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Polarization vs. Polarisation: Comparing Party Divergence in the US and Australia



Fulbright Flinders University Lecture Series 5

Thad Kousser

Distinguished Chair in American Political Science



Professor Colin J Stirling
Vice-Chancellor
Flinders University

I am very pleased to present the lecture delivered by Professor Thad Kousser as part of Flinders commitment to hosting the Fulbright Flinders University Distinguished Chair 2015 in American Political Science.

The Distinguished Chair enhances Flinders strong international links with universities and research institutions across North America and Asia.

Professor Kousser's lecture Polarization vs Polarisation: Comparing Party Divergence in the US and Australia provides both a quantitative and qualitative approach to his research in Australia. His incorporation of social media in research data to illuminate the comparison of the Australian and American political processes shows itself to be both innovative and incisive.

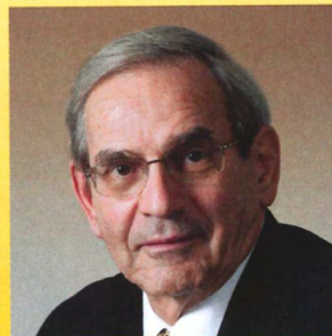


Professor Phyllis Tharenou
Executive Dean
Faculty of Social and Behavioural
Sciences Flinders University

The Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences is pleased to continue supporting and hosting the Fulbright Flinders University Distinguished Chair. Each distinguished scholar contributes to the comparative political analysis of Australia and the United States, and adds significantly to the teaching and research profiles of the Faculty.

The Distinguished scholars have proven to be an invaluable resource to undergraduate and post graduate students across the Faculty, and continue to help foster research links between Flinders and universities in the United States.

The Distinguished Chair program series of publications, including this Series 5, provide a worthy record of the work each Distinguished Chair achieves whilst at Flinders University and is a resource for future students.



Professor Don DeBats
Head, American Studies
Flinders University

Professor Thad Kousser reminds us that comparative politics is the best way to learn about your own nation. "Compared to what," is always a fine question but particularly so in respect of political life. The differences are profound and we see them best when the data is comparative. And that is exactly what Professor Kousser has done in Australia from his position as the Fulbright Flinders University Distinguished Chair in American Political Science. Kousser brings his comparative interests and methods together to show us that polarization/polarisation is a feature of the politics of both Australia and the United States but in quite different ways and to different extents.



Dr Tangerine Holt
Executive Director
Australian-American
Fulbright Commission

The Distinguished Chair Program is viewed as among the most prestigious appointments in the Fulbright Scholar Program with approximately 40 Fulbright Distinguished Chairs across 15 countries. The Australian-American Fulbright Commission is pleased to support the publication of the principal public lecture for each of the Fulbright Flinders University Distinguished Chairs in American Political Science. Professor Kousser's research on the evolving partisan polarisation of environmental politics in Australia is informative, and timely. This publication is valued and highly regarded resource written by a Fulbright Scholar who continues to collect data on this topical issue.

Thad Kousser



*Thad Kousser
University of California, San Diego*

Thad Kousser is serving as the 2015 Fulbright Flinders University Distinguished Chair in American Political Science. He has authored, co-authored, or edited a number of publications including *The Power of American Governors* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), *The Logic of American Politics*, 7th Edition (CQ Press, forthcoming), *Politics in the American States*, 10th Edition (CQ Press, 2012). He is a recipient of the UCSD Academic Senate's Distinguished Teaching Award, the Faculty Mentor of the Year Award, served as co-editor of the *Journal State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, and has worked as a staff assistant in the California, New Mexico, and United States Senates.

A defining characteristic of American politics over the past generation has been the growing ideological divide between the nation's two major parties. Measuring this polarization is straightforward, using roll call records from Congress where every vote is a conscience vote. Asking how Australian parties compare is complicated, because divisions within the party room disappear on the floor. This preliminary work begins to chart comparative political polarization, based on what Australian politicians say in interviews, on the Australian Candidate Survey, on Twitter, and in their maiden speeches.

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Introduction



The present moment may not be the Golden Age of Australian Politics - but the gloomiest prediction, the most dire warning that anyone here can issue for Australian politics is: if things keep getting worse they will be just as bad as the polarised gridlock of the USA.

The ideological gap between the two parties, which has been broadening for decades, is known as political polarisation and it is, I think, the second most profound critique that Australians have of American society.

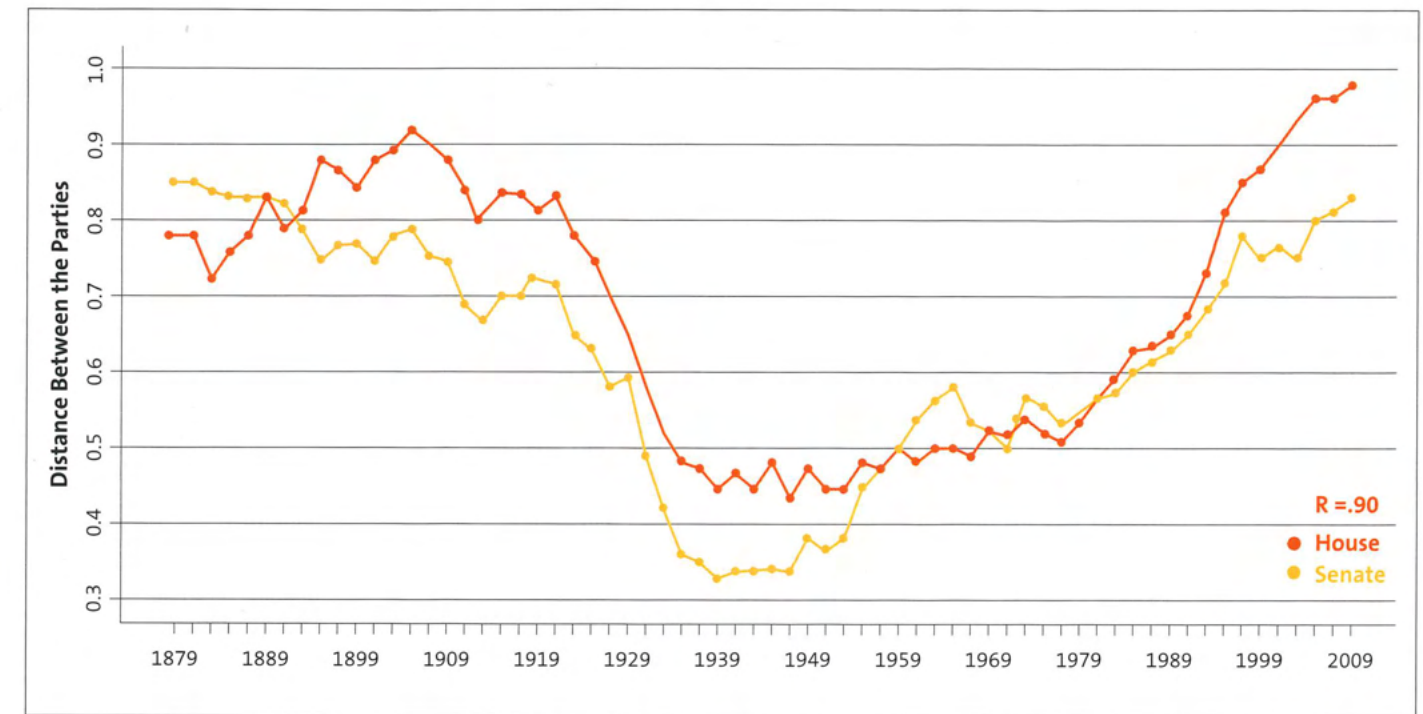
What is the leading critique? Our terrible coffee, of course. But what I want to talk about is political polarisation in a comparative perspective and I will start by giving some brief data on the United States using the tools of modern American statistical political science. I'll then raise some debates that statistics alone can't answer.

Then we will go to Australia and measure it up against some of those same benchmarks to compare it to America. In my research here I've taken both a quantitative approach and a qualitative approach, interviewing about a dozen Australian politicians both in Adelaide and in five other states in Australia. Australian politicians, compared to American politicians, are remarkably approachable, generous with their time, thoughtful and candid, and the Australian academics, especially at Flinders, have also been incredibly generous.

A Polarized America

Let's start out in America and look at political polarisation, which is the defining feature of American politics over the last four decades. Everybody agrees that the two parties, Democrat and Republican, have grown further and further apart, and that agreement comes mostly because we have a good statistical basis for proving the growing divide. This is something that started coming with my former colleague at UCSD, Keith Poole, and his collaborator at Princeton, Howard Rosenthal.

These two came up with a data series below, which is based on every roll call vote ever cast on the floor of Congress. They used some linear algebra to figure out where the parties are and their ideological positioning in the sort of left-to-right dimension and then measured the distance between the average Republican member and the average Democratic member, as shown by these two lines.



This plot starts out in 1879 and shows how the parties were first quite far apart, then came back together but since about mid-century the parties have been moving further and further apart so that we are now at historical levels of political polarisation. In Australia you can't do this analysis: that was one of the first things I learned here.

In America, when a member votes you know they have made a choice using their own free will rather than being bound by the party discipline that is so strongly exerted here. In Australia, party members may have internal divisions but when the party room door shuts behind them, those divisions are gone, so researchers have to find other sources of data to reveal those divisions.

In America, every vote on the congressional floor is a conscience vote so you can see those divisions.

Is Polarization Necessarily Bad?

Back to America. We have plenty of scholars on this topic because we have managed to nail down the basics about whether leaders are more polarised than voters. While this is still a contentious issue, the basics are that Democratic and Republican voters have grown further apart – and the leaders have grown even further apart. But in Australia? We don't know exactly where the leaders and the voters are. The causes of polarisation in the United States could be debated: the rise in income inequality that tracks the rise in polarisation is one candidate for causality; activists who are becoming more and more extreme are another possible cause. We have also looked for the consequences of polarisation. In particular, with a Democratic president as we have today with Barack Obama and a Republican Congress, we find gridlock. They are not getting much done and the levels of legislation passed are historically low. And incivility: a Member of Congress said to President Obama as he gave the State of the Union address: "You lie!" That is what American politics has become.

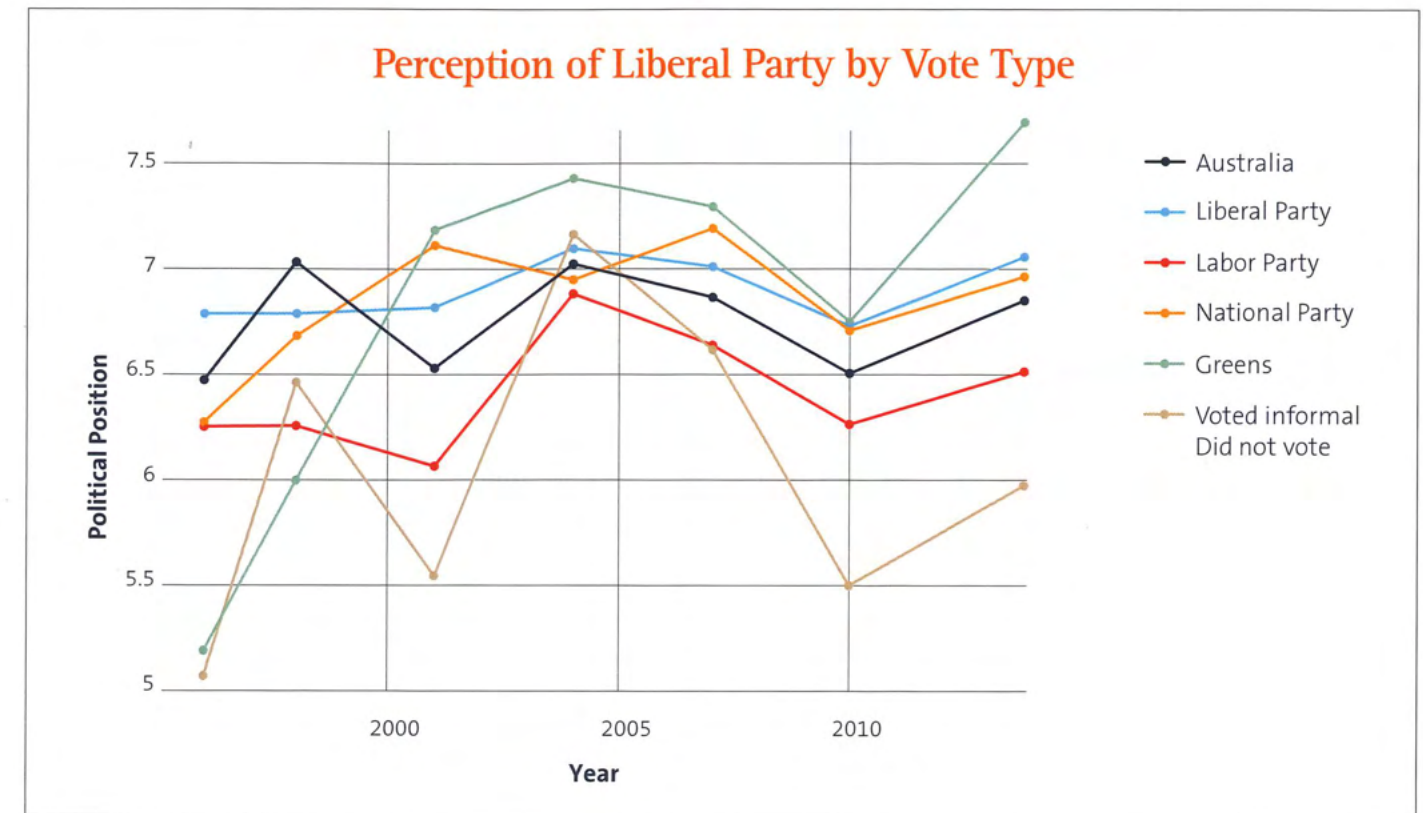
Yet the picture isn't all bad. It's quite conceivable that polarisation is not entirely a negative thing.

For instance, just as we in the United States have gridlock when we have divided government, you in Australia have gridlock when the Senate has a non-government majority that blocks legislation. But when there's unified government, as we had under the first two years of President Barack Obama, we could get a lot done because each branch agrees with the other. Those internal divisions aren't there, so you can move ahead with lots of legislation, and that's what we saw at the beginning of the Obama administration. Outside the beltway, which has been gridlocked for about six years, the individual states have made tremendous policy moves toward both the left and the right, with versions of Obamacare passed before Obamacare itself in many states and at the same time some of the redder states, the more Republican states, were rejecting health care reform. This polarisation inspires activists. We saw both with the Tea Party movement on the right and the Occupy movement on the left that activists can be galvanised to connect with politics. They can get their people elected and they can pass major policies. Many Tea Party officials have been elected, and we have also seen many new tax laws. A law in California, for instance, raises about \$30 billion, with 80% of the money coming from the richest 1%. People can get energised, can become active, and when they do have control they can make change happen and get things done. Polarisation may be good or bad – that is debatable – but at least in the United States we have a common baseline of agreement of statistics so we know polarisation is happening.

Is Australia Polarising?

Australia doesn't have that common metric so there is the question as to whether Australia is polarised or not. This question is deeply contested, so we do know where the red and blue voting blocks are around the country.

At the last election, some people talked about a big party convergence in the 90s – but then others said no, the parties didn't come together in the 80s and 90s.



Talk about divergence has continued since then, but again, there is no consensus: we don't know where our leaders are positioned compared to voters. I found a data based article in the Guardian that discussed Australia's polarising. This was a subjective analysis based on a poll, showing how people placed themselves on an ideological scale. But the message wasn't clear.

One of my first tasks when I got to Flinders was to try to sort out this question: is Australia polarising? One of the things I did was talk to politicians. Now, politicians very much think deeply about a long-term time scale in Australian politics and how it relates to modern Australian politics. Here is what some of them had to say. One Liberal party politician talking about this era said, "Modern Australian politics started in December 1972 when Gough Whitlam brought in a form of social democracy that was affordable. Keating and Hawke were giants." This is a Liberal party member talking about Keating and Hawke and Whitlam! That is not how Democrats talk about Ronald Reagan or Richard Nixon. So this is a sign of some convergence at that time. But then when I talked to Susan Close (Labor), who is South Australia's Education minister, she said, "Hawke and Keating delivered economic reforms that Liberals could only dream of. There was a consensus because we were doing their work... then Howard let the cat out of the bag. Race and immigration, the issues that we used to work on together, quietly, were suddenly polarised".

So evidently there is some polarisation happening in this era. Bob Brown, the Greens leader, when I interviewed him in Tasmania said, "For a decade in the 80s, Labor went for the environmental vote and absolutely delivered results, but after 1993 the ALP moved to the right on everything." And finally a Liberal party senator said "The electorate as a whole has been moving to the right because of security threats and because of the financial crisis." You have different takes from different leaders. Christopher Pyne, whom I interviewed here in Adelaide, said "I don't think politics in Australia or America are very much different from the way they have always been. There have always been dire warnings of polarisation."

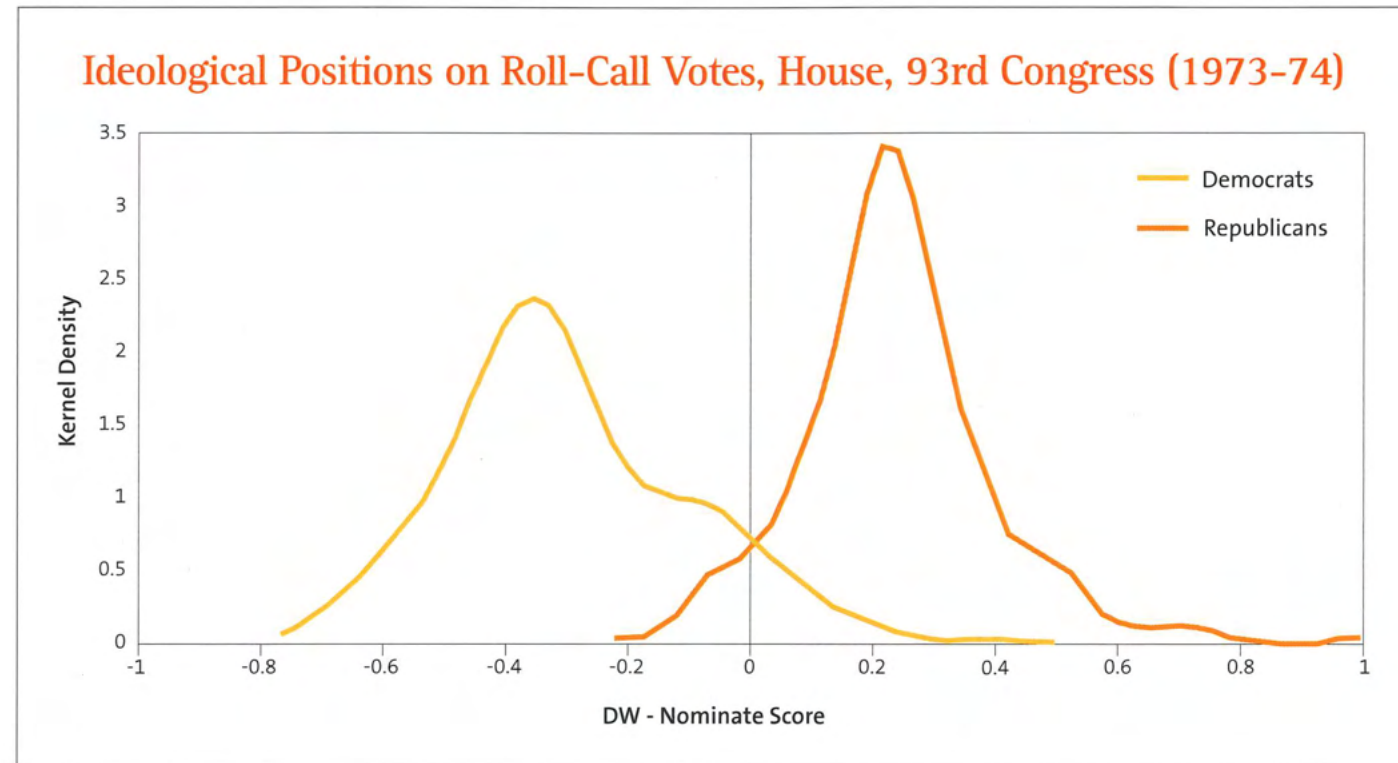
There is no consensus amongst the politicians, just as there is no consensus amongst the academics, about where the parties are moving.

One of the tasks I have been trying is to take some of the tools that are used in America and use them to analyze Australian data and listen to what politicians say in interviews and also into looking what they say on surveys, that will be the first bit of data that I am going to show you, and then what they say on social media.

America's Polarization

So let's start with what is said on surveys. This is going to be an attempt to craft a measure of polarisation that is similar to what people have used in America to come up with the story about the polarising of Washington DC. So using all the roll call votes, and waving a bit over math on them, political scientists have put the parties on a left-to-right spectrum. The graph below shows where the Democratic Party was (yellow) and the Republican Party was (orange) just on the eve of Watergate, about 1973-1974.

What you see is Democrats on the left, Republicans on the right – but there is some variation within each party and in fact there is even a crossover area of liberal Republicans or conservative Democrats. These people were able to often find common ground and they were the ones who put together big deals.



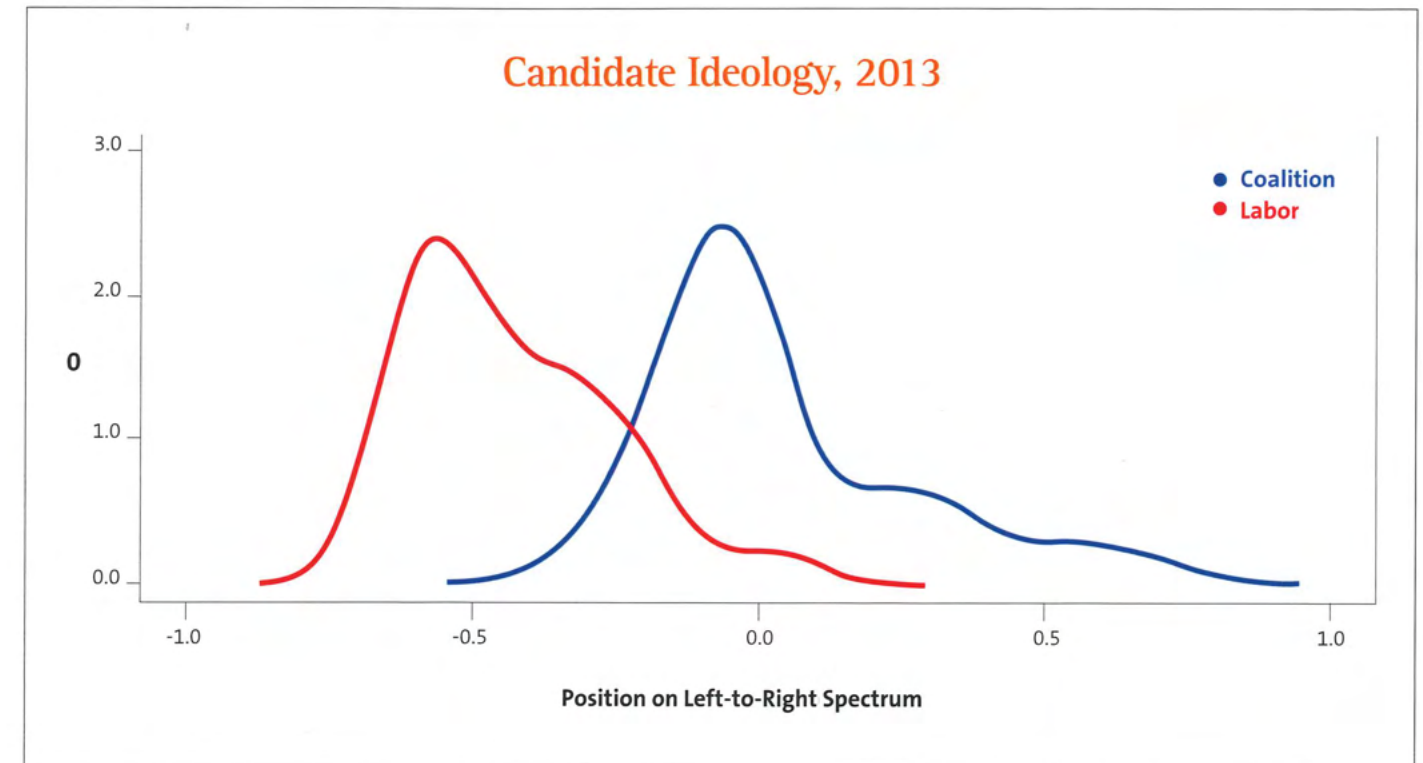
If you look at today's Washington DC, they've gone. That overlap area has disappeared; the most liberal Republican is to the right of the most conservative Democrat in American politics today and if you think this is just an "inside the beltway," Washington

DC thing, I have used this same method on historical roll calls and in all the big states. Just as in New York, so in Illinois, and California: the same story. This polarisation has happened before, a few generations ago.

Australian Analogue

Now what does Australia look like? We can't rely on votes, but Australia does have a wonderful poll of candidates who are running for office, run by the Australian National University. Not every candidate responds, but they have a pretty good response rate. In place of votes on legislation, I looked at how candidates voted on 28 policy questions in the poll. These are policies like the death penalty, marijuana, same sex marriage, asylum seekers -- ANU is very good about picking the big issues of the day.

These can be treated as if they were Yes votes and No votes, and I treat this like people treat the results like a Yes and a No vote on the floor of Congress. One great thing about this polling data is that the same questions are asked of voters, so we can put voters and candidates on the same ideological scale. Below, I show you, first, candidates then voters. Many of the same questions have been asked after every election going back to the 1980s.



Dr Haydon Manning and I are planning a joint project trying to explain the dance of parties and voters. Let me show you the preliminary results so far, in which we've plotted where the two parties are on the ideological spectrum in Australia. The lines look a little like the US did before Watergate, through the 70s and 80s. The coalition is on the right (blue) Labor on the left (red) with Labor left and Labor right both represented. The data in full does not pull out national voters, but there is a good cross over for region. The left Liberals and the Labor rights are in the same ideological area and, I think that explains why Australia does have more political consensus than the United States does at this time. I spent some time with Christopher Pyne and at the end of the interview he said, "You know, if I were in America I'd be either

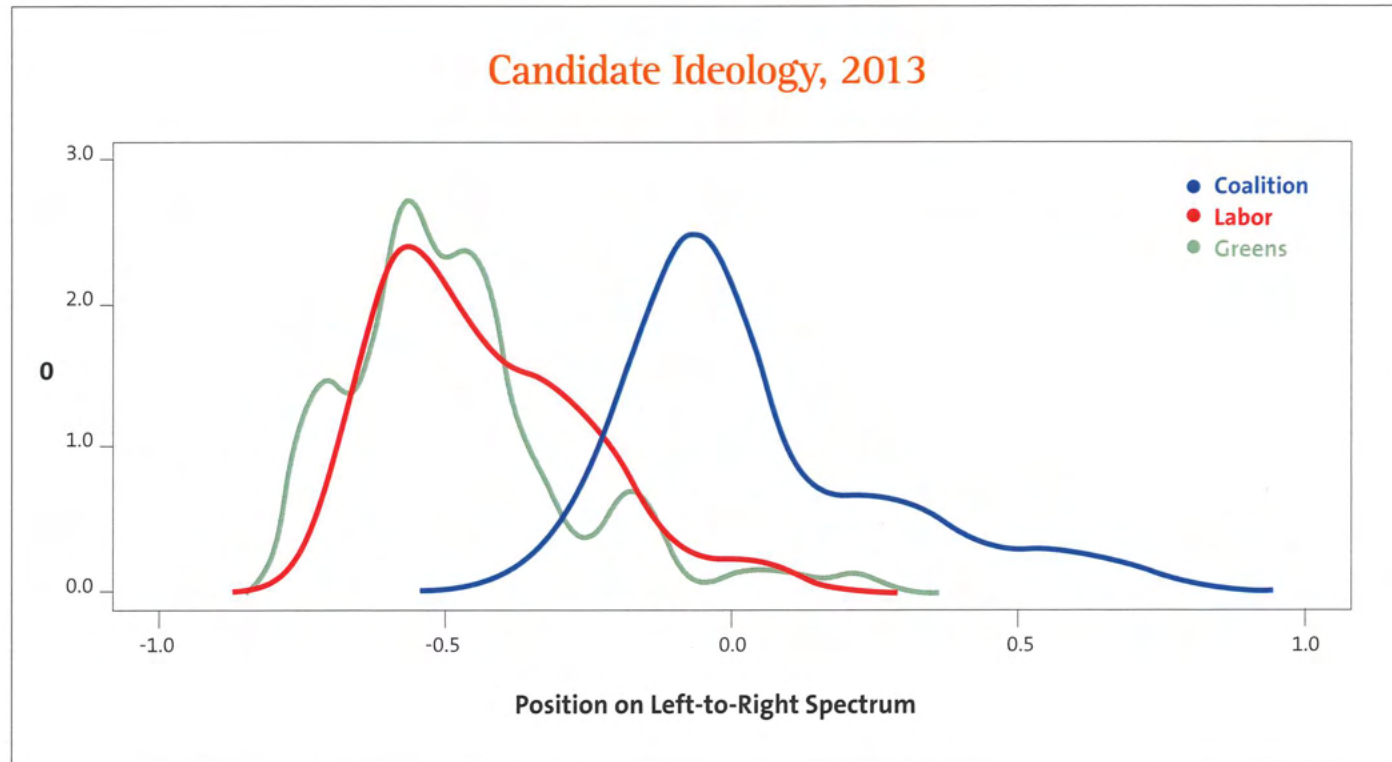
a liberal Republican or a conservative Democrat," which I think is true. And then he said "There aren't many of those anymore." He is correct: if he were in America, he would be ideologically all alone.

The Greens answer these surveys in droves. As a party, they like to hold themselves out as different from the other parties. Let's look at where the Greens are on these issues compared to Labor and the Coalition.

Do Parties Represent Their Voters?

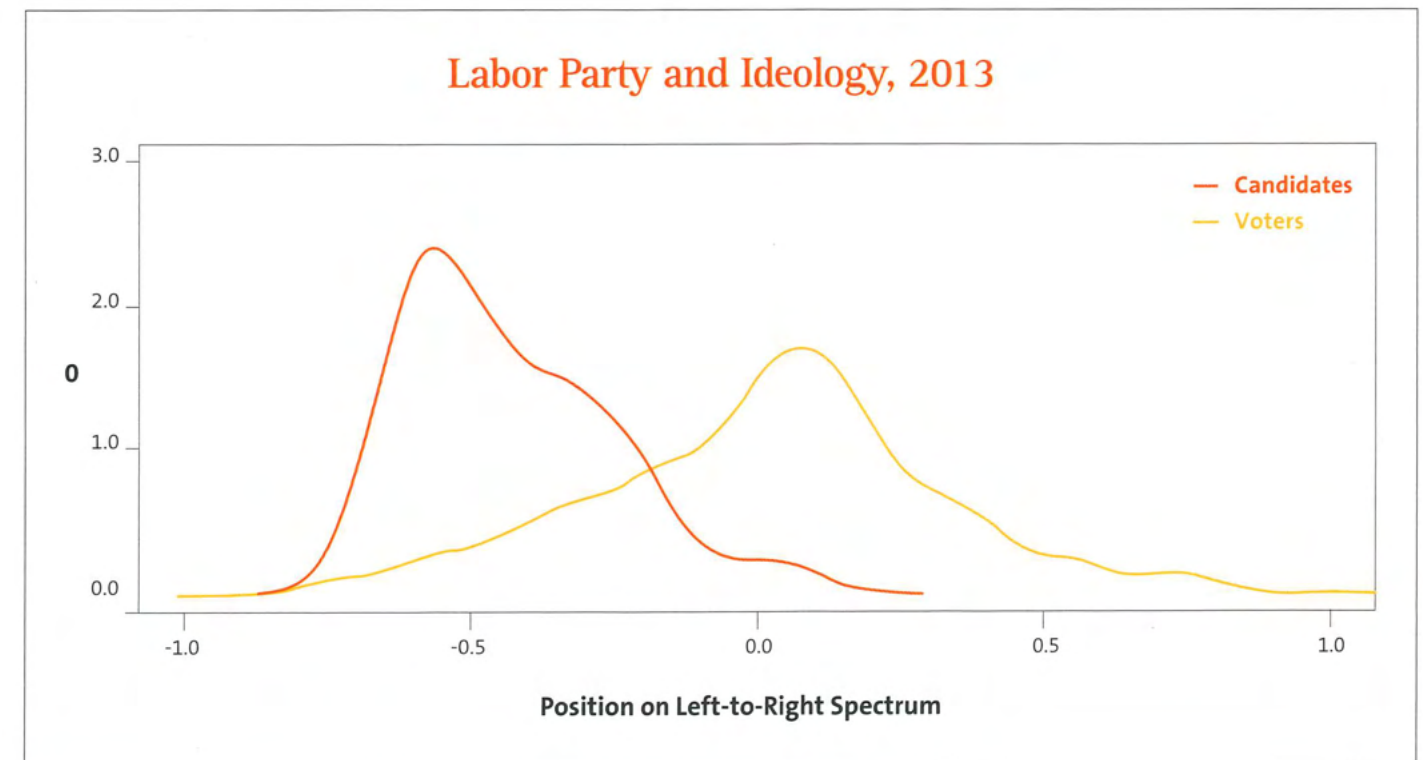
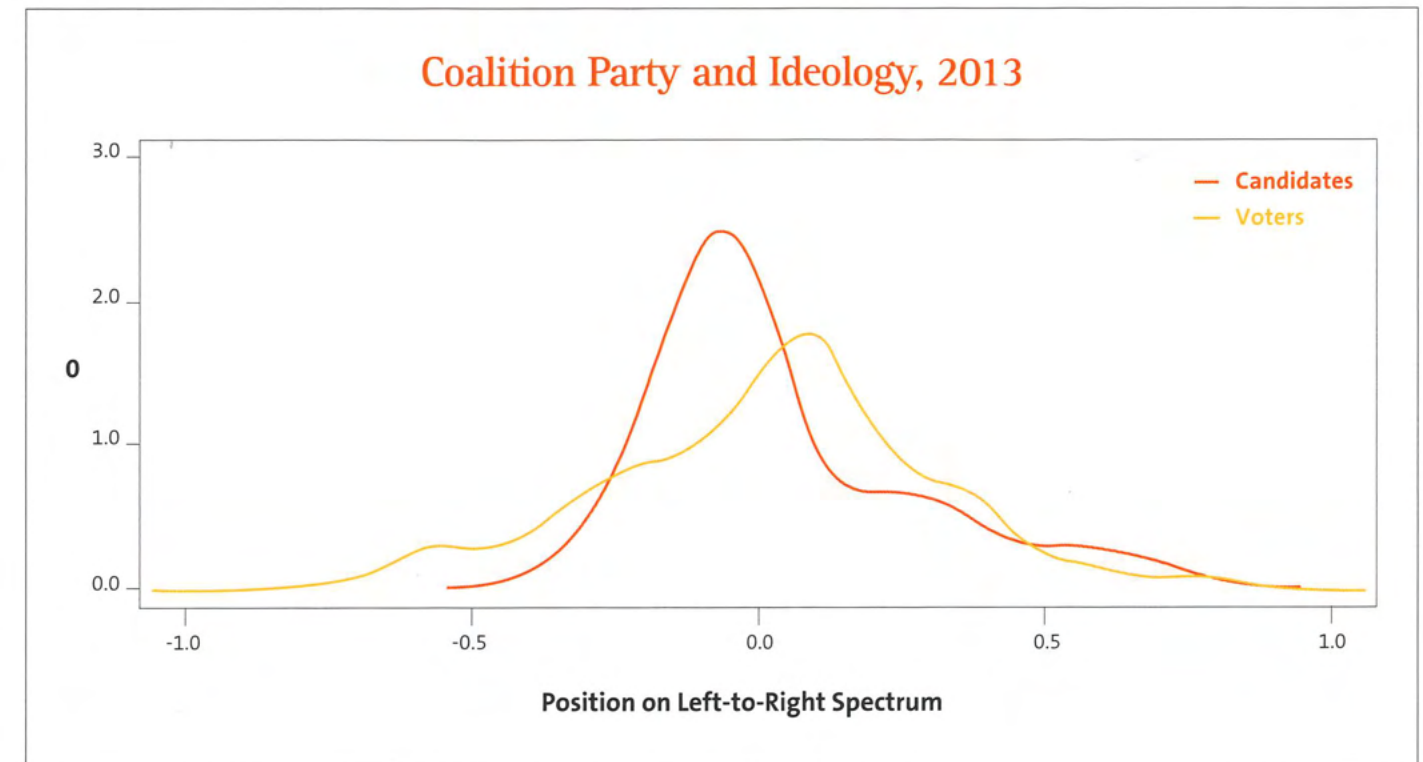
Where are the parties compared to the voters? In America, when we want to answer that, we have to find out by ourselves. I had to run my own survey of voters asking them about things the party had voted on.

But in Australia, the ANU survey asks voters the same 28 policy questions that they ask politicians. This lets us compare the positions of each party's leaders to their electoral base. What do they look like?



There aren't very many Greens where the Labor right is, there are some out to the left, but at least on the wide span of issues they are not all that different from Labor. This is something I heard from Labor people, especially those in the Labor left. When I interviewed Labor left leaders, they feel in their heart of hearts there are not many issues on which they are all that different from the Greens – but they do have to take on different positions in their campaigning and in their governing because they are a major rather than a minor party. When I talked to Anne McEwen, who is the Chief Opposition Whip in the Senate, I asked her "How is the Labor left different from the Greens?" She replied "Being in Labor brings hopefully the responsibility of being in Government at some time. Greens can say and promise things that they know they will never have to deliver. We have to balance demands."

Our hearts may say to do something but we need to deliver a real policy and pay for it." Mark Purnell, who is a Greens member from Adelaide, makes a fair point, I think, when he says "there aren't that many environmental questions on the survey." He went on to point out that "really on environmental issues Labor and Liberal are way over here and the Greens are way over here. Labor are just as capable of destroying the environment as the Liberals." I think that is fair and that is part of the problem with these surveys: you have to go with the questions they ask.



You'll see the philosophical liberals in these graphs are in dashed lines, while the candidates for Parliament are in solid lines. The voters are a little bit more extreme than the candidates. When I showed this to Liberal Party members they said, "Yes, that is probably about right." If you look at Labor though—and bear in mind that this poll was done in the 2013 election—Labor candidates are way outside, way to the left of Labor voters. They are more extreme. The candidates were out of step with Labor voters, and this may explain why they are out of office today.

The problem with these surveys is that because they are all anonymous (and ANU has complete integrity about keeping them anonymous) there is no way to find out who these people are. You can't look at where individual politicians are, and you can't answer many of the questions that arise.

One of the questions I was asked was "The Labor right and the Labor left—are those really ideological reactions?" I got different answers from different people on that. Are they different personalities or are they really ideological? I want to find out who the individual politicians are. And because these surveys are only asked after every election, it's not possible to get that real time view of politics to see whether people are changing their ideological positioning based on, say, where they are in a campaign cycle. That is why I have turned to social media.

What are Political Tweets?

Twitter and other social media give us a great opportunity to see politicians as they present themselves to the world, in real time. They present themselves in hundreds and thousands of tweets. You wonder how these people are running countries because they are always tweeting! Tweets create a great benefit for political science, but on the flip side, there is so much data that you can't just carefully pore over them and analyse them "by hand" as we do with many documents. What you have to do is use the tools of what is called a "big data movement," which is using a hybrid of human intelligence and artificial intelligence—hand coders and computer algorithms—to code and analyse the tens of thousands of tweets that Australian politicians put out. This is a technique that comes out of computer science and has spread to many of the social sciences. Before I arrived here I took a class with a computer scientist and learned some of these methods. I haven't seen these methods used in the US. People have done Twitter hashtag studies to find out what people are tweeting about, but I haven't seen anyone use these methods to gain ideological information. That has been the fun and discovery of this project here: if we can't get peoples' votes, and we want to know where they are on the left-right spectrum, let's use Twitter to try to code their ideology.

What do I think Twitter really is? Well, I don't think it lets us delve into the very heart of hearts of politicians, I think it is strategic communication. But it does have this great advantage of being unfiltered.

We get to see what is on these politicians' minds, and how they want to portray themselves.

It is part of what they are putting into the public sphere and it is going to be quite analogous to what voters are going to find out about them, so for that reason it is good enough for me.

I talked to politicians about what they are doing when they are tweeting. Andrew Leigh, who is an independent Labor member in Canberra, said "my goal is to be interesting." He acknowledges he is talking to journalists and to the Canberra community as well as to constituents. Penny Wong said "what Twitter does allow you to do is talk about issues that you wouldn't necessarily get to in an interview." By using Twitter, you are bypassing the filter of a media that is not exactly perfectly even-handed. What one politician here said was, "I know what Twitter is and it is not going to reach voters." Which I think is an important thing to keep in mind: it is a way to put out ideas. And one politician, when I was talking to him about and describing this project, said "Mate, that is a terrible idea; only an absolute F...wit would say what he really thinks on Twitter" which I think is an important critique. But remember none of these data sources are perfect. Not so long ago California was having its budget vote and the Democratic majority passed its left-leaning, big government, high-spending budget. One Republican voted for it, and everyone was, like, what is going on? And the guy was really embarrassed and said, "yes, I completely screwed that up. I voted by mistake in support of the budget because I was distracted by going on my Facebook page to register my opposition to the budget".*

To be clear, the roll call vote was misleading about his true ideology because he had been distracted: he was busy putting his true ideology on social media! So it may not be that bad a measure...

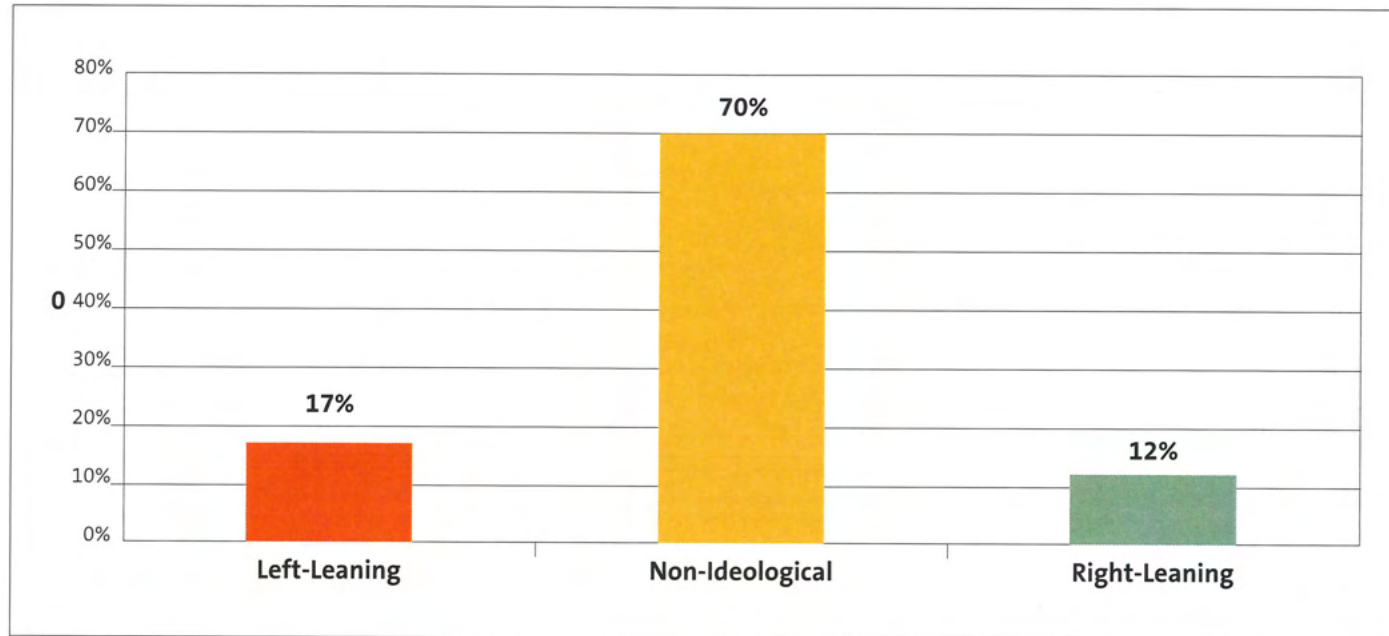
Even though people may not want to say exactly what they think on Twitter, they are still willing to say things that give us a hint of where they are coming from.

Our team of research assistant in San Diego got together and we all learned about Australian politics. We got to where we understood when politicians were saying things that were right-leaning. This is Alex Hawke retweeting from Tony Abbott's tweet: "today is #Red Tape Repeal Day." The expression red tape, that is, bureaucracy, is a big signifier that this is a right leaning tweet. The Federal Liberal party was tweeting about "stopping the boats, scrapping the carbon tax, investing in infrastructure." These messages all give you a sense of where they are coming from. We also code as right-leaning something that was an attack on a left political party, and vice versa. Christopher Pyne tweeted: "SA Labor couldn't manage a chook raffle" and after we looked that up and figured out what a chook raffle was, was we coded it as a right-leaning tweet. We also saw left-leaning tweets, such as people talking about a "rally for renewables." Tanya Plibersek took on Tony Abbott for offshoring jobs. I emphasize that when we were coding these, we just downloaded the tweets—we weren't looking at who was sending them or what party they belonged to. This one about John Kerry, US Secretary of State on gender issues: OK, this is a left-leaning tweet, but that's Julie Bishop tweeting it. It is quite possible in our hand-coding methodology to get people in either party saying something that will put them on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum. And then, much of what you do see on Twitter, I have to admit, is people just tweeting about things that don't portray any ideological projection and don't even have anything to do with politics. It's Tony Abbott and every politician talking about who they visited and showing a great picture of the visit, and saying "thanks to Betty for showing me the ropes." Christopher Pyne is a mad footy fan, and so he tweets about Norwood versus Port Adelaide, cheering for Norwood in the SANFL Premiership. Tanya Plibersek is talking about what she ate for lunch, so even though there might be some ideological content—supporting Norwood versus Port means you are probably on the right, and if you are eating Vietnamese chicken, maybe you're on the left -- but we were coding these by hand as apolitical.

To create this study we first made sure that our human coders could find signifiers and agree on their meaning. We worked together for a while, and then they blind-coded about 2500 tweets. The agreement between each pair of research assistants was over 80%. Humans can recognise ideology in tweets, but then you have to train your computer algorithms. We hand coded more than 2500 tweets. We trained the computer on about 2100 of them and then let it loose on the remaining 400 of them. You let the computers figure out which kinds of words are often used in left-leaning and in right-leaning tweets versus non-ideological tweets.

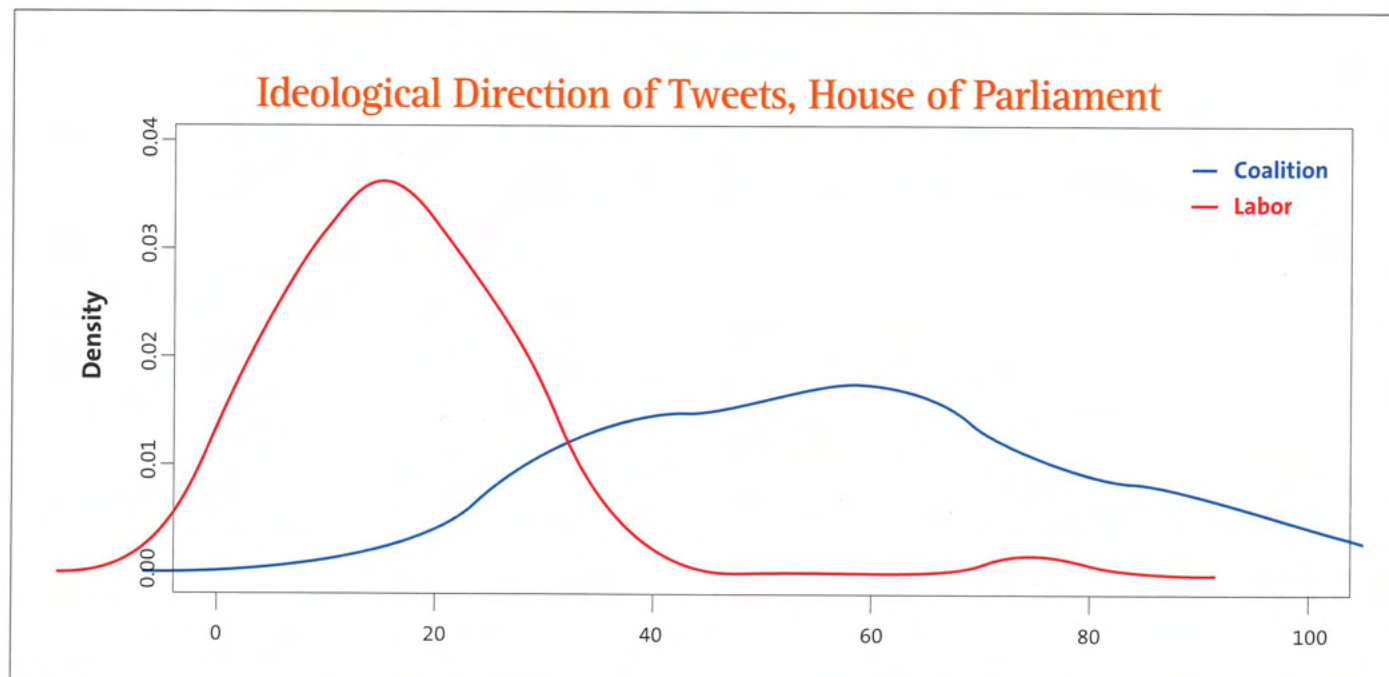
Then you say to the computer, can you predict how the humans code these 400? When you don't know what the hand coding is, can you replicate our research assistants' results? It turned out that the computers could code with about 80% precision – which is the level you need to reach for decent social science. Once you have trained the computer, you turn it loose on the full 50,000 tweets that came from all members of Parliament with Twitter

accounts. In about two minutes, the computer gives you what would ordinarily have taken many years of work by research assistants. When they did that, what we found was that about 70% of the tweets the computer couldn't put in one of the political boxes but 17% of the tweets were coded as left-leaning and 12% as right-leaning.



The results below are based on the tweets that did have ideological content: for each politician's ideological tweets, we looked to see what percent were right-leaning. We put people on this left to right, 0 – 100 percent, spectrum based on what

percentage of their tweets were right-leaning. We can then gauge where the major parties are located on that spectrum by the ideology that they tweet out.



What you see is a picture that doesn't look all that different from those surveys: Coalition members on the right in blue, Labor members on the left in red, and a bit of crossover between the two parties in the middle. This doesn't harness any of the comparative advantages of tweets, but it is a nice check that we aren't getting completely crazy figures. It's useful for mapping the ideology of factions: we can use it to find out who those crossover members are, who are likely to have that broad appeal, and who will be able to cut deals. As this project progresses, I'm going to look for explanations. Are the districts that vote more for Labor more left-leaning? Do these districts have a good representational relationship with their member, or not?

We can also view politics in real time by testing theories about how people change during elections, and also, if Twitter lasts, we could use this sort of data to get a time series on polarisation.

I used the data to look at where some of those individuals are and where the shades of red within the Labor Party are. I only did this for lower house members, not senators, so Adam Bandt as the Greens' only lower house member and the Greens party's official Twitter handle are both here, far to the left as we would expect.

Within Labor you see a broad divergence. so the Australian Labor Party's official party tweet is only 1% right wing, 99% left wing – no surprises there. Mark Butler and Tanya Plibersek, Labor left leaders have a low percentage of right-leaning tweets, then the Labor right and independent leaders and finally the two most right-leaning Labor leaders by this score are Richard Marles and Chris Bowen who are indeed two senior Labor right leaders.

We really do see some strong factionalism within the Labor party that matches up with ideology, at least as it is portrayed. The factions really are meaningful in that ideological sense. Remember there is more spread within the Liberal party, though, than there is within the Labor party. This fits, too. Labor is more disciplined than the Libs, Libs are more free-thinking, as we see below, with the Liberal and National party arrayed.

Let's look at where those folks are. Julie Bishop is in that crossover zone. So is Andrew Southcott: after spending an hour with him I can confirm he is someone who could be in the centre of American politics. It turns out that by this measure he is close to the centre of Australian politics. He's followed by folks like Malcolm Turnbull and Joe Hockey.

Tony Abbott is more to the right but perhaps less than you might expect. Then Warren Truss—and then Christopher Pyne, who is clearly pressing his case. You have him on one side and Tanya Plibersek on the other and their Twitter accounts don't look much different from one of their Q&A appearances.

Shades within the Left

Member	Percentage of Right-Leaning Tweets
Greens Party	2%
Adam Bandt	10%
Australian Labor Party	1%
Mark Butler	10%
Tanya Plibersek	12%
Wayne Swan	17%
Andrew Leigh	28%
Richard Marles	32%
Chris Bowen	34%

Shades within the Right

Member	Percentage of Right-Leaning Tweets
Julie Bishop	24%
Andrew Southcott	33%
Kevin Andrews	50%
Malcolm Turnbull	56%
Joe Hockey	57%
Tony Abbott	66%
Warren Truss	79%
Christopher Pyne	90%
Liberal Party	95%

What Were Some of the Surprises?

One of the things that I was really shocked to hear was that Bill Shorten and Anthony Albanese were the contestants for Labor party leadership, and that Albanese is considered to the left of Shorten. Overall, Shorten's tweets are to the left of Albanese's. Another thing is that even though the National Party overall was about 80% right-leaning, Barnaby Joyce and one other National leader were quite far to the left. I think this is partly because Joyce is a populist, and both talk frequently about indigenous issues being National party issues, which is common ground with the left. This is just one of Joyce's tweets: "We as the Nationals have an obligation to make sure we always stand up for the weakest in our community." So I think this sort of tweeting fits with the image remake that I observed the National party trying to bring about. I met a 20-something tertiary-educated woman who is the deputy leader of the National Party in the Victorian parliament—so they are trying to be not-your-grandfather's National Party. I think that this sort of tweet style signifies that objective.

Now what about using the timing of tweets to see whether people change their messages?

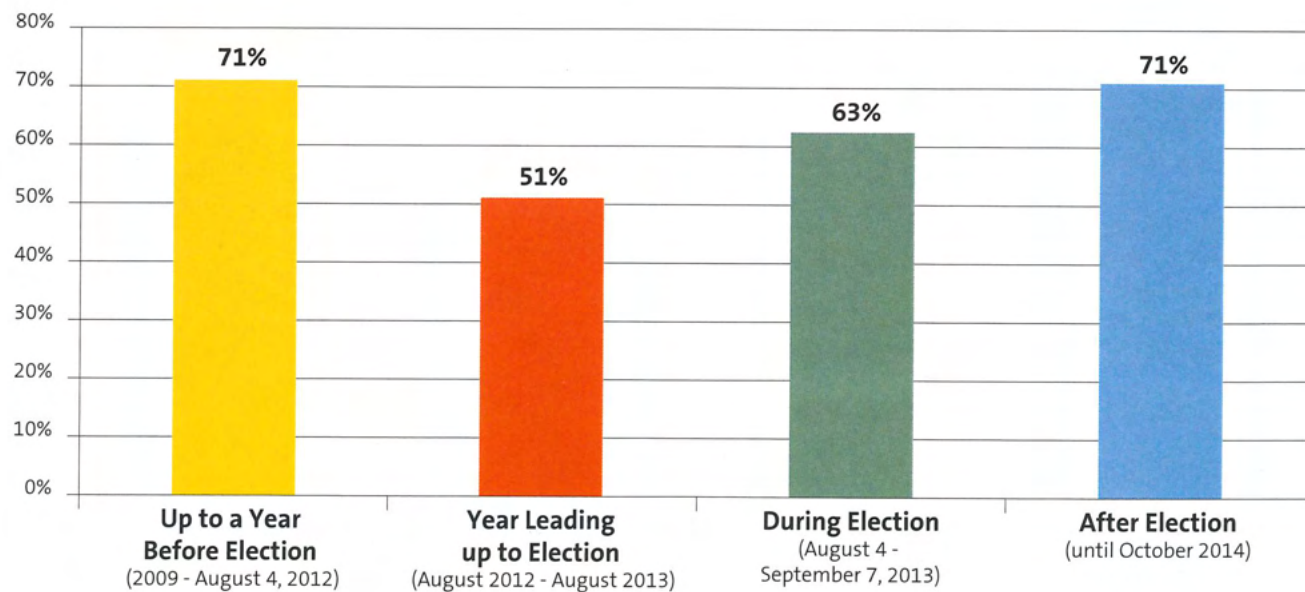
Here is a little quiz. Which politician, which left-leaning, bleeding-heart politician sent out these tweets in the months before the 2013 election?

- "Today I launched 5 projects for the (Party's) planned Green Army. Practical ways to clean our environment"
- "Good discussion with multicultural media today. Our new Colombo plan and govt's attack on skilled migrants key issues"
- "'Have just announced our fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme'

Who is this left leaning politician, this tree hugger? ...Tony Abbott!... Now this is only anecdotal evidence, and maybe he had lots of conservative tweets at that same time. Maybe he has always been like that. Let's investigate by looking at all of his tweets.

Twitter allows us to chart him over time and what you see in these bars are the percentage of ideological tweets that are conservative. Until a year out from the last election he is at 71% conservative, then in the year before the election 51%, in the month of the election a little bit more but still down 63%, and after the election, back up to 71%—and that is good politics. This is similar to what you would see with Americans campaigning first in a primary, to the party faithful, and then for a general election a run back to the centre. I will be performing a similar analysis of all candidates as this project progresses, but I think the Abbott analysis shows us that candidates are responsive to electoral pressures in this important way.

Tony Abbott's Tweet Style During the 2013 Election



Polarization vs Polarisation



At the end of the day we are left with an image of Australia as a polarized place where the parties really are distinct, but it's much less polarized than the United States. I asked everyone I interviewed what might explain this difference between polarization and polarisation. It is a tough question for a political scientist to answer, two countries and an innumerable number of theories. It's really hard to nail down...but that hasn't stopped us from talking about things before.

Preselection I think is an issue. This is Andrew Southcott, in the midst of a heated pre-selection battle that he won: "One difference between Australia and the United States is the candidates are chosen not just by party registrants but by party members." People have a real stake in the party, I think this implies. Sometimes incumbents face serious challenges for preselection, but the challenge is usually about the person who members think will do a good job rather than about ideology. Now tell that to any of the Republican leaders who have been "primaried:" knocked out by Tea Party members in the primaries. They will tell you that there is a difference between the party faithful versus just the voters deciding your future.

Compulsory voting: Australia's favourite thing that they like to lord over Americans! Penny Wong said, "on partisanship and polarisation the fundamental difference between Australia and the United States is that you in the U.S. don't have compulsory voting. In America, we have voluntary voting, where the demand is to get out the vote, so politicians have to campaign on controversial issues that energise people to vote. In many

ways, American leaders energise more radical movements on both sides of the political spectrum. But in Australia, leaders ultimately govern from the centre and win elections from the centre, and that could be part of Australia's difference.

Christopher Pyne said that "it's the unified powers between the legislature and the executive that matters." He said that Australia is different from the US because having the executive in parliament forces responsibility, "whereas we are less polarised in Australia because everyone in parliament knows that they might be in the executive someday. So there is a shared sense of responsibility, a share in success or failure".

Then Andrew Leigh, a former professor who wrote a book about income inequality and who is now in the parliament, talked about income inequality as the issue. He said: "Well, if income inequality was to continue to increase in Australia over the next 10 years, I would expect polarisation to increase along with it."

You in Australia might just reach that nightmare scenario, with your politics becoming as bad and as polarised as ours, but I think what I have learnt so far in my initial findings is that yes, Australia is polarised and you have a politics that is clearly ideological, but it is now where the US was in the 70's or 80's, about halfway down our journey to political polarisation. You are not there yet. I am looking forward to charting Australia's journey over time to find the key movements.





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