

Reaction Paper Week 5

The Andris et al. paper builds a new measure for ideological relationships between members of opposition political parties in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Tam Cho paper looks at Congress as a small-world social network to understand the passage of landmark legislation.

I found the Andris et al. article to be the most interesting, as I believe the approach of individual behavior and interpersonal patterns between representatives to be a different approach to network analysis in this area. I had a few critiques, one of which being the inclusion of substantive and procedural roll call voting—which they already acknowledge is less common and often excluded, but if that is so I believe they should exclude it completely. However, overall I found this paper interesting, informative, and useful. This cannot be said about the Tam Cho article, which I found to be quite convoluted and not extremely useful.

My main qualms with this article come a lot with the presentation. For one, using Mayhew's analysis as a starting point, without outlining their methods is difficult for first time readers who are not familiar with Mayhew's original work. This becomes clear especially when it comes to quantifying 'important laws enacted by congress', which is clearly defined in Mayhew's article but is not defined at all in this one. Also the inclusion of the divided government variable, the activist mood variable, and the budgetary citation variable when only the activist mood variable was consistently significant is questionable to me—especially when the issues of lack of degrees of freedom are brought up later in the article, so I would have removed the two non-significant variables going forward. Overall their methods had quite a bit of problems from multicollinearity, sample size issues, and lack of accounting for the volume of legislation. To solve the multicollinearity, again removing the non-essential variables from the Mayhew model is important, along with possibly changing the way in which 'connections' are measured. The sample size issues could be solved by simply looking at the data, as over time there is more data surrounding this problem. Finally, lack of accounting for the volume of legislation could have been easily solved using scaling. Overall I found this paper to be a mess of problems, and it provided little new information about the connections between congresspeople, or the effects of small-world political networks.