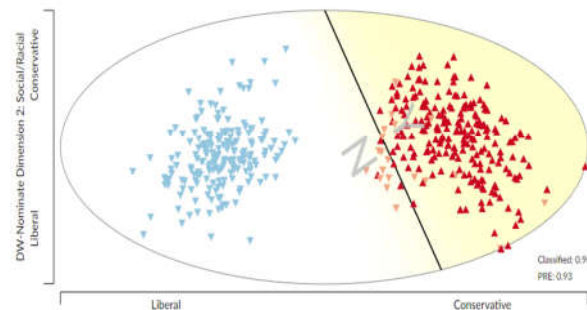
The House then voted on four procedural motions with passed on near party-line votes. Despite pledges of unity, House leaders than pulled the bill after determining they lacked a majority in favor of the measure.

Nearly two months later, the House cast two more party-line votes on procedural motions. The bill than passed by a much more narrow 217-213 margin, with 20 defections.



2017 American Health Care Act

DW-Nominate Cutting Line 



The six procedural votes in the House demonstrated a very unified Republican Party that cast 1396 “yes” votes with just 12 “noes”, for a party coalition of 99.25%.

This was consistent with the previous 50 repeal votes. But the final passage vote—and later defeat in the Senate—on a bill that was not a full repeal demonstrated a much more divided chamber.

This internal divide among Republicans was consistent with media coverage.

Polarization in Congress

The 2017 American Health Care Act is one of many examples that should make us question how we treat polarization in Congress. This talk addresses this topic as follows:

- I. What is Ideological Polarization?
- II. How do we Measure It?
- III. Why is this Flawed?
- IV. Why have we Done? (featuring numerous plugs to our book project!)
- V. How do we Solve the Problems Facing Congress?



Above: The good old days were rarely that good.

What is Ideological Polarization?

What is Ideology? We like to think of it as a consistent way to organize ideas on politics and policy.

But we know amongst the general public, ideas on policy are rarely consistent and mitigated by things like parties and identity.



For example, in 2008-2009, Gallup conducted a poll on confidence in then-Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke.

Year	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
2008	40	43	<u>61</u>
2009	<u>64</u>	44	36

What is Ideological Polarization?

IDEOLOGY  VOTES

IDEOLOGY  VOTES

This is no different for members of Congress. Party loyalty, electoral concerns (in general and primary elections) and substantive knowledge all mitigate the effect of ideology on member behavior.

Moreover, while we often conceptualize ideology as a factor that influences how members of Congress vote in the chamber, scholars, interest groups and the media often measure it using votes.

How Do We Measure It?



There are positives and negatives with using votes to measure ideology.

Positives: Its easy to conceptualize, can be less arbitrary and does an excellent job characterizing member behavior.

Negatives: It is influenced by things other than ideology, over simplifies differences within specific issues and vulnerable to selection biases. The latter point has been well established when we examine interest group scores.



Interest Group Scores



Vote	Elizabeth	Ted	Johnny	Kamala	Mitch	Chuck	Susan
Increase Fines for Water Pollution	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Sell National Parks to Starbucks	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ban Off-Shore Drilling	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Cut Taxes	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Approve a Nationwide Oil Pipeline	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Deregulate Fracking	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Restrict Logging in the Northwest	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Subsidize Recycling	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Federal Subsidies for Coal	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
"Pave Paradise" Song new National Anthem	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

How might an environmental interest group "score" these legislators?

Interest Group Scores



Vote	Elizabeth	Ted	Johnny	Kamala	Mitch	Chuck	Susan
Increase Fines for Water Pollution	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Sell National Parks to Starbucks	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ban Off-Shore Drilling	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Cut Taxes	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Approve a Nationwide Oil Pipeline	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Deregulate Fracking	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Restrict Logging in the Northwest	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Subsidize Recycling	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Federal Subsidies for Coal	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
"Pave Paradise" Song new National Anthem	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Percent Support	100	0	0.25	0.88	0.13	0.75	0.50

One approach would be to eliminate votes not related to the issue, count up supporting votes and present a support percentage.

Interest Group Scores



Vote	Elizabeth	Ted	Johnny	Kamala	Mitch	Chuck	Susan
Increase Fines for Water Pollution	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Sell National Parks to Starbucks	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ban Off-Shore Drilling	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Cut Taxes	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Approve a Nationwide Oil Pipeline	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Deregulate Fracking	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Restrict Logging in the Northwest	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Subsidize Recycling	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Federal Subsidies for Coal	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
"Pave Paradise" Song new National Anthem	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Percent Support	100	0	0.13	0.88	0	0.75	0.25

But there's nothing forcing you to use those votes. Why might you instead use these to tabulate the scores?

Interest Group Scores

Under the first approach, Susan Collins (R-ME), appears to be quite moderate on environmental issues. She scores a 50%.

Under the second, she looks far more extreme, scoring only 25%.

What is the incentive for interest groups to isolate centrists like Collins and make them look more extreme?



The Political Science Approach



Most scholars and media coverage measure polarization by examining all votes cast using the roll call record.

This approach is superior to the interest group approach in the sense that it minimizes obvious selection biases.

We also have easy access to these data.

The Political Science Approach



Bill	Marco	Rand	Lisa	Joe	David	Cory	Bernie
Cut Taxes	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Ban Abortions	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Single Payer Health Care	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Increase Military Spending	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
National Taco Day	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cut Food Stamps	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Increase Unemployment	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

The Political Science Approach



Bill	Marco	Rand	Lisa	Joe	David	Cory	Bernie
Cut Taxes	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Ban Abortions	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Single Payer Health Care	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Increase Military Spending	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
National Taco Day	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cut Food Stamps	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Increase Unemployment	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

STEP #1 – Eliminate unanimous votes. Why?

The Political Science Approach



Bill	Marco	Rand	Lisa	Joe	David	Cory	Bernie
Cut Taxes	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Ban Abortions	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Single Payer Health Care	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Increase Military Spending	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
National Taco Day	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cut Food Stamps	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Increase Unemployment	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

STEP #2 – Identify the anchors. What does this mean? Which is conservative? Which is liberal? Arbitrary?

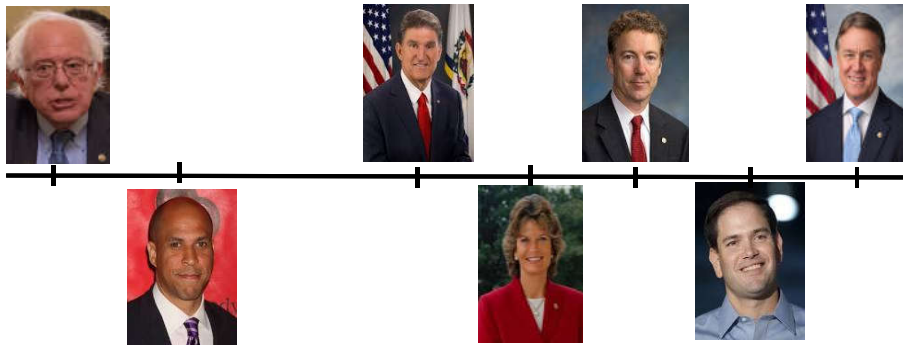
The Political Science Approach



Bill	Marco	Rand	Lisa	Joe	David	Cory	Bernie
Cut Taxes	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Ban Abortions	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Single Payer Health Care	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Increase Military Spending	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
National-Taco-Day	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cut Food Stamps	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Increase Unemployment	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Conservative Votes	6	5	4	3	7	1	0
Conservative Score	0.857142857	0.714285714	0.571428571	0.428571429	1	0.142857143	0

STEP #3 – Tabulate scores.

The Political Science Approach



STEP #4 – Plot the results.

We can use this to predict congressional votes with a high degree of accuracy.

The Political Science Approach



STEP #4 – Plot the results.

We can use this to predict congressional votes with a high degree of accuracy.

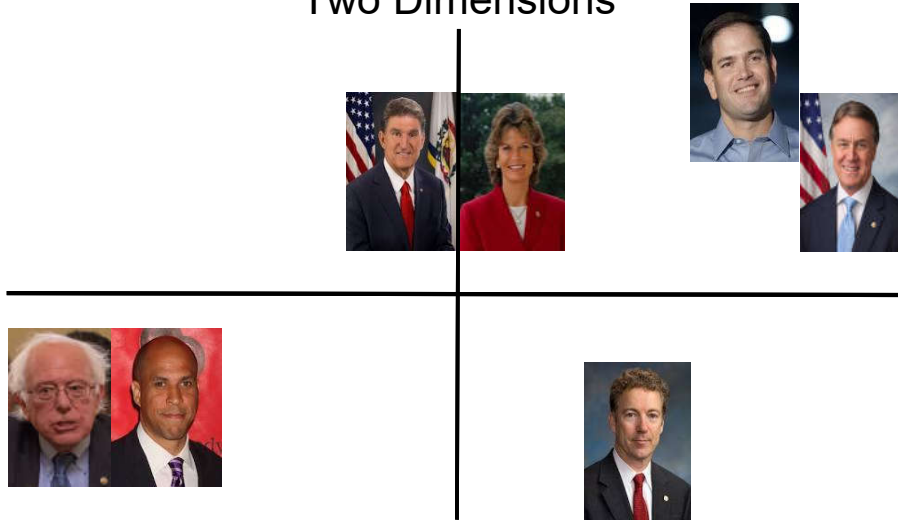
Two Dimensions



Vote	Marco	Rand	Lisa	Joe	David	Cory	Bernie
Cut Taxes	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Ban Abortions	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Tax Break for Church Attendees	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Single Payer Health Care	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Ban Reality TV	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Increase Military Spending	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
National Take Day	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cut Food Stamps	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Bailout Olive Garden	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
Increase Unemployment	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Dimension 1 Score	0.86	0.71	0.57	0.43	1.00	0.14	0.00
Dimension 2 Score	1.00	0.00	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.33	0.33

So we've added three votes here that don't fit well on our left-right dimension. A common approach is to use them to create a second dimension.

Two Dimensions

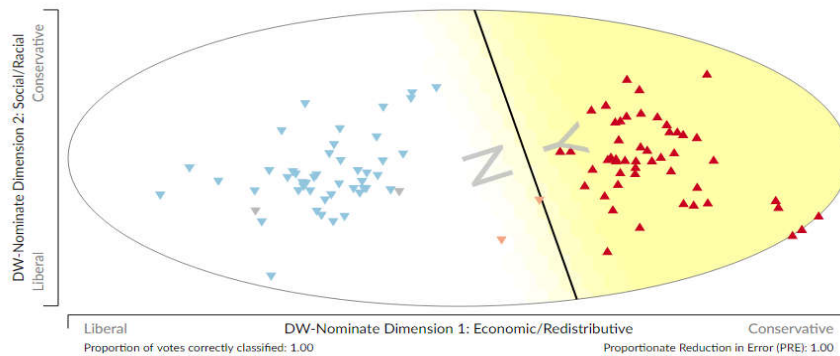


The punchline is it's hard to put too much substantive meaning into the second dimension for most of these models. They're really there for predictive purposes.

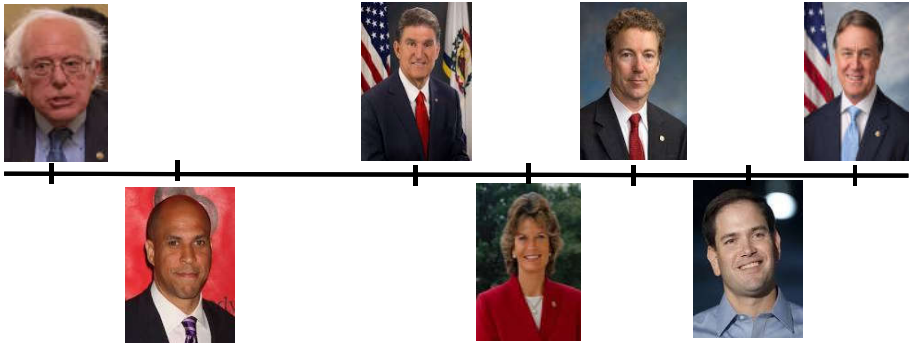
Two Dimensions

For example, media coverage suggested Senators like Rob Portman (R-OH), Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Shelly Moore Capito (R-WV) and/or Bill Cassidy (R-LA) might have all opposed the motion to proceed to the Republican health care bill in the Senate. As the [Voteview](#) graph below demonstrates, that was unlikely.

Vote Ideological Breakdown [↓](#)



Unidimensional Model



Moving back to one dimension. In our example, the model worked well. The score is easy to conceptualize as the votes all seem to make substantive sense.

So why do we care about procedural votes?

Let's add some and see.

Procedural Votes



Vote	Marco	Rand	Lisa	Joe	David	Cory	Bernie
Cut Taxes	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Previous Question on SR #1	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Passage of Rule #1	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Motion to Recommit #1	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Ban Abortions	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Single Payer Health Care	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Increase Military Spending	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
National Taco Day	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Previous Question on SR #2	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Passage of Rule #2	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Motion to Recommit #2	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Cut Food Stamps	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Increase Unemployment	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Eliminate Net Neutrality	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Dimension 1 Score	0.92	0.85	0.77	0.15	1.00	0.08	0.00

Added six votes here. All procedural, all straight party-line votes. You'll notice this does not alter the extreme ends. Nor does it alter the rank order of ideology. But let's plot the members.

Procedural Votes



Again, the rank doesn't change—but notice the huge gap now between Manchin and Murkowski. This model will still predict votes extremely well, but it's very difficult to substantively interpret.

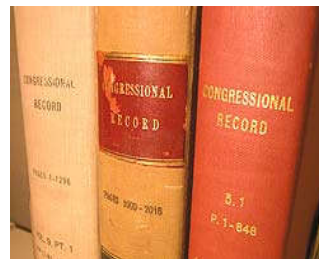
There are other Problems Too

The Record was intended to serve as the transparent conduit between elected politicians and voting.

But not all congressional votes are recorded.

And little attention has been given to changes.

114th Congress – 329 public laws. 80% of them were not subjected to a recorded vote.



Again, Why Do We Care?



Evidence suggests that the observed high levels of polarization are driven by changing electoral dynamics and institutions governing legislative procedures (i.e. more procedural and position-taking votes, more recorded votes).

This does not alter the primary products of polarization—crippling gridlock on salient issues and anemic legislative productivity—it does suggest alternative means of reform



In the absence of specific procedural reforms and increased public education about how Congress operates, “voting the bums out” will only led to the creation of new “bums”

Questions, Concerns, Angry Rants?



Take a crack at a couple of the Scaling Exercises in the Assignments folder in ELC.