Stacking the Vote

Understanding Ideological Leanings of Supreme Court Justices and the Effect on Vote Outcome

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Opening Statement

- **United States Supreme Court** =

  13,600 cases heard (since 1949)
    - 9 Judges affirm / reverse
    - Judge appointed by President
    - 50% / 50% Liberal / Conservative vote history

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- **Martin-Quinn score** = Scores political sway
  - - 6 (Liberal) ---> 6 (Conservative)
- *How does collective political sway affect case outcome?*

How is court-wide sway measured?

Martin-Quinn
s c o r e s

- maintained by U of Michigan
- Small dataset with yearly MQ score for every justice since 1937

THE SUPREME COURT DATABASE

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- 122,000 individual votes cast since 1949

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Justice 1 MQ =   2 (Conservative)
Justice 2 MQ =   1 (Conservative)
Justice 3 MQ =   -3 (Liberal)
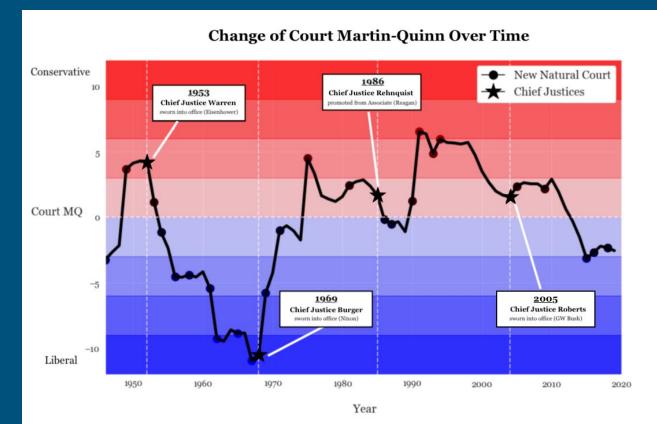**Justice 4** MQ =   -1 (Liberal)
Justice 5 MQ =   3 (Conservative)

COURT MQ   =   2 (Conservative)

Court Martin-Quinn changes significantly with new justices, particularly a new Chief Justice.

64% of rulings in a *very Liberal court* were *Liberal*.

57% of rulings in a *very Conservative court* were *Conservative*.

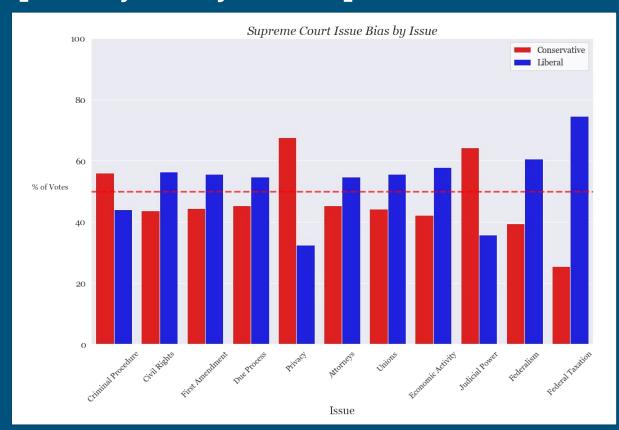## Change of Court Martin-Quinn Over Time

Topic of the case had a *dramatic effect*, particularly federal taxation, privacy, and judicial power.

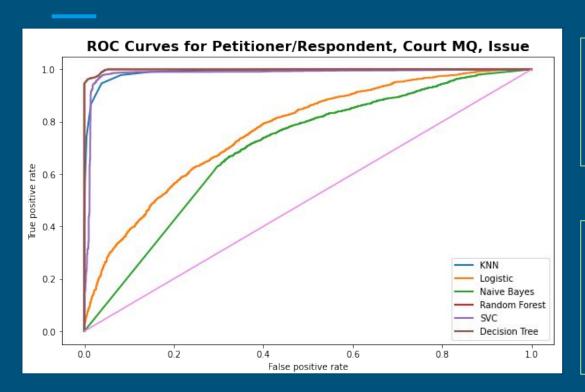**64%** of rulings in a *very Liberal court* were *Liberal*.

57% of rulings in a *very Conservative court* were *Conservative*.

74% of rulings on *Federal Taxation* were *Liberal*.
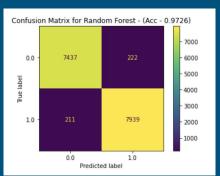
67% of rulings on *Privacy* were *Conservative*.

Supreme Court Issue Bias by Issue

Random Forest displayed high accuracy and good interpretability.

ROC Curves for Petitioner/Respondent, Court MQ, Issue

RanFor -

.9726 Accuracy
.9726 Precision
.9726 Recall

Confusion Matrix for Random Forest - (Acc - 0.9726)

Model Features:

- Court MQ (combined MQ's)
- Issue Type
- Petitioner / Respondent Type

Fantasy SCOTUS is a popular activity, and powerful educational tool to demonstrate judicial influence.

Fantasy SCOTUS Web App

- Educational tool to understand judge bias effect on policy
- Appropriate for both students and citizens
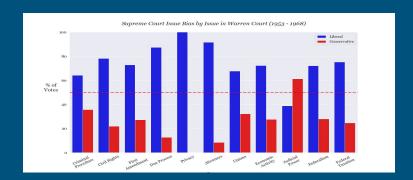- Implements 5-factor and 3-factor model

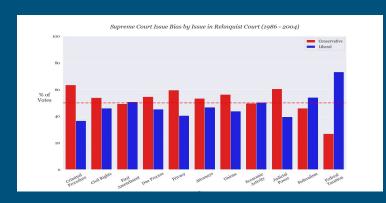# The model is application-ready, but both model and application would benefit from further development.

- More CSS for workflow ease

- Second model to predict MQ (or first term MQ of new justices)

- EDA tools to increase citizen awareness of impact of judge bias

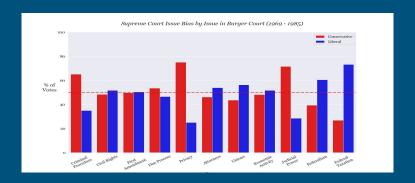# The model is application-ready, but both model and application would benefit from further development.

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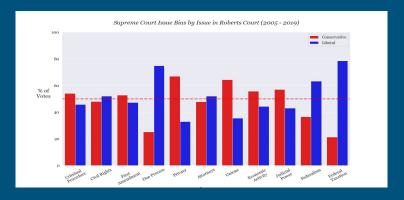- EDA tools to increase citizen awareness of impact of judge bias

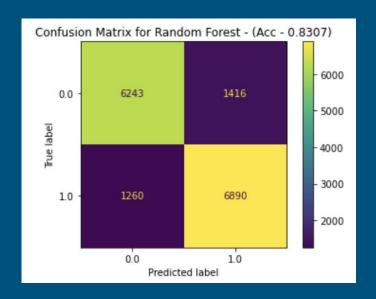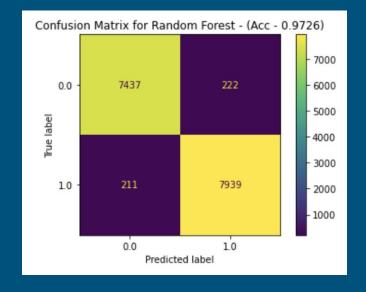*Questions?*

Appendix A - Bias by Chief Justice

Supreme Court Issue Bias by Issue in Warren Court (1953 - 1968)

Supreme Court Issue Bias by Issue in Burger Court (1969 - 1985)

Supreme Court Issue Bias by Issue in Rehnquist Court (1986 - 2004)

Supreme Court Issue Bias by Issue in Roberts Court (2005 - 2019)

Appendix B - Web App Models

3-Feature Model - *Court MQ, Issue Variables*

5-Feature Model - *Petitioner/Respondent, Court MQ, Issue Variables*

Appendix C - Vote Ratio by Natural Court