

The Senate Electoral Calendar and Minority Party Agenda Power

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Overview

I use a novel methodology and data set to assess how the Senate's asymmetric electoral cycle effects agenda-setting. Specifically I estimate the effect that being sponsored by an "in-cycle" Senator has on the probability that an amendment will reach various legislative stages. This effect is identified with amendments that have been offered in identical form across multiple Congressional sessions.

The results are surprising: Immediate electoral-vulnerability increases the probability of a positive agenda outcome for the minority party but not for the majority. This suggests that partisan influence in the Senate may not conform with prominent agenda-setting theories that were developed with the House of Representatives in mind.

Research on Senate Parties and Agenda-Setting Omits electoral cycle and agenda-stage variation

• Problem 1: Senate agenda-setting models generally ignore the chamber's asymmetric electoral cycle

- Outcomes are predicted solely as a function of policy preferences and status-quo points.
- This ignores agenda-setters' potential incentives to favor "in-cycle" Senators.

• Problem 2: Evidence for majority party power in Senate is based on incomplete agenda-outcome measurements

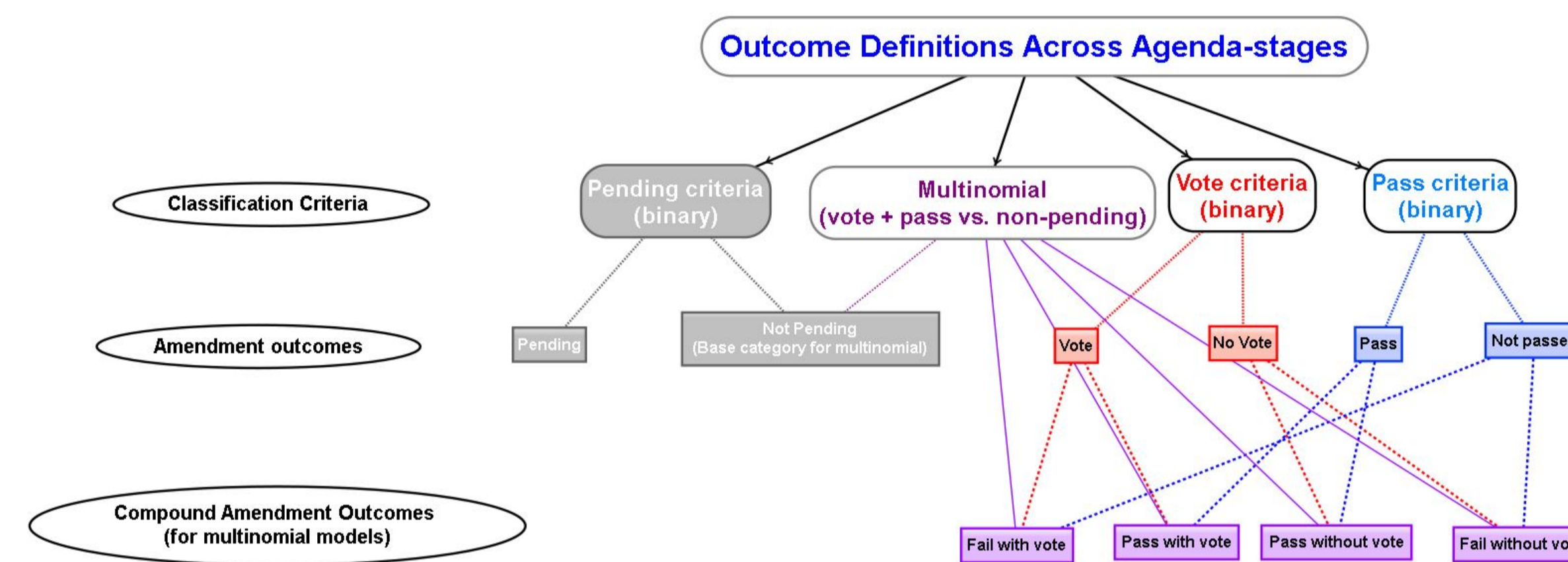
- An absence of party "rolls" and similar measures is interpreted as support for a Cartel theory of majority party influence
- But such measures ignore politically relevant outcomes from earlier agenda stages.
- In the House, this may be unimportant (e.g. because of strong Rules Committee) but the Senate lacks comparable majoritarian control mechanisms.

Empirical Approach: Defining outcomes at different agenda stages and identical amendment matching

Data: New corpus covering 30,000 Senate amendments

Finding policy-identical amendments: "Policy-tags" (e.g. "42 USC 1544", "National Labor Relations Board") mitigate computational issues associated with substring-level comparisons.

Measure outcomes at different agenda-stages: Analysis based on four different dependent variable definitions

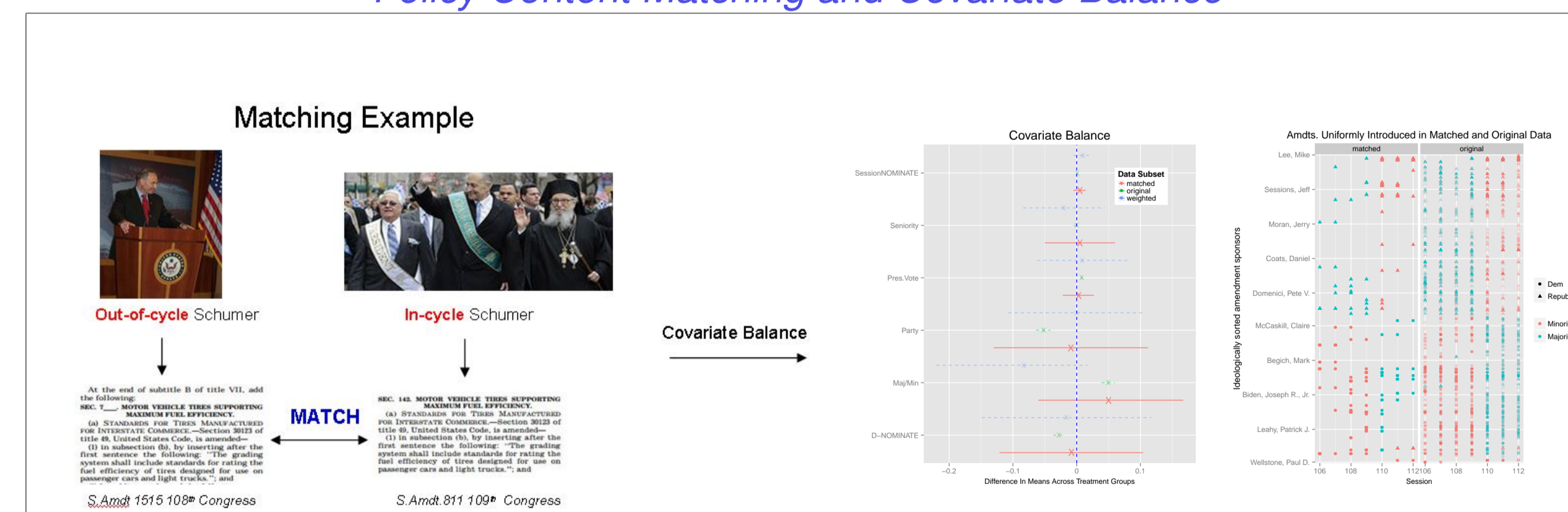


Matching and Causal Estimation of Electoral Cycle Effect

• Matching-based Causal Framework

- Matched data contains identical amendments sponsored by both in- and out-of-cycle Senators

Policy Content Matching and Covariate Balance



- Policy content and other variables are balanced across in- and out-of-cycle Senators.
- So electoral-cycle causal effects can be estimated with Fisher-tests and logit regressions

Results: Electoral Cycle Effects Exist, Vary by Agenda-stage, party membership

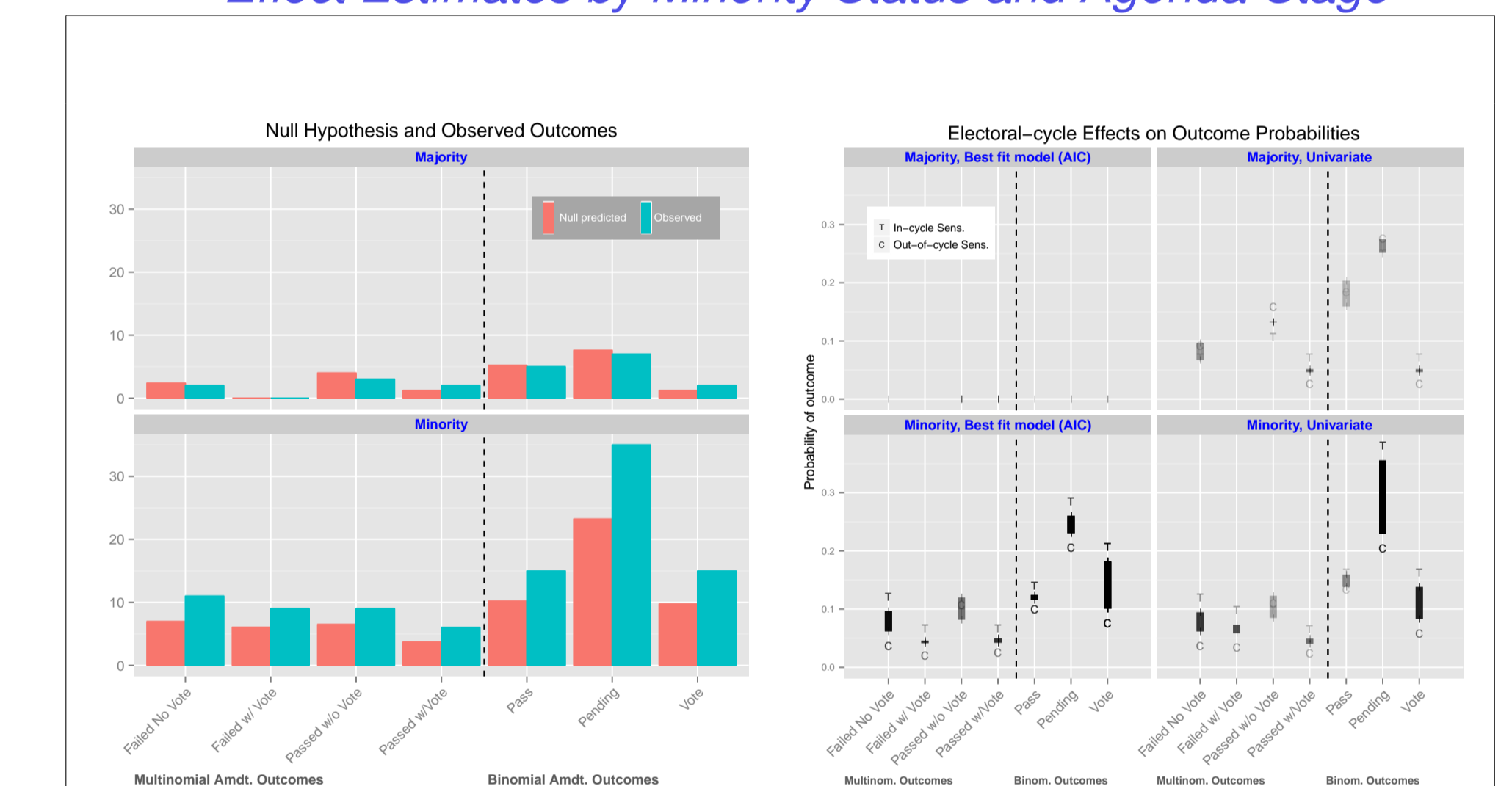
• Result 1: Electoral-cycle effects are found for the minority party but not the majority party

- For minority, probability of positive outcome for in-cycle sponsors is twice that of out-of-cycle ones.
- But for majority, observed effects are nil.

• Result 2: Effects vary across legislative stages

- Relevant for which policies get a vote and/or become pending but not which ones pass

Effect Estimates by Minority Status and Agenda-Stage



Implications for institutional theories of the Senate

- **Minority party strategically affects agenda**
 - Electoral goals drive agenda-resource allocation.
- **Existing theories fail to explain this finding.**
 - Why don't Majority Leaders block minority?
 - And why no effect for Majority in-cycle Senators?
- **A non-partisan "electoral-connection" log-roll?**
 - Perhaps out-of-cycle Senators defer to in-cycle ones anticipating reciprocity.
 - Next step: Do majority-party members "get theirs" at committee stage?