Chapter 1: Cultural Aspects of Political Polarization:

Simulating U.S. Congress Co-Sponsorhip Networks
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1.1 Introduction

One does not need to search too hard for evidence of growing concern over increasing political polarization in the United States. Today, the issue is front and center on the pages of newspapers, both national and local, on cable television news programs, even within the increasingly relevant Twittersphere. The rising polarization of U.S. politics has been a topic of academic research for over two decades, dating back to Poole and Rosenthal's (1984) study, which analyzed the variance of liberal-conservative positions of U.S. politicians between 1959 and 1980. Interest in the issue of polarization and heightened partisanship has only been exacerbated by some of the most recent events in U.S. politics.

Although some argue that the idea of polarization is more an issue of perception and access to information rather than a real problem (see Fiorina, 2006), many studies have yielded quantifiable findings, suggesting that the increase in polarization constitutes an objective reality. The evidence ranges from surveys administered to voters (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2007) to quantitative analyses of co-sponsorship networks (Fowler, 2006a; Fowler, 2006b; Zhang et al., 2008) and roll-call voting patterns in both chambers of the U.S. Congress (Andris et al., 2015).