

Topic Analysis of SCOTUS Opinions

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Policy Question

Is the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) partisan?



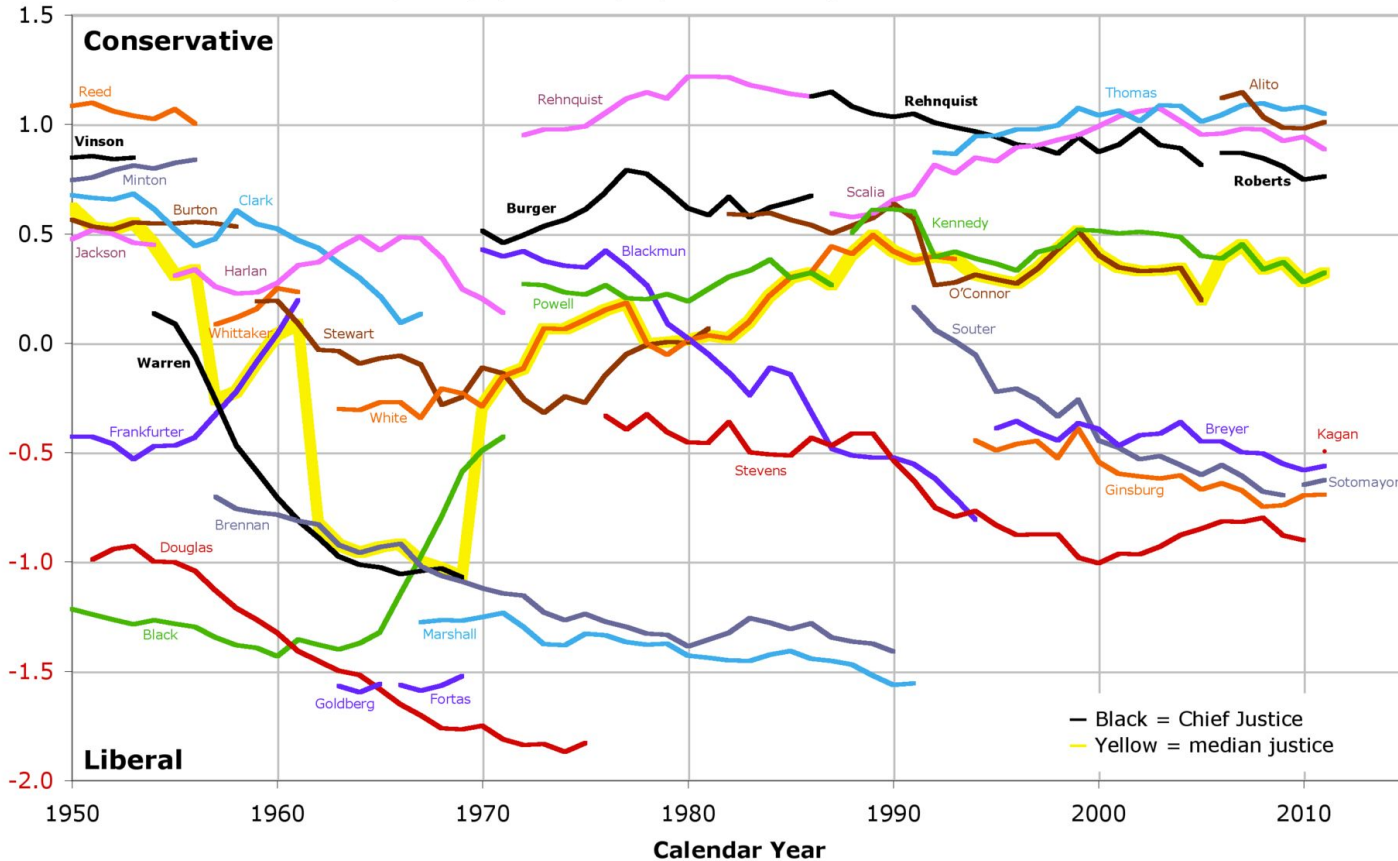
“We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges.

When you live in a politically polarized environment, people tend to see everything in those terms. That’s not how we at the court function, and the results of our cases do not suggest otherwise.”

—Chief Justice **John Roberts**

Ideological Leanings of Supreme Court Justices

Source Data: Michael A. Bailey, Georgetown University, June 2012
http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/baileyma/Data/Data_Measuring1950to2011_June2012.htm



Data Sources

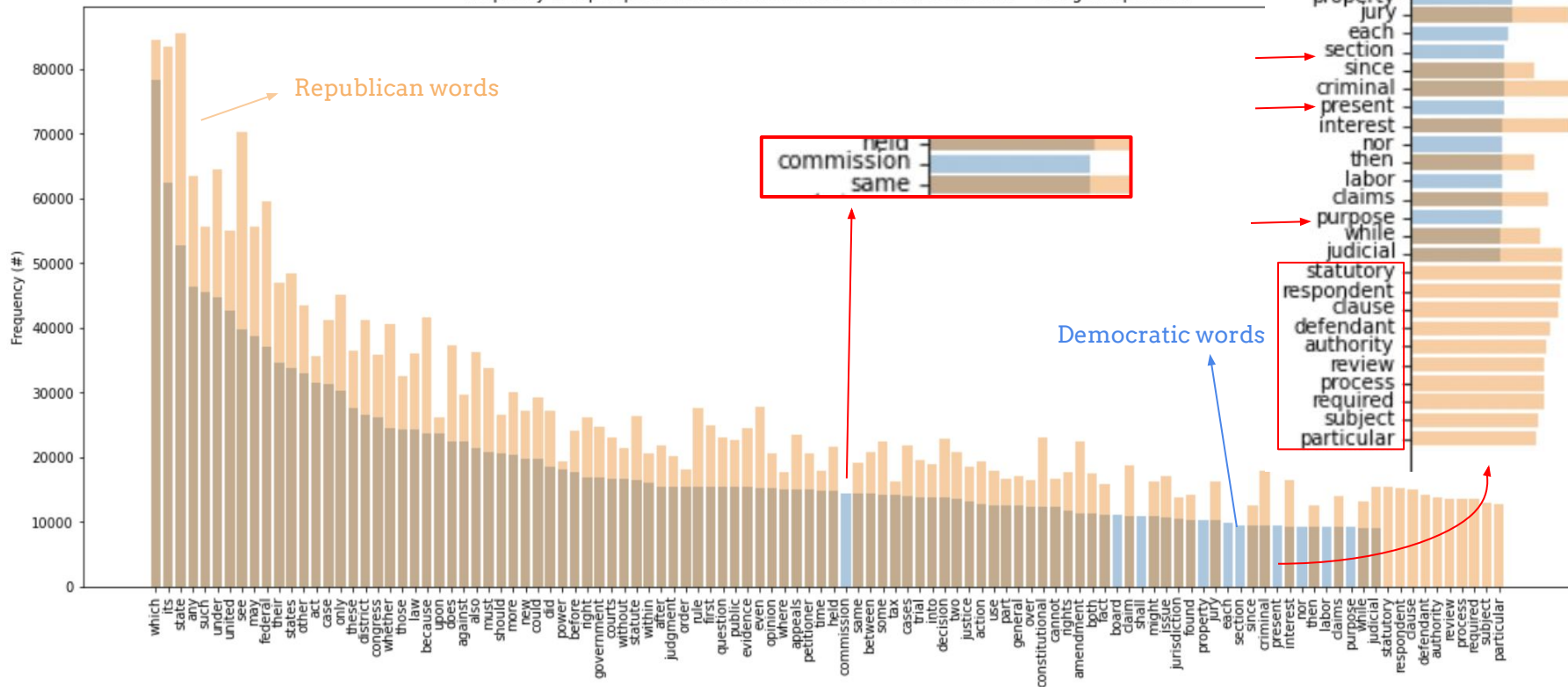
1. Kaggle dataset of all SCOTUS opinions
2. Presidential Dataset
3. Justice Dataset

Methodology

Use LDA to see if there are patterns in the topics of the majority opinions written by justices nominated by each political party that would support evidence of partisanship on the court

Exploratory Data Analysis

Frequency of Top Republican and Democrat Words - Blue: Democrats - Orange: Republican



Exploratory Data Analysis

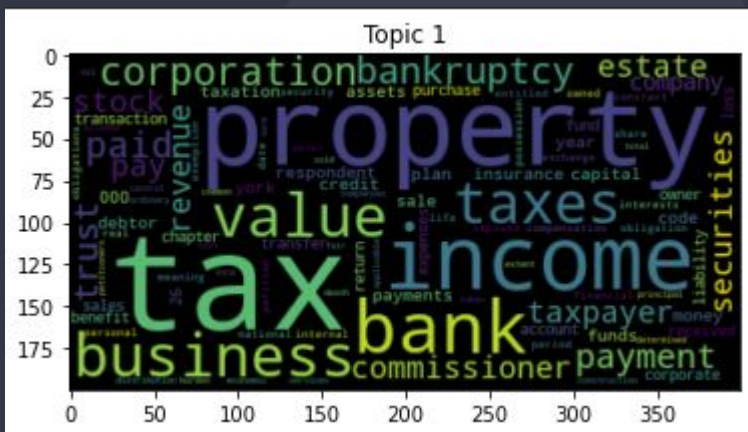
Words with largest PMI's for Democrats:

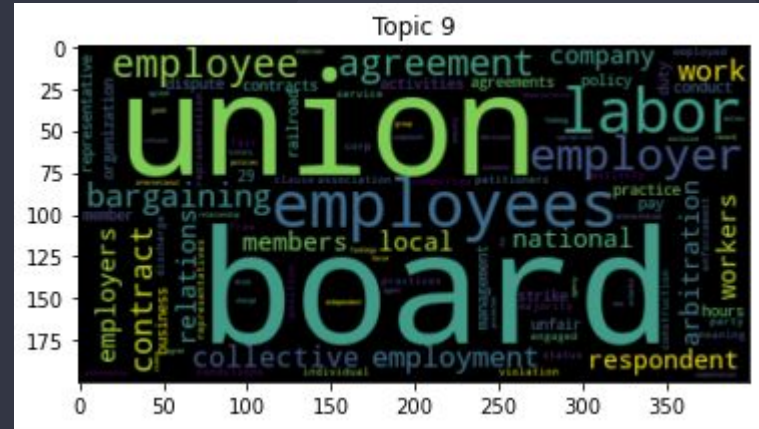
1. honeyman: 0.8347132151581313
2. harrow: 0.8347132151581313
3. embrative: 0.8347132151581313
4. derstand: 0.8347132151581313
5. carloads: 0.8347132151581313
6. perchance: 0.777554801318183
7. permeating: 0.7701746940205603
8. overhanging: 0.7701746940205603
9. escalator: 0.7701746940205603
10. tomkins: 0.76572034367118
11. senn: 0.76572034367118
12. recurringly: 0.76572034367118
13. ecker: 0.76572034367118
14. broderick: 0.76572034367118
15. pathmarking: 0.7640956479441783
16. minton: 0.762392535785053
17. treinies: 0.7606052430044096
18. raft: 0.7606052430044096
19. prophetic: 0.7606052430044096
20. vitamin: 0.7546705074845951
21. sterilize: 0.7546705074845951
22. revest: 0.7546705074845951
23. choses: 0.7546705074845951
24. assail: 0.7513316062190804
25. streetcar: 0.7477018381685017
26. saturation: 0.7477018381685017
27. kaw: 0.7477018381685017
28. fauntleroy: 0.7477018381685017
29. angle: 0.7346297566011489
30. tin: 0.7234875800479071
31. maurer: 0.7234875800479071
32. macgregor: 0.7234875800479071
33. argumentative: 0.7068798436482466
34. negatived: 0.7046600869099335
35. uproot: 0.7011818225336088

0.8.. >> 0.5...

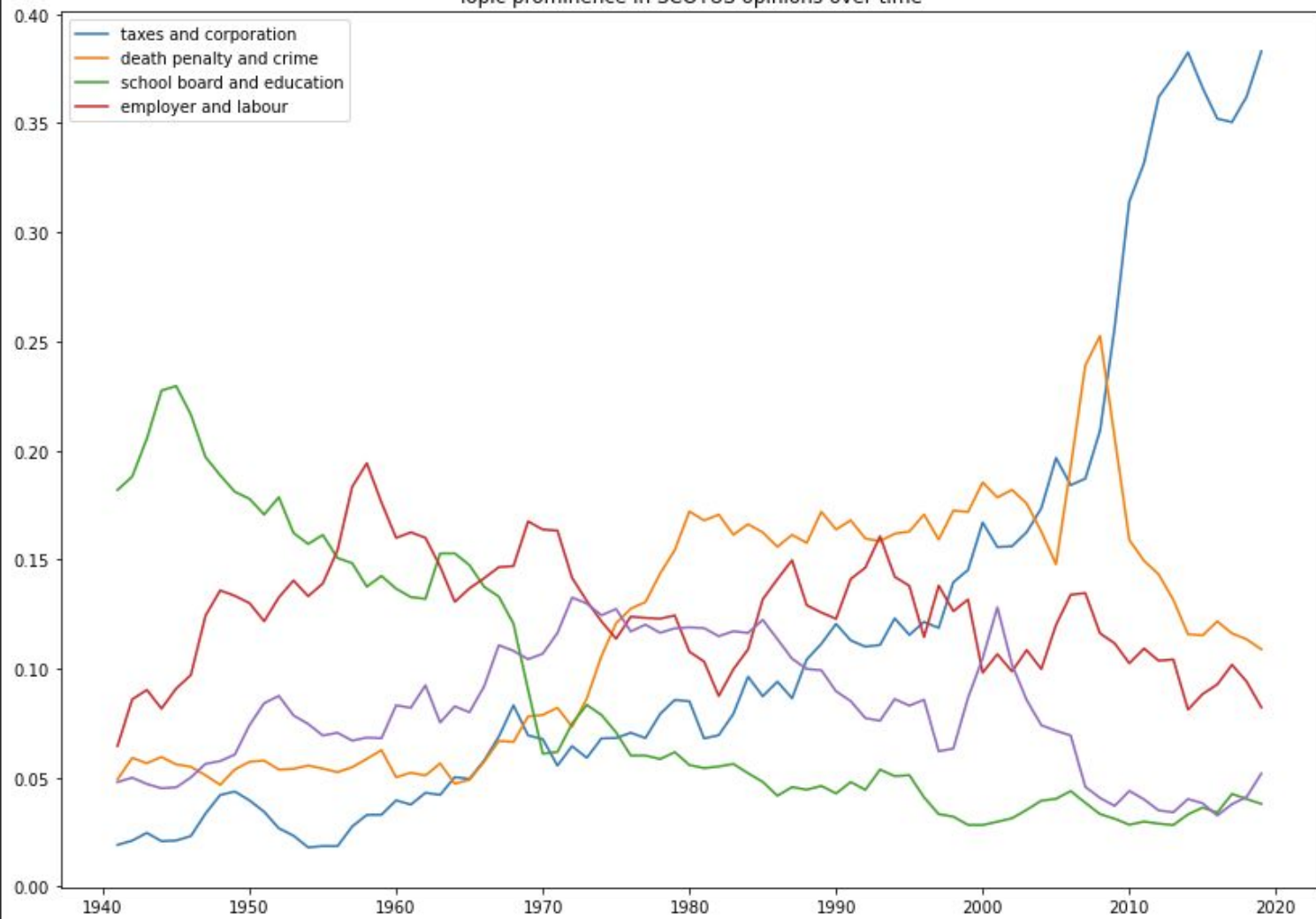
Words with largest PMI's for Republicans:

1. zobrest: 0.5702253416567644
2. unrefuted: 0.5702253416567644
3. undergirds: 0.5702253416567644
4. touting: 0.5702253416567644
5. shoehorn: 0.5702253416567644
6. shockingly: 0.5702253416567644
7. rapes: 0.5702253416567644
8. pubic: 0.5702253416567644
9. pellucidly: 0.5702253416567644
10. lishment: 0.5702253416567644
11. lindh: 0.5702253416567644
12. labyrinthine: 0.5702253416567644
13. itis: 0.5702253416567644
14. harker: 0.5702253416567644
15. furtive: 0.5702253416567644
16. formulaic: 0.5702253416567644
17. extrastatutory: 0.5702253416567644
18. demeaned: 0.5702253416567644
19. circularity: 0.5702253416567644
20. celebrate: 0.5702253416567644
21. breathtaking: 0.5702253416567644
22. atom: 0.5702253416567644
23. associa: 0.5702253416567644
24. virtuous: 0.5702253416567643
25. venireman: 0.5702253416567643
26. unsurprisingly: 0.5702253416567643
27. unexplainable: 0.5702253416567643
28. ues: 0.5702253416567643
29. torical: 0.5702253416567643
30. siebold: 0.5702253416567643
31. refuges: 0.5702253416567643
32. reconfirmed: 0.5702253416567643
33. nonlegal: 0.5702253416567643
34. nonadherents: 0.5702253416567643
35. minnick: 0.5702253416567643

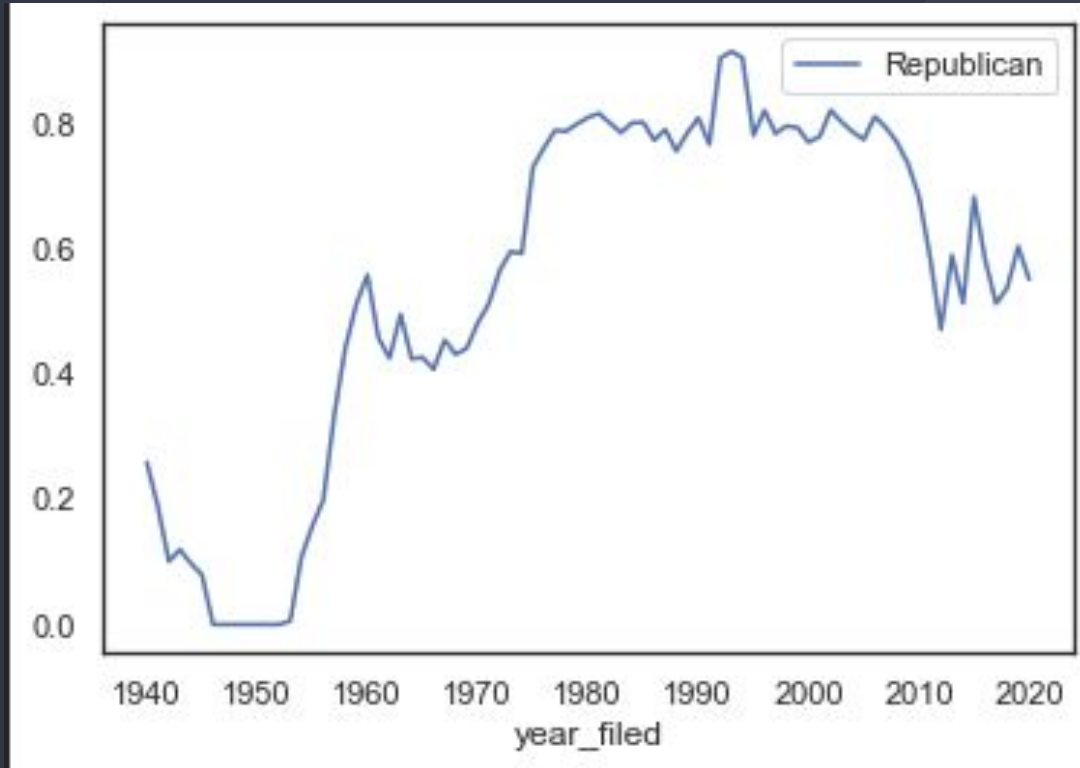
[illegible]



Topic prominence in SCOTUS opinions over time



Percent of Republicans Appointed Justices on the Supreme Court

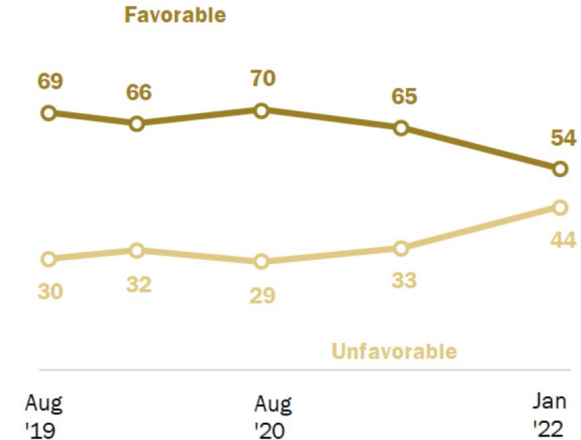


Policy Implications

- Evidence is not strong enough to support drastic changes to SCOTUS
- Current light policy reforms
 - Strengthening judicial ethics
 - Eliminating conflicts of interest
 - Standardizing practice and procedures

Favorable ratings of Supreme Court have declined sharply in past year

% who have a(n) ___ opinion of the Supreme Court



Next Steps

- Use Multidimensional Scaling
- Incorporate For/Against with regards to cases



THANKS!

Do you have any questions?

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