Political Polarization in Legislative Branches

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Introduction

➢ Research objective: How does the social and political polarization evolve over time?
➢ Data-driven analysis:
  ○ We collect congress/parliament voting data of the countries including *Sweden* (2.4M votes), *UK* (3M votes) and *USA* (3.5M votes)
➢ Quantifying the social choices of competition and collaboration by mathematical models.
Partisan Alignment of Members of the U.S. Congress (2015)

Partisan alignment measured by the distance to a party’s centroid:

\[ A_{i,p} = \mathbb{E}_b |\mathbb{E}_i[V_i^{(b)} \delta_{i,p}] - V_i^{(b)}| \]

- Relative measure: if one party deviates then both should move to the poles, but not exactly symmetric due to the non-uniform population distribution.
- Members’ loyalty to the party does **NOT** alway lead to polarization. Parties could align with each other on certain bills themselves.
- Mapping \((A_{i,\text{dem}}, A_{i,\text{rep}})\) to the diagonal, which is equivalent to **PCA** reducing the dimension from two to one.

*Similar results for other countries are in the making*

Political Polarization Workshop, Princeton University, August 9. 2019
Evolution of the Average Partisan Polarization

Polarization increases as a general trend, but it decreases **within** each congress in the 70s and 80s.
Evolution within Each Congress (2 years term)

Period I (1969-1989) Polarization decreases

Period III (2001-2017) Polarization increases (seasonal plot)
We analyze millions of roll-call votes cast in the U.S. Congress over the past six decades to identify evolution of political polarization patterns.

Using the roll-call vote results, we quantify the level of polarization in the legislative branch of government over the last six decades.
The evolution of polarization in the legislative branch of government

The political polarization levels at ten evenly-distributed sampled time points exhibit an evolution of polarization patterns from one type of behavior to another.
Dynamic Social Competition Model[1]

\[ x \in [0, 1] \] measures the current polarization, so the collaboration is measured by the complementary fraction of \( x \), i.e.

\[ y = 1 - x \]

\[
\frac{dx}{dt} = yP_{yx}(x, u_x) - xP_{xy}(x, u_x)
\]

simple symmetric transition functions:

\[ P_{yx}(x, u_x) = P_{xy}(1 - x, 1 - u_x) \]

\[ = c \cdot x^a \cdot u_x \]

= Evolution speed \times Impact of population belief on the change of polarization \times Perceived utility of competition, (the benefit fighting against the other party on certain bills)

We assume a social system dominated by two parties. In such a system polarization and collaboration can convert into each other but they maintain their sum constant at 1.

\[
\frac{dx}{dt} = yP_{yx}(x, u_x) - xP_{xy}(x, u_x)
\]
How to Reduce Social Polarization?

The stable states of the dynamical system when $\alpha < 1$: convergence at some polarization level.

We assume that $u_r$ is unique for each congress, but $c$ and $\alpha$ are universal at all times.

Least Absolute Errors (LAE) estimate:

$c = 0.825$, $u = 0.4$
How to Reduce Social Polarization?

The stable states of the dynamical system when $\alpha > 1$: either consensus or divergence.

$c = 0.6, \quad \alpha = 1.38, \quad u_x = 0.6$
Dynamical Model for Polarization Evolution

Stable system:

Unstable system:
Direction of Polarization Change

➢ When the initial polarization level (green cycles) is smaller than the stable polarization level predicted by our model (solid black curve), we observe an increase of polarization within one Congress. The direction of such change in 28 out of all 30 Congresses are explained by the model (green arrows).

(c) 

(d)
➢ 6 of 14 Presidential election Congresses started with the polarization utilities at least 0.5 while only 1 of 15 midterm election Congresses achieved such high polarization utility.

➢ The highest polarization utility growth (57.1%) occurs in the 112th Congress (2011-2013).

Super PACs arose following the July 2010 federal court decision.

![Graph showing polarization utility over Congresses](chart.png)
Contributions

**Theory:** We define a dynamical model **quantifying the evolution of polarization** in the U.S. Congresses elected in the past six decades.

The hidden model parameter, polarization utility, correlates well with significant political or legislative changes happening at the same time.

**Algorithm:** We implemented a predictor based on the model that successfully predicts the direction of polarization changes in 28 out of 30 elected U.S. Congresses.

The hidden model parameter, polarization utility, correlates well with significant political or legislative changes happening at the same time.
Thanks

Questions?

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Reference: