

Ideological migration in the US
Congress: Out of step but still in
office

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Polarization in the US Congress

- Members of Congress have polarized since the mid-1970s (Theriault 2006, 2008; Bonica 2013)
 - Replacement of moderates by extremists (60%)
 - Ideological migration of moderates toward extremes (40%)
- A sea change in the sources of polarization: Migration explains very little of the increase in polarization before the mid-1990s & almost all afterwards (Bonica 2013)

Previous explanations of ideological migration

- The majority party increasingly manipulated the agenda (e.g., Snyder 1992; Roberts&Smith 2003)
 - This can't explain the increasing difference in mean Nominate scores (see McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006, ch 2)
- Both parties increasingly pressured their moderates to toe the party line (e.g., Roberts & Smith 2003; Theriault 2008)
 - But why would parties pressure their moderates to compile electorally indefensible voting records?
 - And why would they sharply increase such pressure in the mid-1990s?

Candidate-centered & party-centered campaign tactics

- Candidate-centered tactics:
 - Negative: Attack opponent's votes as out of tune.
 - Positive: Stake out one's own positions (e.g., Christian Fundamentalist, Tea Party).
- Party-centered tactics:
 - Negative: Tie opponent to his/her party (e.g., via morph ads); and demonize that party's views.
 - Positive: Campaign with a popular national leader at one's side; and talk about joint policy efforts.

Notation

- Let $V_{\text{party},jt}$ = the vote share Democrats would get in district j , time t , were voters party-centered Downsians.
- Let $V_{\text{cand},jt}$ = the vote share Democrats would get in district j , time t , were voters candidate-centered Downsians.
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Party incentives to nationalize electoral contests

- Consider $d_{jt} = V_{\text{party},jt} - V_{\text{cand},jt}$.
- If $d_{jt} \gg 0$, then the Democrats have an incentive to nationalize, if their vote gain might convert defeat into victory.
- If $d_{jt} \approx 0$, then neither party has a strong incentive to nationalize.
- If $d_{jt} \ll 0$, then the Republicans have an incentive to nationalize, if their vote gain might convert defeat into victory.

A step up in the parties' incentives to nationalize elections, after 1994

- Before 1994, no one thought the Republicans had a realistic shot at a House majority.
 - Thus, the value of nationalizing a set of n contests—the ‘competitive’ seats—was just the expected seat gain $G_n \leq n$. Moreover, n was small.
- After 1994, the House has been closely contested in virtually every election.
 - The value of nationalizing a set of n competitive districts is $G_n +$ an improved shot at majority status.
 - Suppose the value of the improved shot at majority status is substantial relative to G_n .
 - Then one predicts an abrupt step up in efforts to nationalize elections, after 1994.

Predictions

- After 1994, both parties more widely and vigorously nationalized those contests where their party brand was relatively more popular than their local candidate.
- When elections became more nationalized, moderate incumbents necessarily paid a lower penalty for voting with their party.
 - In effect, they were already being identified with, and blamed for, their parties' positions.
 - Thus, ideological migration toward the extremes was sparked by renewed partisan competition for control of the US House, leading to systematic nationalization.

Segue

- The current bout of polarization and gridlock was not produced by changing electoral rules.
- It was produced by strategic nationalization of elections, in response to a large shift in the competitiveness of the US House in 1994.
- Now that elections are highly nationalized, re-engineering the personal electoral incentives of individual candidates no longer looks promising. One needs to give the parties themselves incentives to moderate.

APPENDIX SLIDES FOLLOW...

- Sort all contests into
 - those that are better predicted based on the candidates' ideological locations, relative to the median voter; and
 - those that are better predicted based on the parties' ideological locations, relative to the median voter
- One finds
 - 1980-1992: most contests (~65%) are better predicted by candidate locations;
 - 1996-2012: most contests (~80%) are better predicted by party locations.

The nature of electoral competition

- x_{Djt} = Democrat's position in district j , time t ;
- x_{Rjt} = Republican's position in district j , time t ;
- x_{Dt} = Democratic party's position at t ;
- x_{Rt} = Republican party's position at t
- The voters' ideal points distributed $N(\mu_{jt}, 1)$.
- $V_{Djt} = (1-\alpha_{jt})\Phi[(x_{Djt}+x_{Rjt})/2 - \mu_{jt}] +$
- $\alpha_{jt}\Phi[(x_{Dt}+x_{Rt})/2 - \mu_{jt}]$

Special cases of the mixture model

- The standard Downsian model
 - Candidate-centered version
 - Party-centered version
- Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan (2002)

Model specification

- $V_{Djt} = (1-\alpha_{jt})\Phi[(x_{Djt}+x_{Rjt})/2 - \mu_{jt}] +$
- $\alpha_{jt}\Phi[(x_{Dt}+x_{Rt})/2 - \mu_{jt}]$ (1)

- $\alpha_{jt} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 I[t \geq 1994] + \alpha_2 t + \alpha_3 \text{Senate}_{jt}$ (2)

- $\mu_{jt} = \mu_0 + \mu_1 \text{REP_PRES_VOTE}_{jt-1} + Z_{jt} \delta$ (3)

- Control variables (Z_{jt}) as in Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002

Estimation

- Finite mixture model, per Imai and Tingley (2012)
- Allows a direct test of whether elections became more party-centered after 1994
- Yields
 - a posterior probability that each observation is consistent with a pure candidate-centered model.
 - an estimate of the fraction of the electorate in each district who behave in a candidate-centered fashion.

Components

	Model 1	Model 2
(Intercept)	39.75 ^{***}	38.59 ^{***}
	(0.40)	(0.50)
<i>Midpoint_C</i>	11.27 ^{***}	
	(1.11)	
<i>Midpoint_P</i>		16.45 ^{**}
		(6.36)
Incumbent	10.45 ^{***}	10.45 ^{***}
	(0.32)	(0.32)
Open Seat	4.15 ^{***}	4.15 ^{***}
	(0.32)	(0.32)
District Partisanship	10.56 ^{***}	10.56 ^{***}
	(0.29)	(0.29)
ln(Dem. Spending) – ln(Rep. Spending)	2.78 ^{***}	2.78 ^{***}
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Candidate Quality (Dem.)	1.22 ^{***}	1.22 ^{***}
	(0.26)	(0.26)
Candidate Quality (Rep.)	-1.12 ^{***}	-1.12 ^{***}
	(0.26)	(0.26)
Dem. President	1.23 ^{**}	1.23 ^{**}
	(0.48)	(0.48)
ΔGDP	-0.15 [*]	-0.15 [*]
	(0.06)	(0.06)
Midterm	1.90 ^{***}	1.90 ^{***}
	(0.29)	(0.29)
Pres. Approval	-0.04 ^{***}	-0.04 ^{***}
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Dem. President * ΔGDP	-0.95 ^{***}	-0.95 ^{***}
	(0.19)	(0.19)
Dem. President * Midterm	-3.35 ^{***}	-3.35 ^{***}
	(0.47)	(0.47)
Dem. President * Pres. Approval	0.20 ^{***}	0.20 ^{***}
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Num obs.	4212	4212

BIC = 27264.57

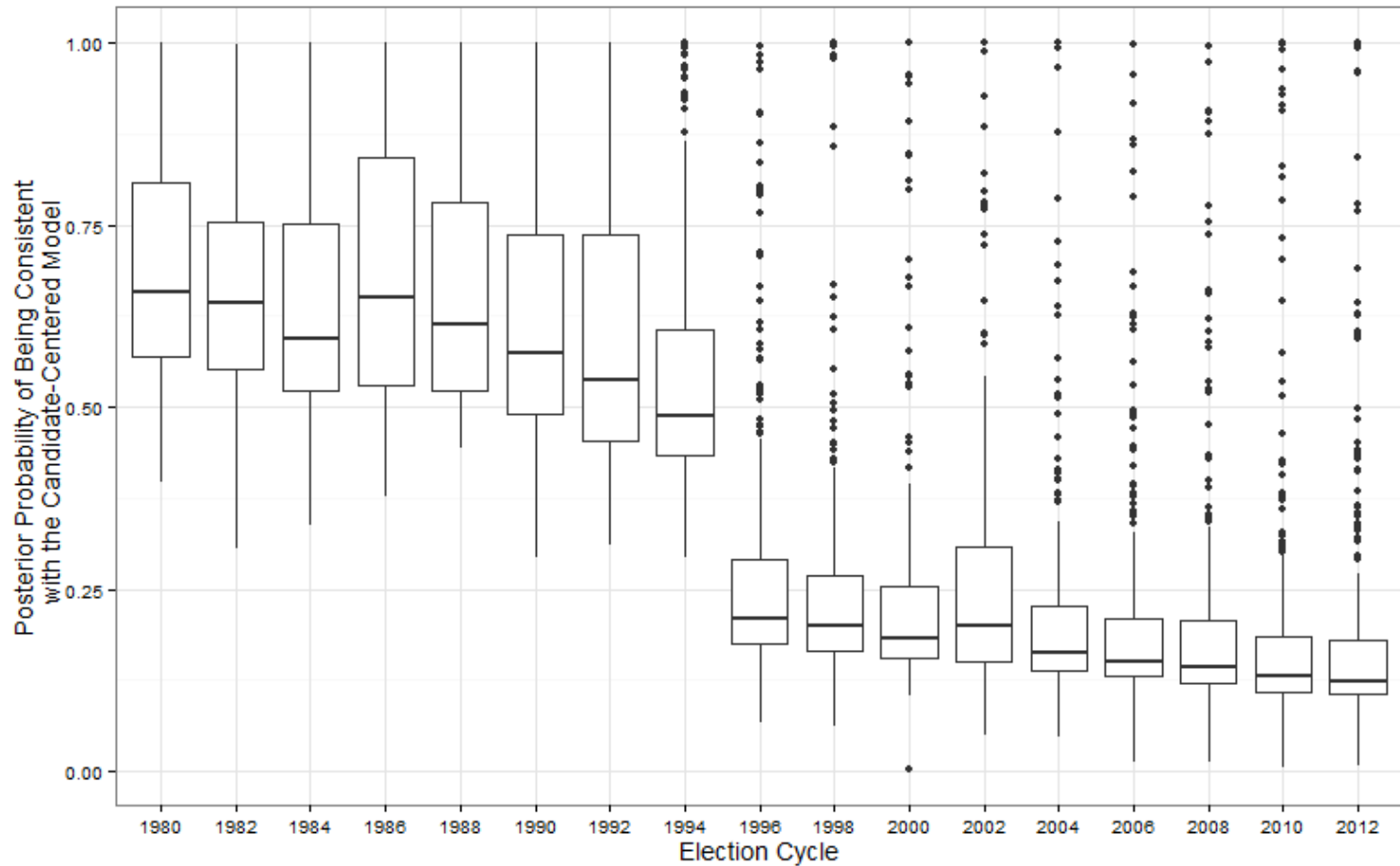
^{***} p < 0.001, ^{**} p < 0.01, ^{*} p < 0.05

Concomitant equation

(Intercept)	-0.70 [*]
	(0.34)
election1	0.07
	(0.04)
post.1994	1.21 ^{***}
	(0.36)
as.numeric(senate)	-0.34
	(0.33)
Num obs.	4212
BIC	27264.58

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Linear trend, post-1994 dummy, & Senate dummy



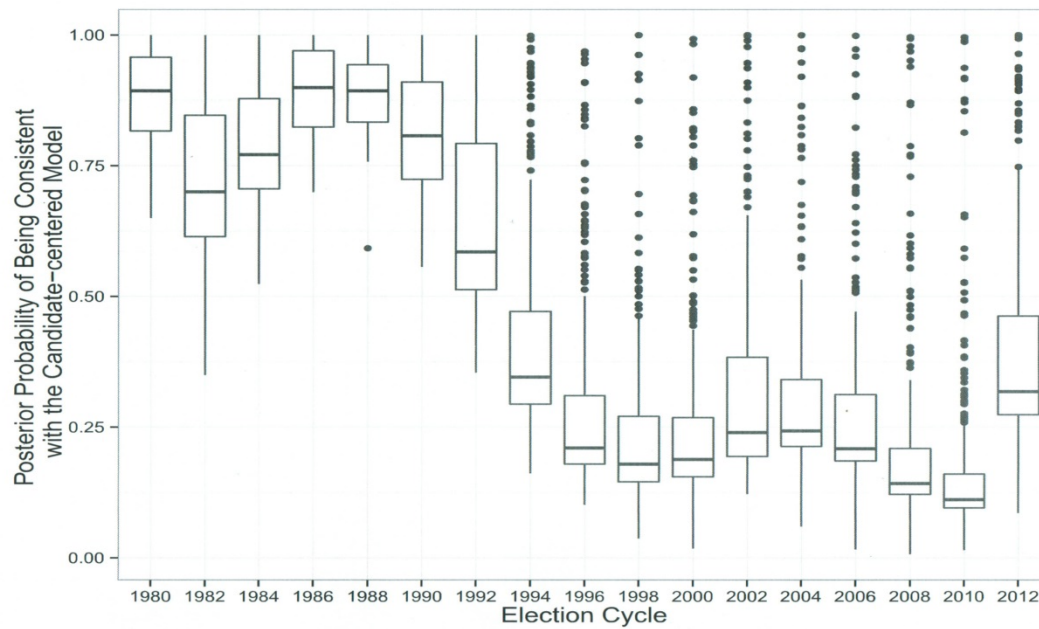
Summary of results on party-centered voting

- Shallow upward trend toward more party-centered voting ($p < .10$)
 - Consistent with info value of party brand increasing
- Sharp and significant step up in party-centered voting at 1994
 - Consistent with elites refocusing on national battle
 - Part of change in mixing probability is due to the candidate midpoint no longer providing any improved fit above the presidential vote share;
 - part due to the party midpoint being significant.
- Senate is not significantly more candidate-centered than the House

Robustness

- North only; South only
- 6th degree polynomial in time, instead of linear trend
- Allow effect of district partisanship to vary across components
- Change threshold number of donors needed for inclusion in analysis (5,...,50)

6th degree polynomial, Post-1994 dummy, & Senate dummy



Conclusion

- A sharp increase in competition for the House in and after 1994.
- Elites already cared about majority control; and now such control was ‘in play’. Thus:
 - Donors sharply adjusted patterns of giving (Wand)
 - Parties sharply adjusted their messaging (Lee)
 - Elections became sharply more party-centered
- More party-centered elections necessarily meant the penalty for ‘extreme’ voting declined.
- Thus, parties were more willing to pressure their moderates, who were more willing to acquiesce.