Polarization: Implications for Policymaking & Accountability

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Agenda

1. Wrapping up the Pivotal Politics Model
2. Procedural Cartel (Partisan) Model
3. Polarization & Policy Making
All-is-Forgiven Policy

- For students who improve their performance consistently, especially on the final compared with the midterm, the midterm grade will be discounted or completely ignored. It is possible to fail the midterm and earn an A in the class!
- While there is a strong (but not perfect) correlation between performance on the midterm and the final, every year there are students who benefit (sometimes spectacularly) from the all-is-forgiven policy.
- If you need help for next week’s final, get it now.
- Policy works under assumption that there is close to perfect participation in the course.
Opening Question: What are the assumptions of Krehbiel’s spatial model of policymaking, the Pivotal Politics Model?
Example of Spatial Voting in the U.S. Senate

U.S. Senate Rollcall Vote to Begin Debate on ACA Replacement; July 25, 2017

- Yeas = 50
- Nays = 50
- Errors = 1
- PRE = 0.98

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Introduction to American Politics: Meeting 17
Example of Spatial Voting in the U.S. Senate

U.S. Senate Rollcall Vote for Clean Repeal of ACA; July 25, 2017

Yeas = 43
Nays = 57
Errors = 2
PRE = 0.953
Krehbiel’s *Pivotal Politics* Model

Consider the following model of a simple legislature:
The following conditions apply to the model:

- Single, left-right dimension of conflict (in the example, on the issue of health care reform)
- Each legislator ($L_1, L_2, L_3, L_4, L_5$) has an “ideal-point”, vote is by majority rule (i.e. majoritarian)
- $Q$ is the status quo policy. For legislators, 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.
- $D$ is the distance between $M$ & $Q$ and the win-set is $M + / - D$
Working through the Simple Legislature

Consider the following questions:

▶ Why does Proposal $P_1$ fail and proposal $P_2$ win. What do the legislative coalitions look like?

▶ What is the new win set if $P_2$ passes and becomes the new $Q$?

▶ Why will any policy proposal within the win set pass as an alternative to $Q$?

▶ Why does policy converge to equilibrium at the preferences of the median voter $M$? Under what conditions does policy change after it converges to $M$?

▶ How does one change the location of $M$?
Krehbiel’s *Pivotal Politics* Model

Now, consider the following model of a bicameral legislature:
Why might the median voters $M$ be located in different positions in the House & Senate?

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?

Under what conditions could $Q_1$ change?

What happens if the status quo policy, $Q_2$, is outside the gridlock region?

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?
Krehbiel’s *Pivotal Politics* Model

Now, consider the following Congress with extraordinary majorities:

Where:
- $M$ = median voter
- $F_{Left}$ = Liberal filibuster pivot
- $F_{Right}$ = Conservative filibuster pivot
- $Veto$ = Congressional veto pivot
What is the rule for stopping a filibuster (cloture)? Explain what that means for the definition of the two filibuster pivots.

What happens to the gridlock region under an extraordinary-majority rule such as the filibuster? Who is pivotal & under what conditions?

What is a filibuster-proof majority?

How does partisan polarization affect the placement of the Left and Right filibusters in the absence of a filibuster-proof majority?

Why do you think the model drops bicameralism? Under what conditions would the unicameral model be inaccurate?

What is the rule for overriding a presidential veto? Explain what that means for the definition of the veto pivot.

Why is the veto pivot **ALWAYS** on the same side as the president?
Changing the Presidential Pivot

Now, consider the following Congress with presidential turnover:

- What happens to $Q$? What’s the win set for $Q$?
- What policy $P$ should $M$ propose? Why?
- Why my “released policies”, such as $Q$ in this example, contribute to the appearance of a presidential honeymoon?
Pivotal Politics Model & Gridlock

- When does Krehbiel’s *Pivotal Politics* predict gridlock both within chamber (House, Senate) & across the system?
- Is policy change substantial or incremental under the model?
- How does this model formalize Madison’s model positing that *ambition must be made to counteract ambition* & that *the interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place*?
- Does Binder find evidence for the Krehbiel model in her article *The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock*?
- Yes, inter-branch, intra-branch & bicameral distance conflict predicts legislative gridlock
- Policies have a harder time passing when large ideological distance within the House/Senate & when there is large ideological distance between House & Senate medians
- Loss of *moderates* also contributes to greater gridlock, why?
Partisan Model of Policy Making

▶ What’s one of the criticisms of the Krehbiel *Pivotal Politics* Spatial Model?
▶ The *Pivotal Politics* is purely a spatial model, no mention of parties or agenda control powers
▶ Why might parties be relevant with policymaking in Congress?
▶ Legislative agenda is not an *infinite* resource, member’s of Congress need legislative accomplishments to be re-elected
▶ Cox & McCubbin’s *Procedural Cartel Agenda* is a partisan-centered model of congressional policymaking
Critical Elements of the Theory:

1. Members seek re-election, policy, & majority status
2. Party brand/reputation important for re-election & winning majority (explicitly collective accountable model)
3. Party brand/reputation depends on legislative record
4. Building a legislative record involves overcoming collective action problems:
   - All would like more for their own districts
   - Party label is a public good, free-riding incentive
5. Primary way of solving collective action problems is delegation to central authority: party leaders, including committee chairs.
6. Key resource that is delegated is agenda control:
   - Party leaders, rules committee & substantive committees
   - Cartel assures that all positions are in hands of senior party leaders.
   - Negative agenda control: prevent majority party from being rolled
What is a Majority-Party Roll?

Majority-party roll occurs when the *majority-party median voter* opposes legislation & passes. Ultimately, responsibility of the Speaker to keep majority rolls off the agenda. Consider $P$, a Trump infrastructure bill & $Q$, the status quo. Will it require a majority-party roll?
Congressional Polarization

Partisan Polarization in Congress since WWII

Polarization measured as absolute difference between first dimension DW−NOMINATE party means.
Polarization & Policymaking

- How do you expect polarization to influence American policymaking under the *Pivotal Politics & Partisan Model*?
- Under the *Partisan Model*, party polarization & internal unity facilitates delegation to party leaders.
- Would this lead to a reduction of agency loss for members & congressional party caucuses?
- What are the implications of polarization for the Madisonian vision of the *district-centered* Congress?
- When conditions of polarization and elements of the Partisan theory of Congress are weakened, you get more of a district-centered Congress (ex: 1950’s - 1970’s)
Does Partisan Polarization Help Voters?

- Does Jones present a positive argument for political polarization?
- Jones argues that partisan polarization should help voters assess who to punish or reward for how Congress functions as an institution: “the subordination of individual officeholders to the party lessens their ability to separate themselves from party action.”
- Why would a lack of polarization foster the notion that “party disunity leads to diffused accountability?”
- What is Jones’ main finding?
- If congressional approval is high, majority party members see an increase in their vote percentages & minority party members see a decrease in their vote-shares
- How is this collective accountability? Implications for the partisan model?
Key Points:

- Krehbiel’s *Pivotal Politics Model* is a formalization of Madison’s model of constitutional government, thus incremental policy change.
- Binder finds evidence bicameralism & loss of moderates leads to more gridlock.
- Political changes *ideological* location of pivotal players in model, (median voter in House & filibuster pivots in Senate).
- One of the main criticisms of the *Pivotal Politics Model* is that it does not take into account political parties.
- Party leaders responsible for exercise of agenda control power, to benefit of members.
- Partisan Model posits *importance* of party brand for members to seek re-election, agenda control critical.