

**Instructions:** Work in groups of 2-3 to complete sections I-III below. Have someone from your group take notes on what you find and post your notes to the discussion board in the section Canvas page at the end of class. The notes do not have to be very polished - I just need to see some record of what you observed and discussed in order to give participation credit for the day. We will aim to share what we learned with the larger group toward the end of section.

**I. Choose an issue and a bill**

- Go to <https://voteview.com/>
- Enter a search term in the “Vote and Member Search” field. Suggested search terms are below.
- To the far right of the “Vote and Member Search” field, select “advanced search,” then under “Key Vote,” select “Any.” To further restrict your search results, you can instead select “Congressional Quarterly.”
- Find a bill matching your search term from the last 15-20 years. If you’re having trouble finding a bill within this timeframe, you can use the “Date Range” option on the left-hand advanced search menu to refine your results.
  - Check the bill’s “Description” field to make sure that it relates to the search topic. If the field is vague or unclear, you can also read a more detailed description on the full bill page outlined in the next step.
- In the top right-hand corner of the bill field, select “View Vote.”

112th Congress > Senate > Vote 377 on 2012-06-20

Bill number: S3240

Vote: 30-69 (Amendment Rejected)

Vote Categories: Agriculture , Budget Special Interest

Question: On the Amendment

Description: To reduce funding for the market access program and to prohibit the use of funds for reality television shows, wine tastings, animal spa products, and cat or dog food.

View Vote

**SUGGESTED SEARCH TERMS** (be sure to put quotation marks around queries with more than one word):

abortion  
“civil rights”  
“death penalty”  
discrimination  
gas  
gay (more recent) / homosexual (less recent)  
gun  
immigrant  
“income tax”  
“minimum wage”  
pollution

prisons  
"social security"  
voting

## II. Study the bill's support by party and ideology

- On the "View Vote" page, look at each party's vote totals in the "Votes" table. Is the vote polarized, with one party supporting it and the other party opposing it? Or is one (or both) of the parties divided in supporting the bill?
- Now look at the "Member Vote Map" to the left of the "Votes" table. If one of the parties is divided in their support for the bill, are there regions of the country where party legislators voted differently from their fellow party members in the rest of the country? Are there any regional patterns in support for or opposition to the bill more generally?
- Scroll down to the "Vote Ideological Breakdown" graph. Where does the "cutting line" fall in Congress' ideological space?
  - Does it intersect the middle of the x-axis, suggesting that members are evenly divided on the issue? Or does it fall more toward the endpoint of the graph, suggesting that one would have to take an extreme position to support or oppose the bill?
  - Is the line vertical, meaning that only one issue dimension (along the x-axis) is needed to explain the vote? Or is it more diagonal, suggesting that more than one ideological dimension informs whether a legislator votes for the bill?

## III. Study the change in party positions over time

- Go back to the "Vote and Member Search" field on the previous page and re-enter your search term. This time, look for bills from an earlier time period, ideally from the 1950s or 1960s. Remember that you can specify the date range under the "advanced search" menu if needed. Make sure "Key Votes" is still selected as well.
- Select another bill. Read the bill's description (again, you can use the longer description on the "View Vote" page, if needed).
  - How does this bill compare to the more recent bill you studied in the previous section? Would you expect people to vote on this bill in the same way if they had similar preferences?
- Select "View Vote." Are parties polarized on this bill, or are either of the parties divided in their support for the bill?
- Look at the "Member Vote Map." If there are divisions within either party, are there particular areas of the country where party members voted differently from party members in the rest of the country?
- Scroll down to the "Vote Ideological Breakdown" map. Where does the "cutting line" fall in Congress' ideological space?
  - Does the issue still evenly divide Congress as it did in the bill you looked at previously? That is, does it fall in the middle of the x-axis?
  - Does the issue rely on a one-dimensional ideology to explain votes, or are two dimensions needed to explain support for the bill?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How have parties changed over time in their position on the issue you studied? Have they switched positions? Are they becoming less internally divided?

2. Are the ideological dimensions informing a legislator's stance on the issue becoming more complex or less? Is there movement toward a single left-right dimension or toward multiple dimensions?
3. If you were a voter deciding whether or not to vote for a legislator from a given party, at what point in time could you be sure that the legislator's party at the national level would support the same issues the legislator from your local district?
4. Considering the points above, are the parties more "responsible" now than they were before? Are you more or less able to know what issues you would support at the national level by voting for a legislator in your home district? Is this a good thing?