

Reaction Paper Week 4

Both readings this week took a longitudinal look at political polarization between the Republican and Democratic parties in both sections of the United States congress. The Zhang et al. paper was written in 2007 and looks at the sharp increase in partisan polarization prior to the 104th congress using modularity to quantify that increase. The Neal paper divides polarization into strong and weak to distinguish between in-group favoritism with and without out-group derogation and finds that both of these have been increasing to the 114th session in 2016.

I will focus on the Neal paper as I found the distinction between weak and strong polarization important and interesting; although, I do have quite a few questions about how the methods of this study could be used today, as the 2016 cut off feels like a distinct one. During the Obama administration, there was quite a bit of polarization where the Republican party attempted to block every piece of legislation that Obama wanted to put in place. I wonder how this has changed since Trump was elected as I still see the Republican party is attempting to block all of Joe Biden's legislation, even as he attempts to reach across the aisle. The paper also discusses how this polarization does not change when different parties are in power, and I wonder if that is still true today. I also wonder if there is a way to distinguish parties more as the alt-right and fascist groups attempt to infiltrate the Republican party. And while I pay no sympathy to any republican, I do believe that there are deep differences between Lauren Boebert and Susan Collins, which need to be looked at in regards to polarization. Overall I found this article very interesting, but want to look at more modern times with this lens.