

Executive-Legislative Bargaining: The Pivotal Politics Model
Pol 1: Introduction to American Politics
FALL 2017

1 Assumptions of the Pivotal Politics Model

The following conditions apply to the Pivotal Politics Model of Policymaking:

- ▷ The ***Pivotal Politics Model*** is a spatial model of policymaking where policies are debated and considered in a single, left-right ideological dimension of conflict.
- ▷ Each legislator (L_1, L_2, L_3, L_4, L_5) has an “ideal-point” where they want policy to be and will ***vote for proposals closer to their ideal-point relative to the status-quo.***¹
- ▷ Q is the status quo policy. For legislators in the model, the choice is always between Q and a proposal to change the status quo, P .
- ▷ M is the median voter’s ideal point. Recall that the median voter is the legislator in the **MIDDLE** of the distribution of legislators and not necessarily in the middle of the issue or ideological space. In other words, the median legislator need not be a moderate (for example: the median legislator in California is relative liberal while the median legislator in Idaho is a relative conservative).
- ▷ D is the distance between M & Q and the win-set is $M + / - D$. The win-set is the policy space where any proposal can pass relative to the *status quo*.

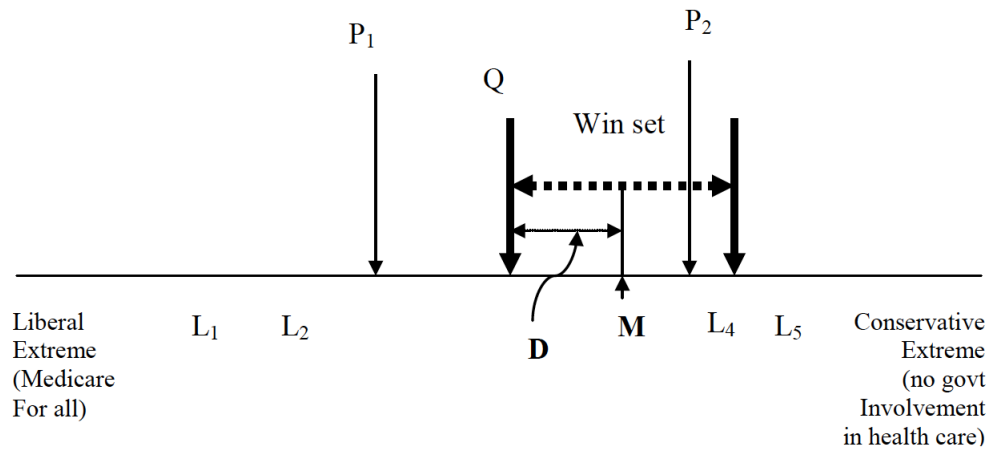
2 Policymaking in a Simple Legislature

Consider the following simple legislature with one majoritarian chamber:

This example focuses on differing liberal-conservative preferences on Healthcare Reform. There are two proposals (P_1 & P_2) and a status quo showing the location of current Healthcare policy (Q). Using the figure, ***please answer the following questions.***

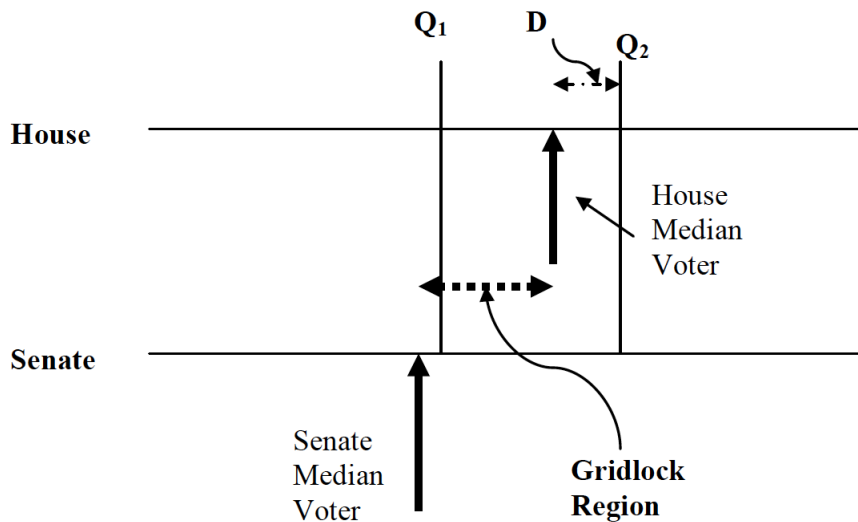
1. Why does Proposal P_1 fail and proposal P_2 win. What do the legislative coalitions look like?
2. What is the new win set if P_2 passes and becomes the new Q ?
3. Why will any policy proposal within the win set pass as an alternative to Q ?
4. Why does policy converge to equilibrium at the preferences of the median voter M ? Under what conditions does policy change after it converges to M ?
5. How does one change the location of M ?

¹This is the same logic specified in the ***spatial model of vote-choice***, where citizens chose the candidate closest to their ideological ideal-point (preference) relative to the other candidate in the two-candidate election. Both spatial models are “***party-less***” models, where choices are driven by ideological preferences rather than partisan preferences.



3 Policymaking in a *Bicameral* Legislature

Now, consider the following model of a bicameral legislature with a House and Senate. For the time being, assume no filibuster so policy can be passed in this legislature with a simple majority in the House and Senate.



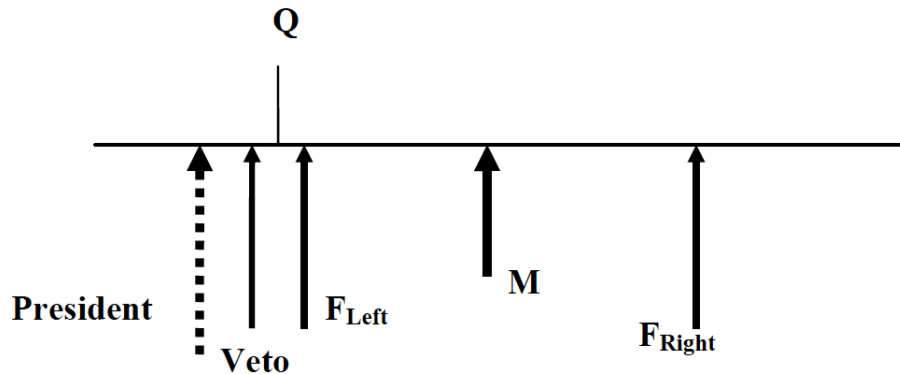
Note: Q_1 = Healthcare status quo (Obamacare) and Q_2 = GOP conservative proposal to replace Healthcare status-quo (Obamacare).

1. Why might the median voters M be located in different positions in the House & Senate?
2. Consider that this is divided government in the 114th Congress with a conservative House & a relatively liberal Senate and the House wants to overturn Obamacare Q_1 for a replacement proposal Q_2 , why couldn't it change policy?

3. Under what conditions could Q_1 change?
4. What happens if the status quo policy, Q_2 , is outside the *gridlock region*?
5. What is the “win set” for Q_2 ? What happens if the Senate median voter moves in the direction of the House median voter, like it did following the 2014 elections?

4 Policymaking in the United States Congress

Now, consider the following model with extraordinary majorities, like those found in the United States Senate. In the Senate, legislation needs the support of 60 out of 100 Senators to overcome a minority filibuster and pass the Senate.²



In the Figure above assume an ideological space found with a Democratic President:

- ▷ M = the ideological location of the *median legislator*
- ▷ F_{Left} = the ideological location of the *liberal filibuster pivot*
- ▷ F_{Right} = the ideological location of the *conservative filibuster pivot*
- ▷ **Veto** = the ideological location of the *congressional veto pivot*, the location of the Senator pivotal to overriding a presidential veto.

Please answer the following questions:

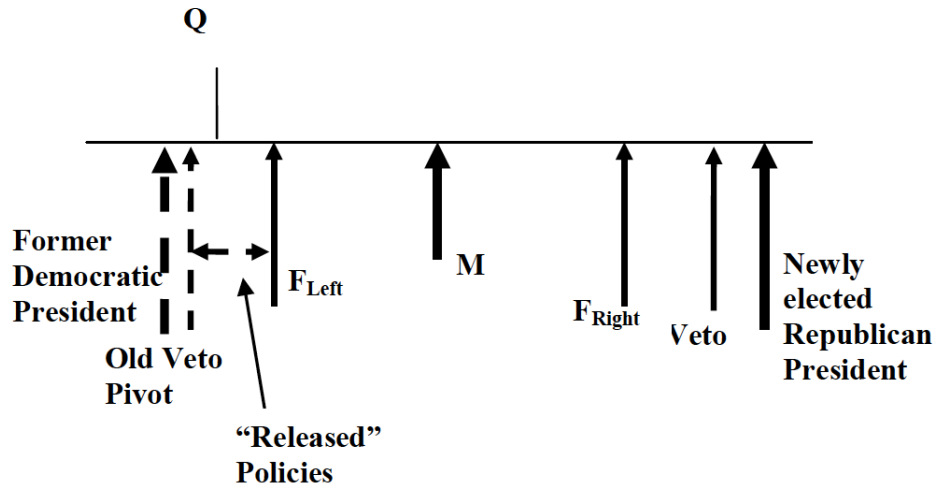
1. What is the rule for stopping a filibuster (*cloture*)? Explain what that means for the definition of the two filibuster pivots.
2. What happens to the gridlock region under an extraordinary-majority rule such as the filibuster? Who is pivotal & under what conditions?

²Note: Most legislation is subject to the 60-vote threshold in the Senate. Only budget reconciliation bills, and executive/judicial nominations, such as those for the Supreme Court or executive agency heads, are not subject to the 60 vote threshold and can be passed with a simple majority (51 votes) as in the U.S. House.

3. What is a filibuster-proof majority?
4. How does partisan polarization affect the placement of the Left and Right filibusters in the absence of a filibuster-proof majority?
5. Why do you think the model drops bicameralism? Under what conditions would the unicameral model be inaccurate?
6. What is the rule for overriding a presidential veto? Explain what that means for the definition of the veto pivot.
7. Why is the veto pivot **ALWAYS** on the same side as the president? Can any status quos (Q) be changed that fall between **Veto** and F_{Left} .

5 U.S. Policymaking: Changing the Presidential Pivot

Now, consider the following Congress with a presidential turnover found this last year. In other words, consider the following iteration of the *Pivotal Politics Model* positing what happens to U.S. policymaking when a Democratic President is replaced with a Republican President. Please answer the following question:



1. What happens to Q when a Republican President succeeds a Democratic President? Define the win-set for Q under this circumstance.
2. In light of your analysis of the win set, what policy P should M propose? Why would M not propose a policy at her ideal point?
3. Why might “released policies”, such as Q in this example, contribute to the appearance of a presidential honeymoon?