

Study examines effects of peer influence on members of European Parliament

March 17 2017



Researchers found that seating assignments in the European Parliament impacted voting behavior. Credit: University of Chicago

Whether out to dinner with friends or attending a conference with co-workers, your experience will be directly impacted by people in close proximity. For example, if everyone at dinner spends the night complaining about the food and service, you may leave unsatisfied, even if you liked the restaurant. Similarly, if you are enjoying a motivational

speaker's presentation at a conference, but your co-workers sitting nearby act bored and impatient, you might decide you dislike the message, too.

In a new study, researchers at the University of Chicago, the University of Copenhagen and Boston University explore the concept of peer influence in a formal setting: the European Parliament. The researchers' choice of venue was strategic: the European Parliament has alphabetical seating assignments at both its Strasbourg and Brussels locations. Therefore, the experiment was controlled, in the sense that members of [parliament](#) could not choose to sit with like-minded friends at sessions. In addition, since the group split its time between Strasbourg and Brussels, the seating chart was a bit different at each location based on the size of the room and length of each row of seats.

After analyzing the voting data and accounting for the fact that politicians with similar last names might vote alike for reasons other than the seating arrangement—for example, because they are from the same country—the researchers conclude that seating assignments do in fact impact behavior. The study, "Peer effects in legislative voting," co-authored by Prof. Emir Kamenica of Chicago Booth, Nikolaj Harmon of the University of Copenhagen and Raymond Fisman of Boston University, was released during January in the *National Bureau of Economics Research*.

"Sitting adjacently leads to a 13 percent reduction in the likelihood that two members of the European Parliament from the same party differ in their vote," said Kamenica, a professor of economics.

In addition, the researchers determined that peer influence can have lasting effects on voting patterns. "We show that [peer influence](#) is persistent: [Members of the European Parliament] who have sat together in the past are less likely to disagree even on votes during which they are

not seated adjacently," said Kamenica. "This persistence might operate through altering peers' allegiances or beliefs that influence future votes when the peers are no longer sitting next to one another."

In other words, two parliament members who sit adjacently for a January vote in Strasbourg vote more similarly during May in Brussels, despite the fact that they no longer sit next to one another.

The findings have clear political implications but can also apply to academia and other similar social settings. "Peer influence extends beyond mere parroting to impact beliefs or alliances," they concluded.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Study examines effects of peer influence on members of European Parliament (2017, March 17) retrieved 18 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-03-effects-peer-members-european-parliament.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.