

Heresthetics: Measuring Influence in Legislative Debates

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When groups make collective decisions, which aspects of alternatives that are discussed and considered weighs heavily for final outcomes. Heresthetics, or the "art of political manipulation," is the strategic manipulation of the context, framing, or structure of a decision by political actors (e.g. members of Congress). Central to the manipulation of issues is the ability of a politician to influence the way in which issues are framed or discussed.

This talk presents approaches to quantifying politicians' ability to influence the "nature of debate" - the subsequent discussion and debate of a legislative issue (topic). Using modern machine learning techniques, the influence of legislative speech on subsequent debate is measured. Two periods from the United Kingdom are studied using the corpus of all floor debate in the British House of Commons. General trends over the 19th century is analyzed using the Document Influence Model (Gerrish and Blei, 2010) and compared to historically important speeches. A special case is considered in the deliberation and discussion of the second reform bill (1866-1867), resulting in an almost doubling of the electorate.