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Where Measures Meet History

Party Polarization during the New Deal and Fair Deal

Joshua D. Clinton, Ira Katznelson, and John
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"We are now substituting a 'despotism' for a free nation," proclaimed the
Pennsylvania Republican, James Beck, on the floor of the House during
a debate on the core legislation of Franklin Roosevelt's Hundred Days,
the National Industrial Recovery Act. "It Russianizes the business of
America," declared his fellow Pennsylvania Republican, Harry Clay Ransley.
"We are, in this bill, not to mention a long list of others recently passed
under gag rule, placing American industry under the President as dictator,"
pronounced their New Jersey colleague, Charles Eaton. New York Repub-
lican James Wadsworth, Jr., similarly lectured the House on "The end
of individualism in America! I cannot help but believe that this means the
end of real liberty and the substitution of bureaucracy – the hard, heavy,
cold hand of bureaucracy – upon the daily lives of millions and millions of
Americans."[1]

The back and forth in the chamber was rhetorically fierce; on key amend-
ments, the depleted Republican opposition largely stood solidly together in
efforts to weaken the bill against a virtually united Democratic Party, and in
the face of mass opinion and interest group support across a wide spectrum.
Final passage in the House witnessed Democrats voting in favor by a 206–23
margin. By contrast, Republicans split 53–50 in favor, reminding us that final
passage votes often take distinct form. The House later approved the confer-
ence report by voice vote, but it only cleared the Senate 46–39, with 23 of the
28 participating Republicans voting "no."

Not a national emergency, not a president with a landslide mandate, and not
the active support of the business community could override partisan divisions.

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[1] *Congressional Record*, 73d Congress, 1st session, May 25, 1933, pp. 4212, 4188; May 26, 1933,
pp. 4358, 4348.

And so it went during much of the New Deal and Fair Deal years. Working with uncommonly large Democratic majorities, President Roosevelt succeeded on the Hill unless, as in 1937 debates over the Fair Labor Standards Act, or, later, in disputes about union organizing, southern Democrats defected to Republican positions. Over and over again, Republicans and Democrats divided over the revolution in domestic affairs and national responsibilities that the New Deal ushered in.

This is hardly an unconventional view. It is, after all, the way that historians have long understood the role of partisanship at this critical juncture in American political history. So it is particularly jarring to have the New Deal and Fair Deal era represented in landmark systematic scholarship on congressional behavior as a halcyon time of comparatively low polarization (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006).

That historical moment is now conventionally contrasted with today's ubiquity of high polarization. We all have become familiar with the historical portrait of a U-shaped pattern of elite polarization with a nadir during the New Deal and Fair Deal. Much literature also has linked polarization to legislative productivity (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006), and to heightened incivility in politics and rhetoric (Hetherington 2009).

Motivated by the puzzling asymmetry of historical accounts of partisan division during the 1930s and 1940s and the designation of the New Deal as a low-polarization moment, this article is written as a series of four interlocking discussions. First is an engagement between history and NOMINATE, one of our discipline's most canonical measures. Second is an account of elements of change during the Roosevelt and Truman years that raise questions about both the level and the constancy of that era's polarization. Third is an assessment of alternative measures in tandem with a consideration of why NOMINATE generates results for this critical period in American history – a period that it designates as a polarization outlier – that appear to be in tension with patterns apprehended by focused historical treatments, and that do not capture shifts germane to polarization within these two decades. Fourth is an assessment of some implications for extant understandings of the impact of polarization on legislative productivity and for whether and how inequality shapes polarization.

These probes have a hortatory purpose. As the turn to history has taken hold – a quest that David Mayhew projected in his first book and that was keenly advanced by Poole and Rosenthal's pioneering analytical characterization of roll call behavior over the full span of America's past – it has become ever more important to create a dialogue between history and method (Mayhew 1966; for an example, Katznelson 2012; for an assessment, Wawro and Katznelson 2013). To that end, we offer these reflections in the hopes that they spur further inquiries and questions directed at better understanding the causes and consequences of the difficult task of characterizing history.

DEFINING AND MEASURING ELITE POLARIZATION

The NOMINATE project has defined polarization as being partisan in nature. We, too, ultimately adopt that definition, but we note that defining polarization is not an easy task, for it is an inherently ambiguous concept. In a review essay, Marc Hetherington (2009) underscores subtle differences between elite polarization more broadly and partisan polarization. He writes, "The 1960s and 1970s witnessed plenty of polarized rhetoric and behavior about divisive issues like Vietnam and Civil Rights. But differences did not break down along party lines" (Hetherington 2009: 417). This observation is important both conceptually and as we think of measurement issues, especially as most conventional definitions of elite polarization are based on partisanship.

For the purposes of this chapter, we follow the extant literature in this regard. That is, we look to differences in voting behavior between and among various partisan groups to assess polarization. We do so because, while we agree with Hetherington that polarization may occur in the absence of partisan divisions, our aim is to contribute to the scholarship on elite polarization, which emphasizes the role of partisanship. Empirical studies of polarization in Congress typically make use of roll call voting data, most notably the estimates produced by the DW-NOMINATE algorithm (Poole and Rosenthal 1997) applied to matrices of recorded roll call votes. This work measures polarization as the distance between the median first dimension DW-NOMINATE scores of the two major parties in the House of Representatives (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Hetherington 2009; Lapinski 2008 and 2013).

Before moving further, it is important to understand what a NOMINATE-based measure of polarization does, and does not, tell us about the larger political context and the sources of partisan conflict in a legislature.[2] Poole and Rosenthal explain that the variation that is characterized by the first dimension of DW-NOMINATE "can be thought of as ranging from strong loyalty to one party ... to weak loyalty to either party to strong loyalty on the second, opposing party" (2007: 55). In other words, the "ideal points" that are recovered on the first dimension capture the extent to which there is variation in members' voting behavior on those issues on which the parties disagree. Political scientists, including Poole and Rosenthal, often label the resulting dimension as "liberal-conservative ideology" because the issues involved typically deal with such matters as income redistribution, but this label is an *ex post* interpretation of the recovered pattern. Nothing in the statistical or underlying behavioral model necessarily requires the recovered dimension to have anything to do with liberal and conservative issues (or, in fact, even ideology). This

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[2] To be clear, while some of the analysis in this chapter is specific to DW-NOMINATE (e.g., the unclear role of the second dimension), its broader points also apply to many other roll call-based estimates of polarization.

subtle point is consequential because it reminds us that the standard measure of polarization captures the tendency of Democrats to vote against Republicans, and nothing more. The oppositional voting that we observe could be the result of policy preferences, party pressure, or the types of issues that are brought to votes on the floor. It is impossible to adjudicate between these alternatives from roll calls alone. In fact, the pattern of "yeas" and "nays" being analyzed is a product of the preferences of the members in the chamber, the extent to which voting behavior reflects those preferences, and the issues that are taken to a vote. Ideal points that result from analyzing the pattern of observed votes are sensitive to each (Clinton 2012).

Consider how extant statistical models are agnostic about the nature of the agenda, the substance of issues, and their degree of importance both in terms of the significance of legislation and in terms of the larger situation within which it is being offered and appraised. Constraints on how ideal points are assumed to change over time tend not to take such matters into account. We know, however, that there is variation along these lines at different historical moments (e.g., Clinton and Lapinski 2008), and under different conditions of partisan electoral competition and success (Lee 2008; 2009).

Law making during the New Deal took up issues that were different in kind from those debated in more recent Congresses. Legislation considered in the 1930s and 1940s fundamentally restructured the relationship between the state and its citizens in the context of the Great Depression, which had exposed the laissez-faire status quo as radically inadequate to the calamity at hand. As a result, legislation was introduced to promote a far more expansive role for the federal government, not only in terms of its involvement in and regulation of economic activity, but also in terms of the level of support that it provided for citizens. Government was reacting to a set of existing policies widely thought to be inadequate.

More recent law making has been very different. Aside from the Affordable Care Act enacted in 2010 and arguably the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, contemporary debates have largely amended or reformed existing policies. The contrast is stark. During the New Deal, political debates were over whether or not to create Social Security; current debates are over whether or not to raise the age of retirement or the formula used to calculate cost of living increases in the amount that is paid out. Put differently, the policies of the New Deal were largely, though certainly not exclusively, about *creating* new programs and redefining the nature of the relationship between citizens and the state, given a status quo that was thought to be unacceptable. The politics of more recent periods largely, though not always, involves attempts to *amend* the relationships that characterize the existing policy regime.

Change to the nature of issues is consequential because the ideal points we estimate from observed voting behavior can change if we hold preferences fixed and alter the substantive agenda. Put differently, it is possible to generate what appears to be an increasing amount of polarization in voting behavior even if

the preferences of legislators are held constant simply by adjusting the nature of the bills being voted upon. In particular, as the number of proposals to adjust centrist status quos increases – as we might expect would happen if policy converges to more median positions (Krehbiel 1998) – then the level of estimated polarization can increase even if preferences remain unchanged.

An illustrative Monte Carlo simulation briefly highlights this fact by demonstrating how both the preferences and the agenda affect the level of estimated polarization in a legislature. Think about a hypothetical legislature with 100 members and 55 Democrats. Suppose that the agenda initially consists of 100 votes with uniformly distributed cutpoints ranging between [–1,1]. Assume Democrats' true preferences range uniformly between [–1, 1-α] and Republicans' range uniformly between [–1+α, 1]. Allowing α to vary from 0 to 1 examines situations ranging from a complete lack of polarization to an instance where every Democrat is to the left of every Republican. Given the assumed cutpoints and ideal points for each choice of α, we follow Hirsch (2012) by introducing idiosyncratic voting error and generating a matrix of roll calls using the probabilistic behavioral voting model of Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers (2003) that we then use to estimate ideal points.

Figure 8.1a plots the estimated level of polarization from the ideal points that are estimated in each simulation. As expected, for a fixed agenda, as the amount of party overlap in true preferences decreases from 1 (complete overlap) to 0 (complete separation), the estimated ideal points of the average Republican and average Democrat increasingly diverge. This is the common interpretation of polarization; that is, increased polarization reflects increased disagreement between the two parties about what policies ought to be pursued by the government.
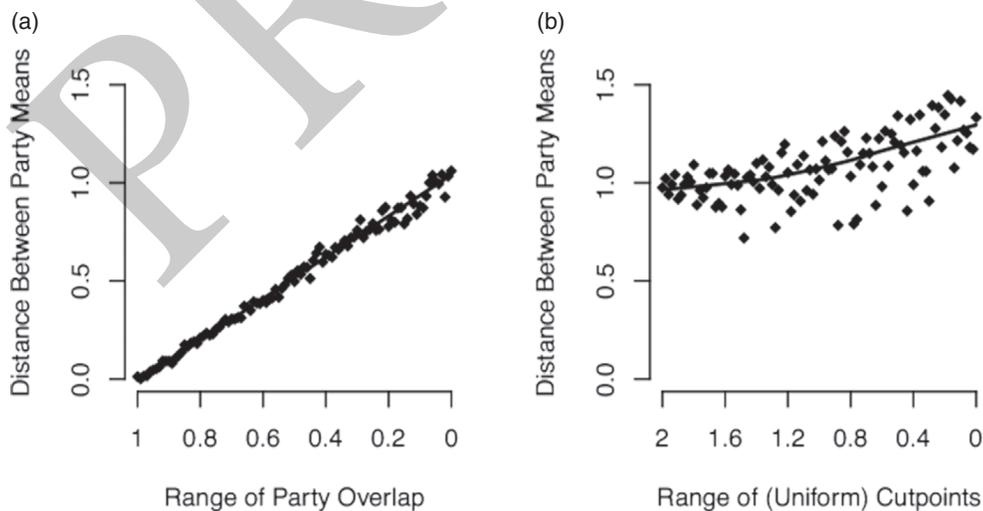

FIGURE 8.1 Polarization two ways: the impact of changing preferences (a) and a changing agenda (b) on polarization.

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What is less commonly realized is that, as Figure 8.1b reveals, polarization is also sensitive to the agenda being voted upon even when true preferences are polarized (by setting $\alpha = 1$). Instead of assuming that the cutpoints uniformly range from $[-1,1]$ as in Figure 8.1a, Figure 8.1b illustrates the consequences of choosing 100 cutpoints from the uniform interval $[-1+ \beta, 1- \beta]$ when β varies from 0 to 1 across simulations. When $\beta = 0$, cutpoints are uniformly spread across the entire $[-1,1]$ policy space and we observe members from the different parties sometimes vote together on the issues we observe; $\beta = 1$ reflects the extreme instance in which all of the cutpoints are all located at 0 and every vote is a party-line vote in the absence of voting error. Figure 8.1b reveals that the measure of polarization increases as the distribution of cutpoints converges to the middle of the policy space. Theoretically, converging cutpoints can be interpreted as reflecting an increasing emphasis on amending more centrist policies as opposed to creating controversial new government programs – perhaps because policy outcomes converge dynamically to median positions over time in the absence of exogenous shocks (Krehbiel 1998).

To be clear, our polarization measures depend on both (1) the distribution of underlying preferences and (2) the issues that are brought to a vote. While Figure 8.1 suggests that, for the particular values chosen for the simulation, the impact of preferences appears larger than the impact of the agenda, the larger point is that our ability to control for the possibility of these two types of changes when conducting analyses across extensive time periods is typically limited. The difficulty of identifying the cause of observed polarization is likely to be consequential because it matters whether a legislature is polarized because of divergent preferences or whether it is polarized because the votes that are being taken are intentionally chosen to divide the parties. Whereas the latter may be a consequence of electoral position taking and may have limited implications for policy outcomes, the former reflects divergent opinions on the policies that the government should pursue. DW-NOMINATE does not let us adjudicate between these two alternatives.

Another important and underappreciated feature of DW-NOMINATE scores is that they estimate two dimensions. The second dimension deals with issues that often split parties internally, especially matters that concern race and region (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Curiously, even though the "residual" second dimension characterizes voting on issues on which the parties are internally divided – and in which party-based polarization therefore does not occur – second-dimension scores are almost universally ignored in empirical studies of polarization. We know no major study focusing on the second dimension of the NOMINATE project. To be sure, Poole and Rosenthal do look at how issue areas map onto the second dimension in their landmark book, *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting* (1997). That noted, why estimate a two-dimensional model (except for goodness of fit reasons), only to ignore the second dimension when studying important substantive topics such as polarization? Why not look at overall polarization as

characterized by the entire roll call voting record of a Congress? These questions are rarely asked by the large and significant body of scholarship that constructs polarization scores for Congress based on DW-NOMINATE measures.

Equally curious is how few scholars evaluate the assumptions of DW-NOMINATE's algorithm (for exceptions, see Carroll et al. 2009; Clinton and Jackman 2009; Carroll et al. 2013). To most, the method underneath the various NOMINATE estimators is a black box. This is unfortunate because the assumptions necessary to implement any scaling method such as NOMINATE have empirical consequences (Poole 2005; Clinton 2012). While the sensitivity of some assumptions have been explored, there are others made by both the behavioral and the statistical model that have not.[3] Of particular interest here is the manner in which strong assumptions are necessary to make scores comparable across time.

To evaluate how the ideal point estimates in one time period compare to another, a baseline is required. Because everything is unobserved but a matrix of "ones and zeros," to compute and interpret distance measures over time requires many assumptions about both a behavioral model of voting and the statistical model used to implement it. For example, if we assume, as DW-NOMINATE does, that any change in a member's ideal point must be steady, gradual, and persistent, might this affect our ability to characterize important moments in political history that are both dramatic and relatively short-lasting? As a key example, might the tremendous exogenous shocks to the political system caused by the Great Depression and World War II combined with the changing (endogenous) willingness to consider issues involving race and the electoral insulation of southern Democrats affect our assessment of partisan conflict over this period? How sensitive are our conclusions to alternative assumptions that we might make when comparing ideal points over time?

THE NEW DEAL, FAIR DEAL, AND POLARIZATION IN THE U.S. HOUSE

The NOMINATE project finds political polarization to have been very low during the New Deal and Fair Deal periods in both the House and the Senate.

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[3] For example, when estimating a two-dimensional model using a NOMINATE-based estimator, the weight given to the first and second dimensions is assumed to be fixed across time and the weight is chosen so as to maximize fit (variously computed). There is also a "SAG Correction" built into the estimator that can override and impose a constraint on how distant members can be from one another and rescale the computed estimates. The SAG Correction prevents there from being too much distance between ideal points in the [−1,1] space and it changes the meaning of the recovered space if the variation between ideal points in a Congress becomes too large. It is unclear how consequential these assumptions are when computing estimates over long periods of time where the meaning of the dimensions and the scale could vary.
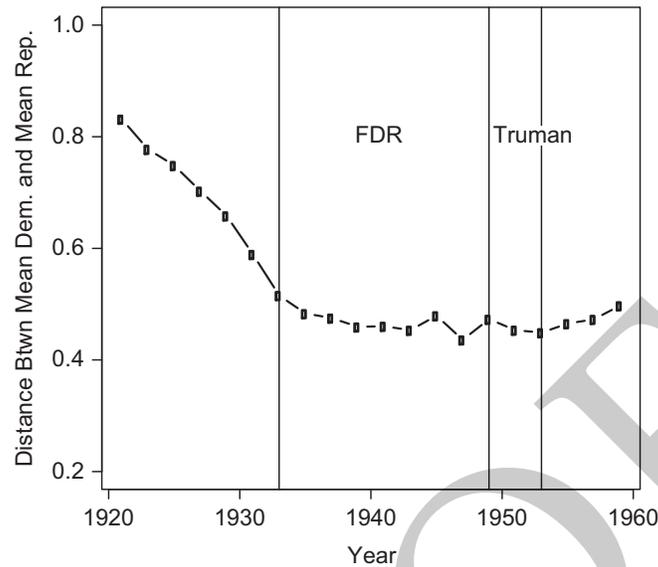
FIGURE 8.2 Polarization in the early twentieth century U.S. House (1920–1960). The
trend line shows the difference between the average Republican and average Democratic
DW-NOMINATE scores in the first dimension.

Figure 8.2 reveals this portrait by graphing the amount of polarization in the
U.S. House between 1920 and 1960 through a calculation of the difference
in the average ideal point of Democrats and Republicans according to
DW-NOMINATE.[4] A crucial feature of historical analysis is distinguishing
the particularities of distinctive situations. Doing this for the 1930s and
1940s, we can discern circumstances that, at minimum, complicate this low
and flat characterization of the period. Moreover, these historical circum-
stances complicate any measure of Republican and Democratic polarization
that, for this moment, fails to grapple with the particular place that southern
Democrats occupied in Congress.

A first attribute of the period is a constellation of uncommon shifts in the
circumstances of partisanship. These were not just ordinary changes, as in the
80th Congress, when Republican majorities displaced Democratic control in
each chamber. Rather, two shifts occurred that could not but have affected
both the extent and meaning of polarization.

First, the pre-New Deal 72nd Congress had been divided between 218
Republicans, 216 Democrats, and 1 Farmer Labor Party member. After the
1932 Democratic rout, fully 313 Democrats and 5 Farmer Labor members sat

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[4] The Voteview.com website offers an identical figure of polarization using DW-NOMINATE
scores for the entire history of the U.S. Congress. Using party medians instead of party means
makes no substantive difference and the measures correlate at 0.995 for the 1877–2009 time
period.

in the chamber. Bucking midterm trends, Democratic numbers grew two years
later to 322, and, in 1936, to a remarkable 334, with only 88 Republicans left
(as well as 8 Wisconsin Progressives and 5 Farmer Labor members). For
obvious reasons, change in the Senate was slower, but by the 75th Congress,
only 16 Republicans remained. From this low base, the swing back to a more
ordinary division was impressive. The 78th Congress, elected in 1942, wit-
nessed 38 Senate Republicans, and a Democratic majority of just 222–209.
Normal partisanship had been restored.

A second peculiarity concerns the balance of regional forces within the
Democratic Party. This period, of course, witnessed Democrats starkly divided
between a primarily urban, immigrant, Catholic and Jewish northern wing and a
primarily rural, native-born, Protestant southern contingent. During the Repub-
lican 1920s, southern Democrats had constituted the great majority of the party
in Congress. The early New Deal realignment brought in a nonsouthern party
majority. But that did not last. Starting in the 76th House and the 77th Senate,
southern Democrats constituted the party's majority in the legislature once more.
Never again during the Roosevelt or Truman Administrations did their share fall
below half of all House Democrats; by the end of the Truman administration,
fully 63 percent of Democrats in the Senate hailed from the South (understood as
the seventeen states that mandated racial segregation).

Long ago, V. O. Key, Jr.'s classic chapters on the House and Senate noted
how southern Democrats constituted the most cohesive bloc within the legisla-
ture (Key 1949). That being the case, the level of polarization depended not just
on the degree of likeness exhibited by members of the two parties, but on the
extent to which southern and nonsouthern Democrats joined forces to share a
partisan position.

An additional key feature of the period is the global conflict that consumed
most of the 1940s, opening with World War II and closing with the Cold War
and the hot war in Korea (Mayhew 2005). These developments exerted strong
normative pressures for national unity in tandem with growth in the number of
military and security issues to be adjudicated in Congress. This set of pressures
cross-cut continuing partisan differences about the role of the United States in
foreign affairs, often serving to soften them. Thus, as an example, even as
isolationists (primarily Republican) and internationalists (primarily Demo-
cratic) disagreed about such key matters as the fate of American neutrality in
the late 1930s and early 1940s, they could agree across party lines to dramatic-
ally increase military spending in a dangerous world.

Within this particular context, high polarization between the parties
required Democratic Party solidarity across regional lines, but the absence of
polarization could have been caused by two different mechanisms – either
growth in cross-partisan behavior or the defection of Democrats to the Repub-
lican camp on a meaningful number of issues – working separately or together.

To help track the patterning of partisanship under these conditions during
the New Deal and Fair Deal, Katznelson and Mulroy (2012) fashioned a

classification of roll call types according to the degree of likeness of southern members from the seventeen states that then mandated racial segregation manifested with respect both to fellow Democrats and Republicans. The assumption that voting behavior reflects preference homogeneity rather than party discipline (Krehbiel 2000) yields the schema shown in Figure 8.3.

With a conventional Rice score of 70 serving as the distinction between high and low similarity, this typology classifies votes in four categories: partisan votes in which southern and nonsouthern Democrats vote with high likeness but southern Democrats and Republicans do not; cross-partisan votes in which all members vote with high likeness across party lines; sectional votes in which southern Democrats do not vote either with Republicans or other Democrats; and defection votes in which southern Democrats join Republicans while deserting the party position.

Over the course of the twenty years of the Roosevelt and Truman presidencies, we can observe significant shifts in the percentage of roll calls falling within each quadrant. During the four New Deal Congresses that preceded American participation in World War II, between 67 and 73 percent of all roll calls in the House were partisan; yet during and after the 77th Congress, at no time did more than 42 percent of the votes prove to be partisan.

It is clear, in consequence, that measures displaying consistently low polarization, as shown by DW-NOMINATE in Figure 8.1, either are not accurate or mask important transformations to roll call behavior within and across the parties. Indeed, it seems clear that both mechanisms – the growth of cross-partisan voting under conditions of global duress and the upward trend of southern defection – should be invoked and better understood as underpinning
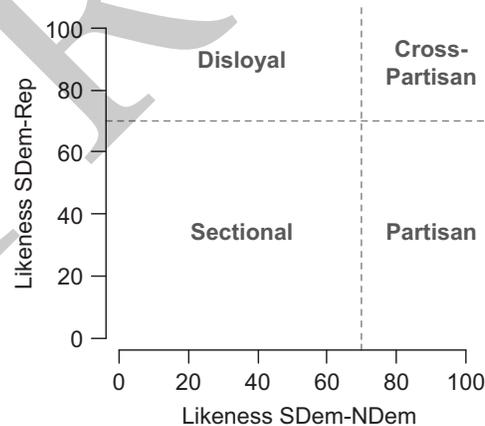

FIGURE 8.3 Typology of southern roll call behavior. Likeness scores between southern Democrats and nonsouthern Democrats (on horizontal access) and between southern Democrats and Republicans (on vertical axis). The dotted gray lines mark a likeness score of 70. A roll call that falls above or to the left of the dotted gray lines indicates that the two blocs under comparison voted with low likeness on the roll call.

TABLE 8.1 *Southern Roll Call Behavior: The Percent of Roll Calls Falling in Each Quadrant*

Congress	Number of RCs	U.S. House of Representatives			
		Disloyal	Sectional	Partisan	Cross-Partisan
73 (1933–34)	143	1.5	3.7	73.3	21.5
74 (1935–36)	212	2.4	0.6	66.7	30.4
75 (1937–38)	158	4.4	4.4	67.2	24.1
76 (1939–40)	227	7.2	4.6	67.7	20.5
77 (1941–42)	152	8.8	11.7	42.3	37.2
78 (1943–44)	156	17.3	6.4	39.1	37.2
79 (1945–46)	231	20.6	5.9	40.2	33.3
80 (1947–48)	163	21.9	8.0	41.7	28.5
81 (1949–50)	275	9.8	16.0	40.2	34.0
82 (1951–52)	181	24.1	13.3	36.8	25.9
Total	1755	12.1	7.8	50.7	29.5

any aggregate outcome of diminished polarization during the second half of this twenty-year period.

Compared to the more flat and low pattern projected by DW-NOMINATE, the categorizations of Table 8.1 discern a pattern that is more varied. Roll call voting in the 73rd and 74th Congresses at the start of the New Deal in 1933–1936 was largely defined by partisanship. The southern and northern blocs of the Democratic party united against the members from the Republican bloc, with only a few roll calls venturing into the Sectional (3.7 percent in the House and 1.8 percent in the Senate) and Disloyal (1.5 percent in the House and 3.5 percent in the Senate) quadrants. This pattern continued through much of the early New Deal period with southern Democrats diverging from non-southern Democrats on fewer than 13 percent of all roll calls in both chambers of the first four New Deal Congresses, as represented by the extreme bias of roll calls grouped on the right-hand side of that moment's scatterplots.

But this pattern did not prove to be stable. Rather, the early New Deal configuration changed dramatically, with several breakpoints marking the evolution of southern bloc behavior as members from the region began to selectively disengage from their coalitional relationship with nonsouthern Democrats. As southern members began to behave less reliably as party voters, two patterns emerged. First, southerners began, on occasion, to find new allies within the Republican Party. By the 76th Congress, the proportion of Disloyal roll calls (7.2 percent) had nearly doubled that in the 75th. Even more substantial at this moment was the sudden accumulation of Sectional votes. On these roll calls, southern members broke away as a distinct and independent bloc, diverging both from Republicans and from their co-partisans on nearly 12 percent of the roll calls. Southern Democrats in the House were shedding some partisan loyalty in favor of regional preferences.

By the 78th Congress, the Disloyal category had become the reservoir for a
massive deluge of roll calls. Quite suddenly and considerably, southern Democrats
began to ally with Republicans in proportions that far exceeded any previous New
Deal Congress. This pattern continued into the Truman years, thus dramatically
softening intraparty polarization. Democrats as a whole were not moving closer to
Republicans; rather, the party's southern majority was doing so selectively.

One of the striking features of these shifts over the course of the New Deal
and Fair Deal is how they match much of what we know in a more qualitative
way about the period. The early moments of the New Deal, marked by the
passage of an extraordinary range of legislation that transformed the scale and
responsibilities of the national state – laws about banking and Wall Street,
agriculture and labor, economic oversight and social security – pitted very
different perspectives, if not quite formed ideologies, against each other in what
was then a rather one-sided political competition between the parties. We also
know, as historian James Patterson (1981) noted long ago, that a southern
revolt against the wage-labor bill in the 75th Congress was a turning point. It
marked the first moment southern members, fearing disruption to their low-
wage and racialized labor market, and concerned about the upsurge in union
activity, started to calculate how votes on what ordinarily would be thought of
as first-dimension issues might affect their intense preferences about race and
region. "Southern solidarity," noted the *Atlanta Constitution*, was becoming
"solidarity unhitched to Democratic Party leadership" (December 22, 1937: 6).

CHARACTERIZING PATTERNS OF ELITE POLARIZATION

Given the discrepancy between the degree of polarization during the New
Deal and Fair Deal as depicted by DW-NOMINATE, on the one hand, and
historians, on the other, it is useful to contrast how the politics of this period are
categorized according to other measures. In characterizing how DW-NOMIN-
ATE's measure of elite polarization compares for this era, we can open the way
to an evaluation of the difference that variations in assumptions about ideal
points make to empirical results over time.

To evaluate whether measures exist that come closer to historical treatments
of the New Deal and Fair Deal, we focus on the relationship between polariza-
tion in the House according to DW-NOMINATE and the average level of party
unity voting in the House; the amount of electoral polarization that is present in
House districts; and wealth inequality over time. Each of these inquiries
strengthens our awareness that the characterization of polarization during the
New Deal and Fair Deal by DW-NOMINATE is anomalous.

Party Unity Voting and Elite Polarization

Consider simple differences in party unity voting over time as a first comparison
to DW-NOMINATE trends in party polarization. We identify the set of votes

in each Congress on which the parties are opposed to one another and calculate
the percentage of such votes for which the average member of Congress
votes with his or her own party. This is a relatively coarse description of elite
polarization (Krehbiel 2000), but it does capture the level of conflictual voting
behavior.

Figure 8.4 shows that party unity in voting slowly declined from 1877 through
the early 1960s when it fell rather dramatically before beginning a steep ascent in
the 1970s. Figure 8.4b considers the relationship between such average party
unity and the level of polarization characterized by DW-NOMINATE scores.
A very strong relationship is found, except during the period of the New Deal
and the Fair Deal! During this period, the level of polarization is estimated to be
far less than the average party unity would suggest based on the relationship
between party unity and polarization. In fact, over the entire period, the correl-
ation between average party unity and polarization measured using DW-
NOMINATE is 0.69, but this correlation increases to 0.76 when the ten Con-
gresses associated with the New Deal and Fair Deal are excluded.

Electoral Polarization and Elite Polarization

Another measure of polarization is provided by the extent to which the districts
of Democratic and Republican incumbents vote for different presidential can-
didates. If districts represented by Democrats vote differently from districts
represented by Republicans in presidential elections, this arguably provides
some evidence that the two electorates disagree on issues related to national
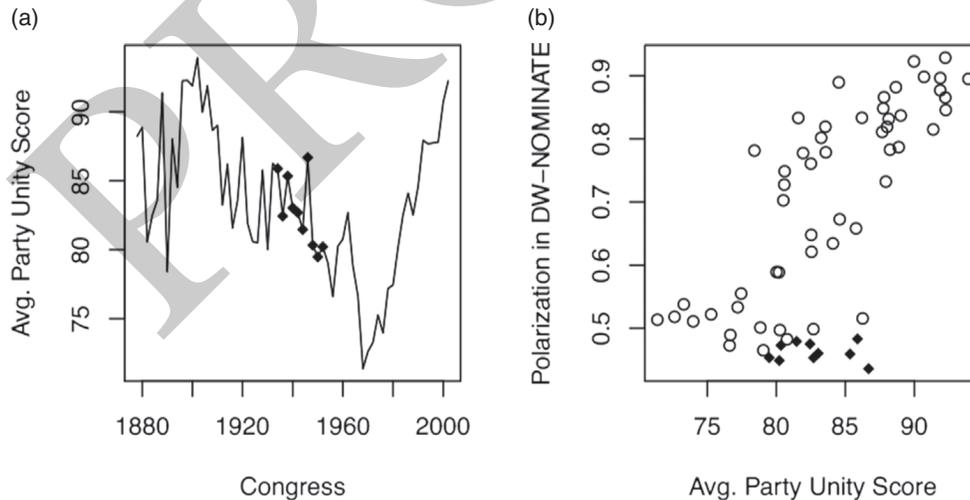

FIGURE 8.4 Trends in party unity voting, 1877–2010. (a) The average party unity voting
between 1877 and 2010. (b) The correlation between this average and the DW-
NOMINATE measure of polarization. Dark points indicate Congresses during the New
Deal and the Fair Deal (1933–1953).

politics. To measure district electoral polarization, we calculate the difference in the average percentage of votes cast for the Democratic presidential candidate for districts represented by Democrats and Republicans.

To be clear, this measure is imperfect. Not only does the meaning of voting for the Democratic candidate change over time depending on which Democrat is running, but even if the same candidate were to run in every election, what it means to cast a vote for that Democratic candidate would depend on who else is running. Despite these shortcomings, district presidential voting behavior provides one of the only characterizations we have about the views of the electorate across enough time to allow us to track the decline and rise of polarization.

To compute this measure of electoral polarization we rely on several data sources. For the first half of this period (presidential elections from 1872 through 1948), we utilize district-level estimates of presidential votes derived from county-level election returns by Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2001).[5] For the modern period (1952 through 2008), we use district-level returns as reported by the Census Bureau.

Figure 8.5 presents the comparison in an analogous way to Figure 8.4. The top graph plots the difference in the average two-party Democratic vote between Democrats and Republicans over time. It reveals a fairly constant level of electoral polarization (with notable exceptions in notable elections such as 1912), especially in the period leading up to, and including, the New Deal and Fair Deal. The level of electoral polarization proceeds to decrease before gradually climbing throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In general, Figure 8.5 reveals that periods of high electoral polarization in district-level voting behavior in presidential elections occur when high levels of polarization in elite voting behavior also occur. There are some exceptions to this pattern – most notably the Congresses of the New Deal and the Fair Deal graphed in solid plots. During this critical period, DW-NOMINATE suggests that there is far less polarization than the voting behavior of districts in presidential elections would otherwise imply based on what we observe in other time periods. The stark difference is more clearly revealed when we consider the correlation between the two measures. When we include the New Deal and Fair Deal Congresses, the correlation is only 0.24 over the entire time period, but it increases to 0.45 when the outlying Congresses of the New Deal and Fair Deal are excluded. This discrepancy implies that there is something different about either the politics or the measures of the New Deal and Fair Deal era relative to the rest of the time period.

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[5] These data are incomplete due to difficulties in matching county-level election returns with congressional districts; 18 percent of districts are missing, primarily in large cities and the Northeast. Our graphical representations of responsiveness include breaks between the early and later data to underscore this limitation. In addition, we omit the 88th Congress (1963–1964) due to missing data stemming from widespread congressional redistricting in the early 1960s.
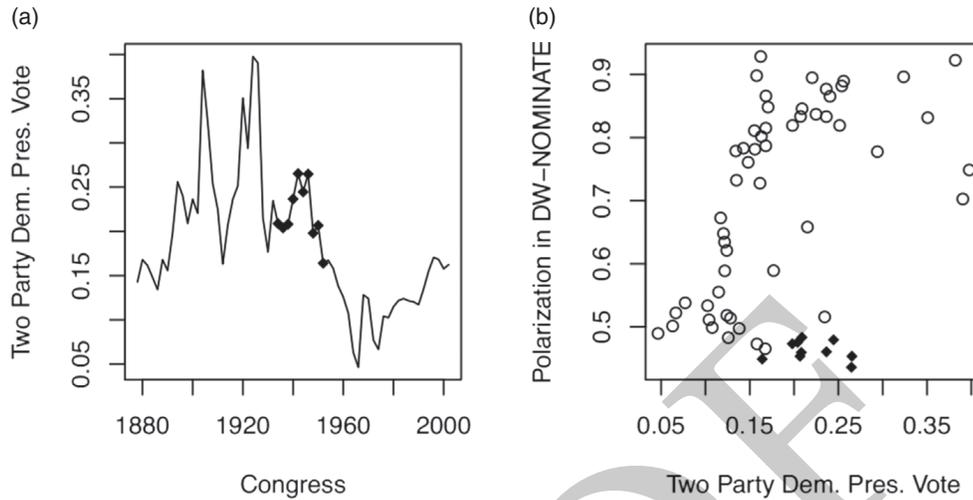
FIGURE 8.5 The relationship between district electoral polarization and DW-
NOMINATE polarization. (a) The difference in the average percentage of two-party
Democratic presidential vote between districts with Democratic and Republican
representatives. (b) The relationship between this measure of electoral polarization and
the measure of polarization based on DW-NOMINATE. Dark points indicate
Congresses during the New Deal and the Fair Deal (1933–1953).

Income Inequality and Elite Polarization

The rise of income inequality has been causally associated with increases in
polarization. Notably, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2003; 2006) argue that
income inequality and congressional polarization in Congress are tightly
linked. Our revisionist view of polarization reveals that this relationship is
weakest during the New Deal era. To explore the correlation between elite
polarization and income inequality, we use the fraction of wealth in the United
States held by the top 1 percent as measured by Piketty and Saez (2003) and
extended by Saez to 2011. This data series begins in 1913. Figure 8.6 reveals a
nearly identical pattern to those of Figures 8.5 and 8.4, at least for the 1940s
when income inequality according to this measure began to dramatically
decrease (Figure 8.6a).

Figure 8.6 again reveals that the polarization that DW-NOMINATE esti-
mates to be present during the period of the New Deal and the Fair Deal appears
different from the polarization present during periods of similar income inequal-
ity. The relationship between income inequality and polarization evident during
other historical moments appears absent during this time period. Over the entire
time period the correlation between the measures is 0.51, but it increases to 0.68
when the Congresses of the New Deal and Fair Deal are excluded.

Examining the relationship between DW-NOMINATE polarization and
three time-series that are thought likely to be associated with elite polarization
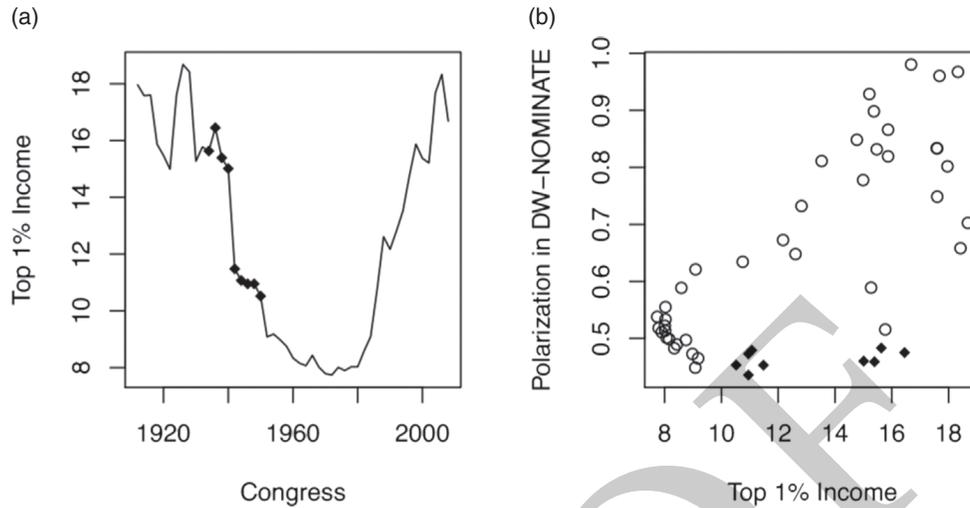
(a)

(b)

FIGURE 8.6 The percentage of U.S. wealth held by the top 1 percent, 1913–2009. (a) The
percentage of wealth held by the top 1 percent of U.S. households computed by Piketty
and Saez (2003). (b) The relationship between polarization and income inequality over
the same time period. Solid points denote the New Deal and Fair Deal period.

in Congress – the extent of party unity voting in the House, the extent to which
congressional districts are electorally polarized, and the extent of income
inequality in the United States – reveals that there is a strong relationship in
each case except for the period pertaining to the New Deal and the Fair Deal.
The characterization of polarization in the House during the New Deal and the
Fair Deal according to DW-NOMINATE is far less than the level of polariza-
tion we would predict based on other measures that are commonly thought to
be related to polarization.

LAW MAKING AND ELITE POLARIZATION

Conventional wisdom holds that elite polarization produces gridlock. Lying in
opposition to this conventional wisdom about the inability of the House and
Senate to enact significant legislation during periods of stark partisan and
ideological division, however, is the fact that some such periods have in fact
been punctuated by dramatic law making. The highly polarized 111th Con-
gress – characterized by Norman Ornstein as "the most dysfunctional political
environment that I have ever seen" – was, as Ornstein himself noted, "one of, at
least, the three most productive Congresses' since 1900." (Fahrenthold et al.
2010). How then should we think about the relationship between polarization
and legislative accomplishment? Is there a systematic relationship between the
two that would lead us to think that polarization in and of itself is sufficient to
impede law making, or is the relationship less solid or more complex? More-
over, given the apparent discrepancy between the historical record and how

DW-NOMINATE classifies the polarization of the New Deal and the Fair Deal, how dependent is our conclusion about the relationship between polarization and law making on how we classify that era's politics ?

Correctly diagnosing polarization during the 1930s and 1940s is important for understanding the consequences of polarization and the relationship between the size of the majority and the distribution of policy preferences held by legislators. In terms of law making, this was among the most productive moments in American history; many New Deal and Fair Deal statutes have had a lasting and profound effect on the relationship between the federal government and its citizens. If these changes did not occur during a period of low polarization, what we attribute to polarization *per se* rather than features of the political environment has to be carefully reconsidered (e.g., Jones 2001; Schnaffner 2011). For example, when the partisan division in the House is 340–95, how consequential are the policy differences between the majority and minority party?

Many have argued that polarization decreases the ability of Congress to pass laws essential for governance. Most empirical work confirming this relationship analyzes the period after World War II (see, e.g., Binder 1999; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; McCarty 2007), a period in which polarization is estimated to be either constant or increasing according to the commonly used DW-NOMINATE measure. Given the nature of this variation, exploring the consequences of polarization can be difficult, as any increasing trend would produce a high inverse correlation with productive law making.

Lapinski (2008) has provided a valuable extension to this literature by exploring the correlation between polarization and law making since Reconstruction – a long period with far more variation in polarization according to DW-NOMINATE. Utilizing that measure, he indeed reports that Congresses with high levels of polarization are among the least productive (using the legislative accomplishment data of Clinton and Lapinski, 2006). We build upon this analysis while showing how alternative measures for classifying polarization during the New Deal and Fair Deal affect the empirical conclusion and causal argument.

Here, we model the number of "significant" enactments passed by each Congress as a function of polarization in the House and other prominent variables that are thought to affect the supply and demand for legislation. We use a negative binomial model to account for the discrete nature of the count data.[6] The regression results in Table 8.2 reveal that the characterization of polarization during the New Deal and the Fair Deal is critical for what we can conclude about the empirical relationship connecting polarization and law making. Looking at Congressional activity between 1877 and 1994,

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[6] The covariates included in Table 8.2 do not include a size of the majority party. We ran the models with this variable included and it does not change any of the findings presented here.

TABLE 8.2 *Relationship between Polarization and Legislative Accomplishment,
1877–1994.*

Model 1 includes all years and Model 2 excludes the New Deal and the Fair Deal.

	Model 1	Model 2
	1877–1994	1877–1932, 1954–2004
House Polarization	–1.31	–0.34
(Rbst Stnd Err.)	(0.84)	(2.01)
Start of Term	0.52***	0.51***
	(0.13)	(0.15)
Divided Gov't	–0.13	–0.12
	(0.13)	(0.15)
Vietnam War	0.59***	0.57***
	(0.10)	(0.13)
Time	0.05*	0.05*
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Time^2	–0.001*	–0.001*
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Post-1946	–0.49*	–0.002
	(0.23)	(0.87)
Constant	2.05*	1.21
	(0.85)	(1.73)
ln(alpha)	–2.65***	–2.92**
	(0.60)	(1.09)
N	59	48

Model 1's results are consistent with the conventional understanding of
the relationship between polarization and legislative accomplishments: as
the parties become more polarized in Congress, the Congress is increasingly
unable to pass significant legislation to address important problems facing the
nation. The effect of House polarization on the ability of Congress to pass a
piece of legislation in the "Top 500" is negative and statistically distinguish-
able from zero using a two-tailed test at p=0.12 and using a one-tailed test
at p=.06.

The results of Model 2 show that the coefficient on House Polarization
shrinks to a fourth of what it was when the New Deal and the Fair Deal are
excluded, and the standard error nearly doubles to provide a substantively
uninformative confidence interval that ranges from –4.27 to 3.60. If the New
Deal and the Fair Deal are excluded from the analysis – as we might be inclined
to do if we suspect that the polarization of this period is mischaracterized – the
relationship between polarization and legislative accomplishment is neither
substantively nor statistically distinguishable from zero.

To interpret the substantive significance of the results reported in Table 8.2,
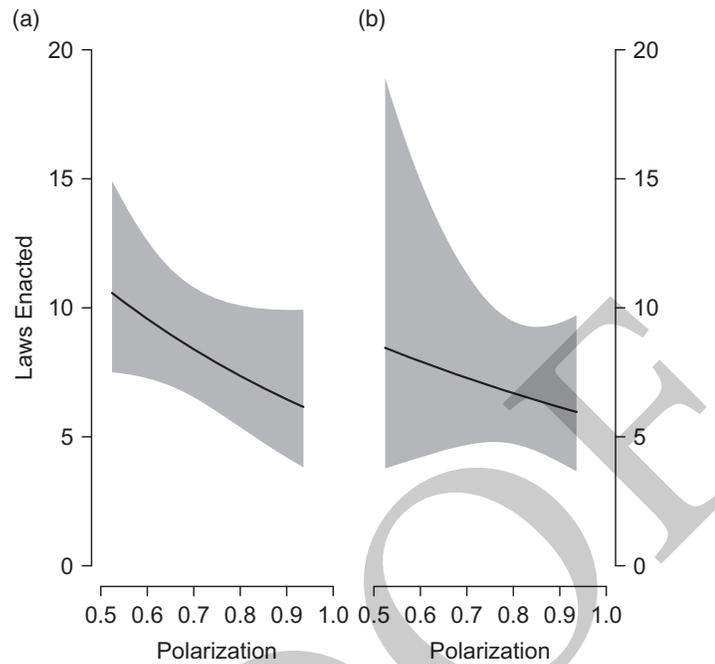Figure 8.7 graphs the predicted number of notable laws enacted across the

FIGURE 8.7 Interpreting the effect of polarization in Table 8.2. (a) The predicted number of notable enactments as a function of polarization in the House using the specification reported in Model 1 and data from all Congresses between 1874 and 1994. (b) The relationship when the Congresses of the New Deal and Fair Deal are omitted. The line denotes the predicted number of enactments and the shaded region is the 95% confidence interval for that prediction.

range of observed values of House polarization for the two models for modal categories.[7] Figure 8.7a presents the relationship using every Congress between 1874 and 1994, while Figure 8.7b replicates the analysis after omitting the Congresses associated with the New Deal and the Fair Deal. As Figure 8.7 reveals, whereas there is a negative relationship between polarization and legislative productivity when we measure the period of the New Deal and the Fair Deal as being a period of low polarization, if we remove these Congresses from the analysis we can no longer be confident that there is any notable relationship between the two. The line indicating the predicted number of enactments is much flatter and the shaded area denoting the 95 percent confidence interval is much wider.

The dramatic changes in the relationship between polarization and legislative accomplishment evident in Models 1 and 2 reveal that our inferences regarding the relationship between polarization and the capacity for legislative

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[7] To generate predicted values we set *Start of Term*, *Divided Government*, *Vietnam War*, and *Post-1946* to 0 and we chose the median year for Year and Year².

accomplishment hinge critically on how we characterize the politics of the
New Deal and the Fair Deal. If we think it is a period of low polarization as
DW-NOMINATE classifies it, we would conclude that periods of low polar-
ization are also periods of legislative accomplishment. If, however, we remove
this period from the analysis to see how robust the relationship between
polarization and legislative accomplishment is to the characterization of this
period, we find that we can no longer conclude that the relationship between
polarization and accomplishment is a meaningful one.

other assumptions, other measures?

The preceding sections suggest that scholars should be exceptionally careful when
using DW-NOMINATE to explore the politics of the critical period surrounding
the New Deal and Fair Deal. Not only does the characterization of low polariza-
tion seem at odds with the historical record and the patterns of voting we observe,
but the measures of polarization for this period do not correlate with measures
that correlate quite highly with the polarization measure in other historical
moments. Moreover, the impact of this discrepancy is important. What we
conclude about such vital subjects as the relationship between polarization and
law making depends heavily on how we classify the New Deal and Fair Deal eras.
In these instances, two possible conclusions are conceivable. Either the larger
analyses are spurious because of the mischaracterization of that key period or the
larger relationships are in fact robust but the exceptional qualities of behavior
during the New Deal demand explanation. One such possibility concerns the
constellation of unusual factors regarding partisan patterns across and within
the parties during this era, especially the role played by southern Democrats.

The analysis we present stops well short of integrating the various elements
we have considered; we are not in a position either to adjudicate between
possible measures or to diagnose the reasons that have propelled the divergent
characterizations of polarization in the space we possess. But we do wish to
consider some consequences of making alternative assumptions about the
nature of politics across time to determine if the resulting characterizations
better account for the trends we highlight. To be clear, the alternative assump-
tions we consider involve different assumptions about how to compare ideal
points across time. It does not, however, grapple with the question of whether
or not the agenda itself is shifting in consequential ways that are not adequately
captured by the assumptions made about ideal point change across time.

The ideal point estimates that are recovered by the DW-NOMINATE model
are temporally comparable over time because it is assumed that members' ideal
points can only change in a linear fashion over time. Different members may
change by different amounts, but, if change occurs, it is linear and it persists
across a member's entire tenure in office. For the analysis in this paper, we take
the same behavioral model used in DW-NOMINATE – as implemented in
W-NOMINATE – but we consider the effect of taking an alternative approach

to comparing ideal points over time. Rather than impose assumptions about how the preferences of individual members may change, we follow the approach taken by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) when extending the work of Poole and Daniels (1985) to adjust interest group scores across time.

Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) propose a linear transformation to compare estimates that would otherwise be dissimilar because of differences in the underlying scale due to differences in the agenda being voted upon. By assuming that the underlying ideological space is constant, but that the scale for any particular Congress may be stretched, thinned, or shifted from that space depending on the votes being taken, they provide a method for adjusting estimates that would otherwise not be directly comparable.

The critical assumption of the approach proposed by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) is that the mean member of Congress is unchanged over time. This implies that for an individual with a long-term average ideal point of x_i, if y_{it} is the estimated ideal point of legislator i in Congress t,

$$y_{it} = \alpha_t + \beta_t x_i + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{8.1}$$

where α_t effectively recenters the ideological space of Congress t and β_t accounts for any "stretching" or "shrinking" of the space that may have occurred because of the political agenda in Congress t. From this, we can compute an "adjusted" score that accounts for possible scale differences using: $\frac{y_{it} - \alpha_t}{\beta_t}$.

Conceptually, this method estimates a series of regressions between Congresses to determine how the scales of adjacent Congresses differ from one another and then it uses the estimated difference to remove the effects of these differences from the ideal points that were estimated in time t. It creates ideal points that: (1) have a constant mean for those members serving across time and (2) best account for the evident variation subject to the constraint that the mean is fixed across time.[8] To be clear, these are very strong assumptions with seemingly implausible behavioral implications; the approach of Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) assumes that each legislator has a fixed mean over his or her entire career and that the members' ideal points in each Congress are iid around that mean. Put differently, a shift in a member's ideal point for a given Congress is assumed to be unrelated to shifts in earlier or later sessions.

Given an alternative method of computing ideal points over time, we now explore how applying the Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) transformation to W-NOMINATE ideal points estimated in each House compares with the

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[8] Given the nature of the relationship in equation (8.1), the change in individual behavior is idiosyncratic across legislators and time and it is due to differences in the error (see, e.g., the discussion of Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999, p. 48)). The fact that members' average ideal points are unchanged means that it is assumed that Congress is not drifting systematically to the right or the left over time; Congress is operating in the same ideological space as past Congresses. To be clear, this is also an implicit assumption in DW-NOMINATE – scaling methods cannot easily identify if the ideological conflict shifts.

conclusions we would reach using DW-NOMINATE. Because our purpose is to explore the ability of these alternative assumptions about how ideal points vary over time to characterize the nature of politics, we focus on a comparison that uses as much of DW-NOMINATE as possible. So doing allows us to attribute differences that we uncover to the alternative assumptions used to compare the estimates over time. In particular, we ask whether the assumption of linear preference changes is problematic in the presence of large exogenous changes to the status quo such as might be caused by the Great Depression and its aftermath.

Comparing how this adjustment affects the estimated ideal points for individual members provides a clear illustration of the maintained assumptions when trying to compare ideal points across time. Figure 8.8 graphs the relationship between several estimates for the 27,940 ideal points we analyze. Figure 8.8a illustrates the consequences of the adjustment behind Equation (8.1), which rescales the underlying W-NOMINATE scores in a linear way to produce the
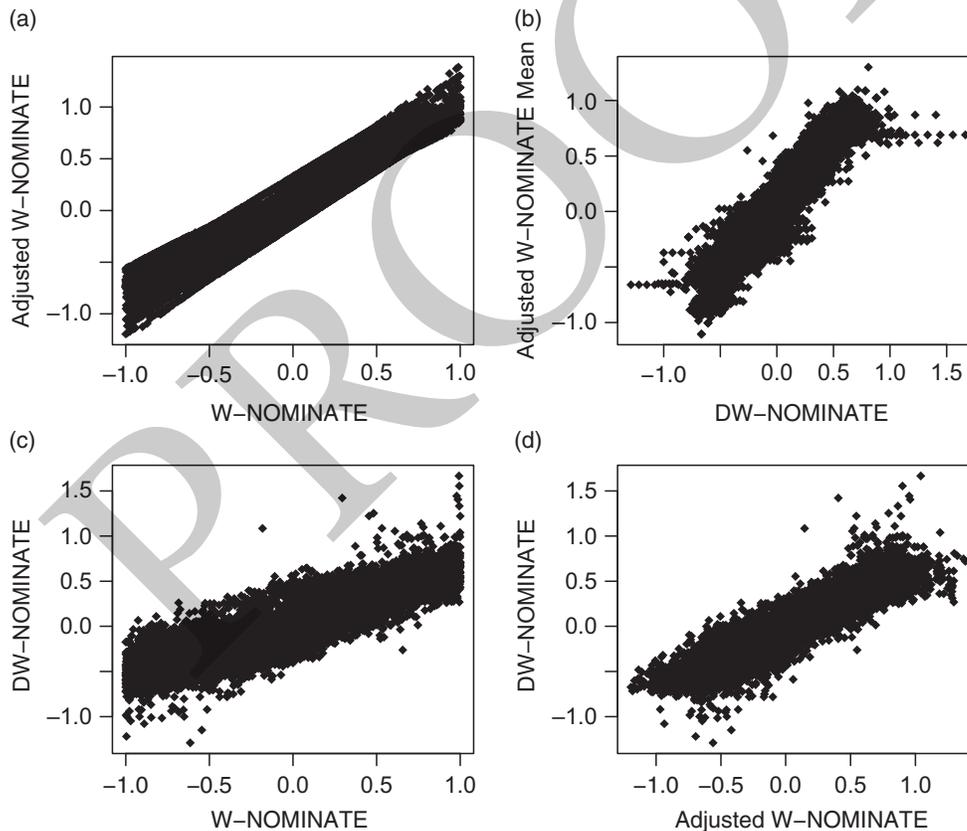

FIGURE 8.8   Ideal point estimates four ways. Each point is an ideal point for a member in a Congress calculated using either W-NOMINATE; DW-NOMINATE; or WNOMINATE adjusted using the procedure suggested by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) to estimate the Adjusted W-NOMINATE score and Adjusted W-NOMINATE Mean.

adjusted scores. It does so by assuming that the mean ideal point of members is constant over time but subject to random fluctuations. Figure 8.8b illustrates this assumption as it is possible to visually identify legislators with a constant adjusted W-NOMINATE mean and changing DW-NOMINATE scores.

The consequences of the linear rescaling proposed by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999) and presented in Figure 8.8a can be seen in the bottom two graphs, which show how the unadjusted (Figure 8.8c) and adjusted (Figure 8.8d) W-NOMINATE scores compare with those produced by DW-NOMINATE.

While not a surprise given the scaling assumptions being employed and the common behavioral voting model being assumed in each instance, there is a great deal of overall similarity between the individual ideal point estimates. The ideal points of individual members in the Congresses we examine using DW-NOMINATE and adjusted W-NOMINATE, for example, correlate at roughly 0.95. However, the high level of similarity does mask some dramatic differences among some individuals. For example, if we examine the predicted ideal points of the second longest-serving member in the U.S. House – Jamie Whitten (D-MS-2) – we can observe the consequences of the different assumptions being made to compare ideal points over time.

When the House debated a bill to outlaw the poll tax in May 1943, Rep. Whitten rose to attack both organized labor and nonsouthern Democrats for supporting the legislation. Their meddling in southern race relations, he cautioned, will "make it much more difficult for us who consider ourselves liberals in the South as we struggle to free the poor people in the South and admit them to the economic life of the region and to a participation in its political processes."[9] Like many southern members of this era, he was supportive of liberal economic policies, but fiercely opposed to civil rights initiatives. Later, he signed the Southern Manifesto condemning the U.S. Supreme Court for the 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education,* and he opposed the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, 1965, and 1968. (He later apologized for these actions and supported the Civil Rights Act of 1991.) He also frequently opposed the foreign and domestic policies proposed by President Reagan in the 1980s.

Whitten's specification in DW-NOMINATE is at odds with his self-described commitments. Because DW-NOMINATE assumes that ideal points can change only linearly over time – if at different rates for each member – its estimates for Whitten in Figure 8.9, denoted by the thick line, suggest that he began his service in the House as a conservative and gradually and steadily became more liberal over the course of his House career. The adjusted W-NOMINATE estimate suggests a very different account. They suggest more accurately and in a more nuanced way that Whitten opened his career as a New Deal liberal but became dramatically more conservative in the civil

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[9] *Congressional Record*, 78th Congress, 1st session, May 25, 1943.
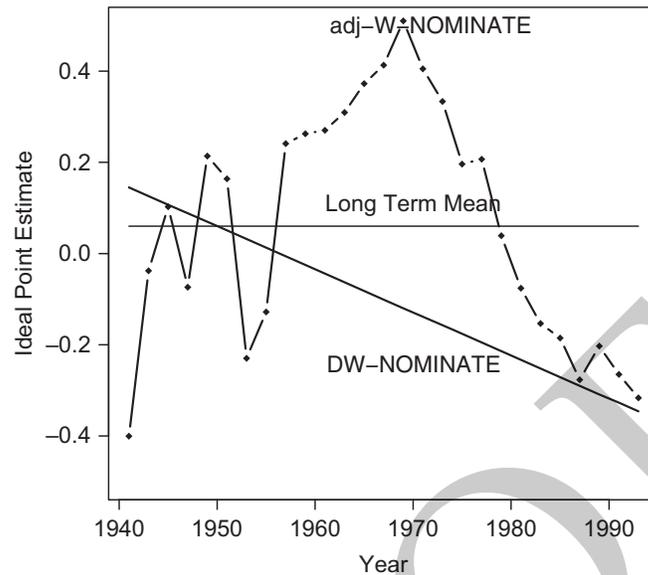
FIGURE 8.9 Three ideal point estimates for Rep. Whitten (D-MS).

rights era, only later to once again move to the left once civil rights issues had
been settled at the federal level.[10]

Aggregating the individual ideal points plotted in Figure 8.8 to compute the
level of polarization according to the two measures provides the long-term
trends graphed in Figure 8.10. Figure 8.10 plots House polarization between
1877 and 2010 according to DW-NOMINATE (Figure 8.10a) and the trans-
formed W-NOMINATE estimates (Figure 8.10b).

The first point worth noting about Figure 8.10 is that despite the different
assumptions being used to relate ideal points over time, the two trends exhibit a
substantial level of covariation over this time period: they correlate at 0.80.

Even so, it is clear that the trends suggest qualitative differences in the level
of polarization across time. The horizontal line denotes the minimal level of
polarization that is estimated to occur in each of the two measures. According
to DW-NOMINATE, the periods of the New Deal and Fair Deal represent the
start of a low period of polarization that extends to 1980. In contrast, if we
"bridge" W-NOMINATE scores estimated in each House using the algorithm
proposed by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder (1999), we observe a very different
characterization. Not only is the New Deal a period of polarization that is more
on par with the level of polarization that we currently measure in the House,

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[10] The constant mean assumed by the adjusted-WNOMINATE approach is denoted in Figure 8.8
by the thin line. The deviations from the long-term mean certainly appear nonrandom, but the
important point is that the conclusions that one would draw from this pattern differ significantly
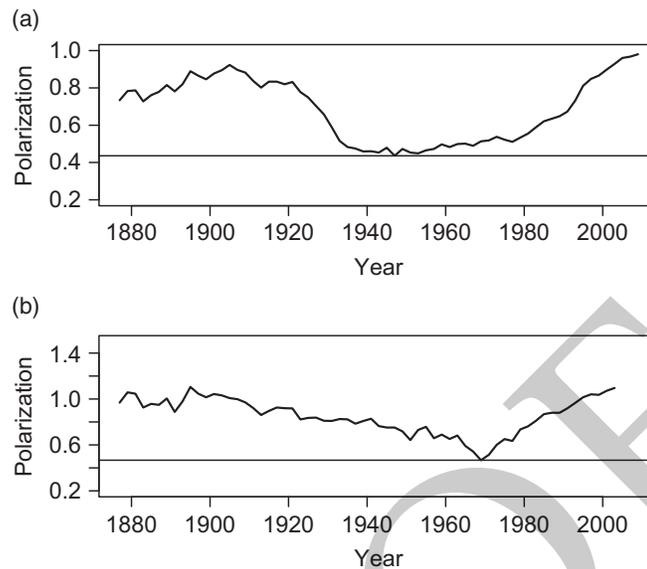from those which DW-NOMINATE would suggest.

FIGURE 8.10 Measures of polarization in the U.S. House, 1877–2010. Measured using DW-NOMINATE (a) and adjusted W-NOMINATE scores (b). The horizontal line denotes the period of minimum polarization.

but the nadir of polarization does not occur until the 1960s, having begun, as the work of Katznelson and Mulroy (2012) has suggested, in the late 1930s and 1940s.

To explore the differences in these two measures further, we compare how well each covaries with the measures we examine in the section Characterizing Patterns of Elite Polarization. Predicting each as a function of polarization measured using both DW-NOMINATE and adjusted W-NOMINATE scores reveals that the adjusted W-NOMINATE measure is a better fit in every case.

Table 8.3 shows that polarization in the House is highly related to these three measures, but the adjusted W-NOMINATE measure of polarization appears to do a better job than DW-NOMINATE at describing the observed variation. Including both measures reveals that only the adjusted W-NOMINATE score is correlated with the measure of party unity presented in Figure 8.4 (Model 1) and the level of income inequality graphed in Figure 8.6 (Model 5). Disentangling the relationship with voter polarization evident in Figure 8.5 is more difficult, but Models 2, 3, and 4 suggest that the relationship is slightly stronger when using adjusted W-NOMINATE to measure levels of elite polarization.

In all, the differences in the two measures of polarization are largely due to differences in how the two measures characterize the level of polarization during the New Deal and Fair Deal period. The fact that the level of polarization according to the adjusted W-NOMINATE scores better predicts the observed variation of interest than the level of polarization suggested by

TABLE 8.3 *Correlates of Alternative Measures of Polarization*

	Party Unity	Voter Polarization	Voter Polarization	Voter Polarization	Top 1% Wealth
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Intercept	58.27*	0.10*	0.07	0.50*	0.45
(Std. Error)	(2.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(2.58)
DW-Nominate	−3.66	0.13*		0.02	−0.78
	(4.11)	(0.06)		(0.12)	(5.18)
Adjusted	32.67*		0.14*	0.10	15.58*
W-Nominate	(4.38)		(0.06)	(0.13)	(5.22)
N	63	63	63	63	44
R^2	0.73	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.35

Standard errors in parentheses,

* indicates two-sided significance at $p < 0.05$

DW-NOMINATE implies that the characterization of polarization according to DW-NOMINATE during this period is at odds with what we observe in similar situations in other periods.

Despite both the improved fit and the more reasonable account that the measure provides concerning levels of polarization during the New Deal and Fair Deal, we are not claiming that the W-NOMINATE adjustments provide the silver bullet solution to the notoriously difficult task of establishing comparable estimates over time. This remains a challenge when agendas and larger political and economic contexts can change so dramatically, as they did in the 1930s and 1940s. Our discussion also remains incomplete regarding what "second-dimension" estimates imply about polarization and how to make them more constitutive of Congressional analyses. The descriptive data we presented on southern roll call shifts in the period we have considered further underscores the significance of this lacuna. If the second dimension essentially reflects "error" in the first dimension that can be fit in a second dimension, what does it mean substantively that the relevance of the second dimension varies so much over time and that the relevance of the second dimension rises precisely when polarization is estimated to fall? Clearly, there is a cost to ignoring aspects of the congressional agenda that do not fit neatly into a one-dimensional partisan divide.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

The roll call estimates pioneered by Poole and Rosenthal revolutionized Congressional studies and, indeed, those of American politics more broadly. The intent of our chapter is not to claim that a different bridging mechanism is "better" than the approach employed in the DW-NOMINATE procedure, nor is it to suggest that we have not greatly benefited from the analysis of the roll

call voting behavior data generated by the NOMINATE project. It was, and still is, a critical scholarly enterprise that has revealed much about the nature of politics.

However, we do think that it is perhaps important to reconsider some of the assumptions underlying NOMINATE and compare its results to what we know historically when conducting wide-ranging analyses spanning many different political, economic, and social contexts. Precisely because of the significance of the NOMINATE project, it is important to continue to assess the vulnerabilities as well as the strengths of this, or any other, approach to measurement that seeks to apprehend long-term historical trends. To this end, we have been attentive to a particular historical moment when the NOMINATE approach seems at odds both with focused historical accounts and with other approaches to measurement. In so doing, we hope to have cleared some ground, and to have suggested pathways for continued research and analysis.

Our intention was not, and is not, to suggest that existing analyses are necessarily problematic or that alternative existing methods produce superior results. We instead intend our analysis to prompt further questions about the importance and accuracy of various assumptions and to encourage continued conversations about how to measure and assess the nature of the changing political environment over time.

When considering polarization, for example, a host of vexing questions loom. What exactly does it mean? How close a fit should the concept of elite polarization have with partisan divisions, as distinct from substantive disagreement about issues divisions? When do considerations of ideology and partisanship become tautological? How might we best transcend an exclusive focus on the left-to-right first dimension, especially in circumstances such as the New Deal years when race and region were so manifestly important, not only in the issue space of the time, but in the very dynamics of the party system? How should we think about comparing estimates over time? Should we be aiming at portable hypotheses that hold up over huge swaths of time, or focus with at least equal intensity on historical moments that seem either exceptional or serve as critical junctures? If so, how should such times be identified? Does it make sense to be agnostic about what substantively is being scaled when we are scaling votes? There are no easy answers to these questions when measures meet history.

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