

Who Goes Public with Whom? A Network Analysis of U.S. Senate Press Events *

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Abstract

This paper explores the extent to which shared legislator characteristics—in particular, partisanship, representing the same constituency, and sitting on one or more of the same committees—influence legislators' decisions to collaborate with their colleagues on a given issue. To do so, we employ network analysis. Previous studies that have done this have largely focused on bill co-sponsorship and roll-call voting. We argue that such measures, while informative, do not sufficiently capture the high-profile strategic choices that legislators make, and so instead employ a little-used comprehensive dataset that documents all U.S. Senate press events held between 1979 and 1999, as well as between 2003 and 2009, including all of the particular senators who attended each event. When we look at senator dyads, we find that shared party is the strongest predictor of whether two senators choose to appear at the same event and this effect increases over the time series. As to whether shared constituency and committee membership predicts public collaboration, the evidence is more mixed, with the strength of these institutional variables attenuating over time. Overall, our results mirror the increased levels of partisanship of the contemporary Senate that scholars have arrived at using other measures and demonstrate that such partisanship has largely erased the importance of institutional variables such as shared constituency and shared committee membership.

Key words: U.S. Senate legislative behavior, strategic legislative collaboration, social network analysis, Senate press events

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