

# Measuring Constraint and Multidimensionality in Political Preferences

Matthew Tyler & William Marble  
Stanford University

Full paper available at [stanford.edu/~mdtyler](http://stanford.edu/~mdtyler)

## BACKGROUND

- Many argue that politicians hold low-dimensional, highly constrained political preferences
- In contrast, the preferences of the public lack constraint and are possibly multidimensional (e.g., economic and moral dimensions)
- How comparable are the ideal points of politicians to those of the public?

## THEORY

- Literature has incorrectly conflated low constraint with multidimensionality
- Dimensionality refers to the number of distinct underlying issues that are common to all actors
- Constraint is how useful knowing an actor's ideal policy is in predicting their choices

$$P(y_{ij} = 1 \mid \gamma_i) = \Phi(\alpha_j + \beta'_j \gamma_i)$$

$$P(y_{ij} = 1) = \Phi(\delta_j)$$

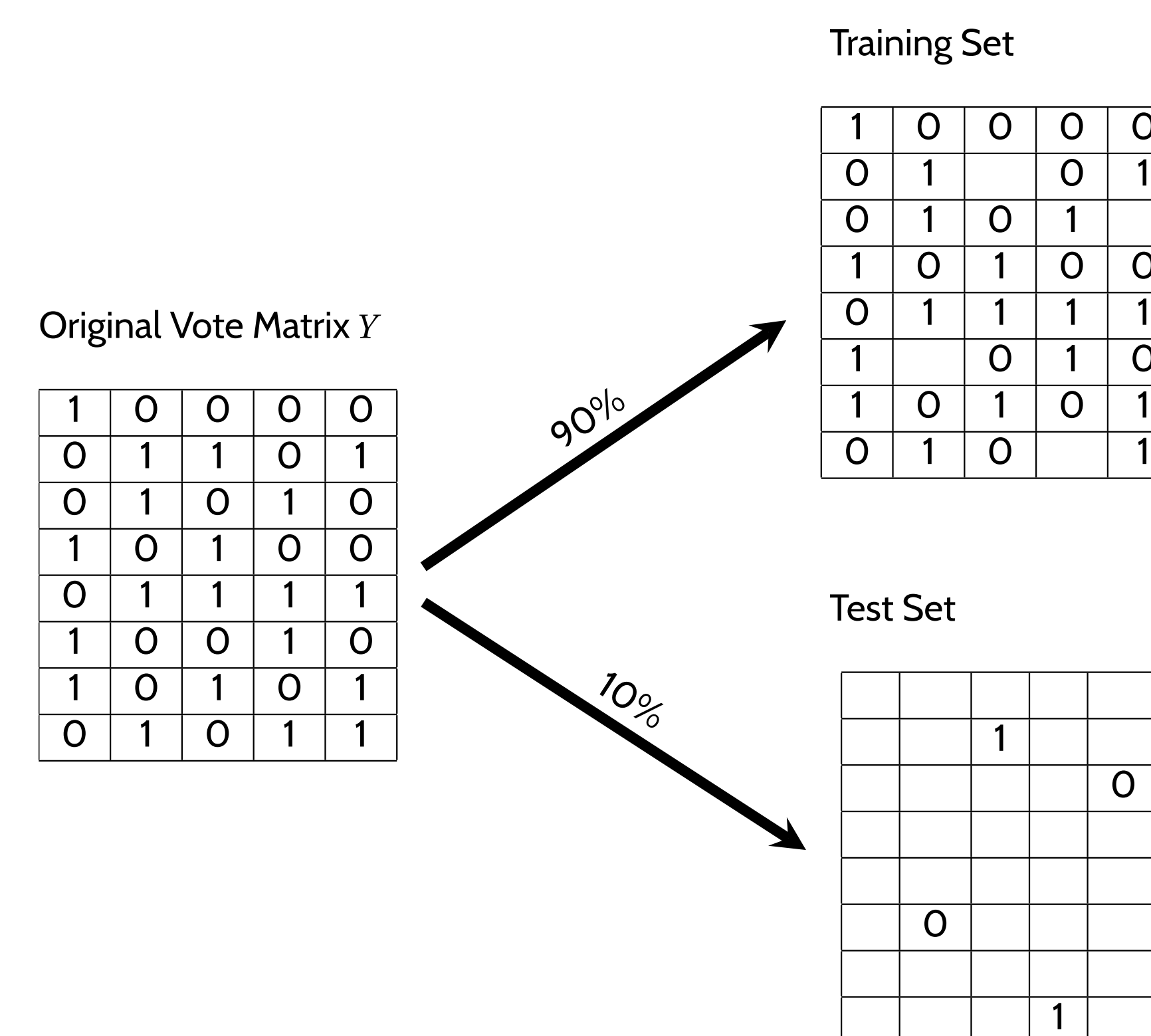
- Dimensionality and constraint can exist in any combination

## DATA

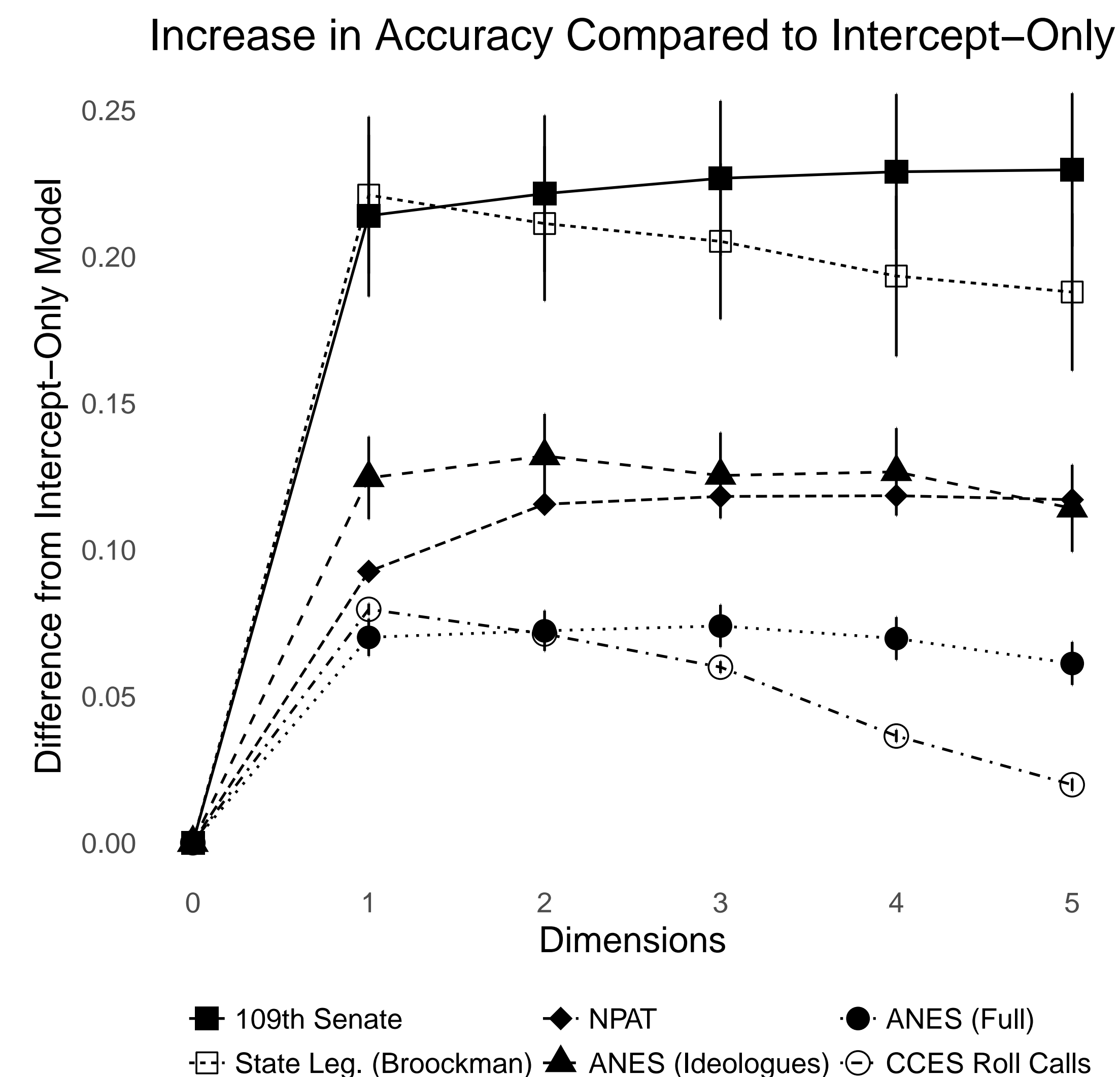
- **Public:** policy questions from 2012 ANES, mock roll-call votes from 2012 CCES
- **Politicians:** roll-call votes from 109th Senate (05-07); NPAT survey of state candidates; Broockman (2016) survey of state legislators

## MEASUREMENT STRATEGY

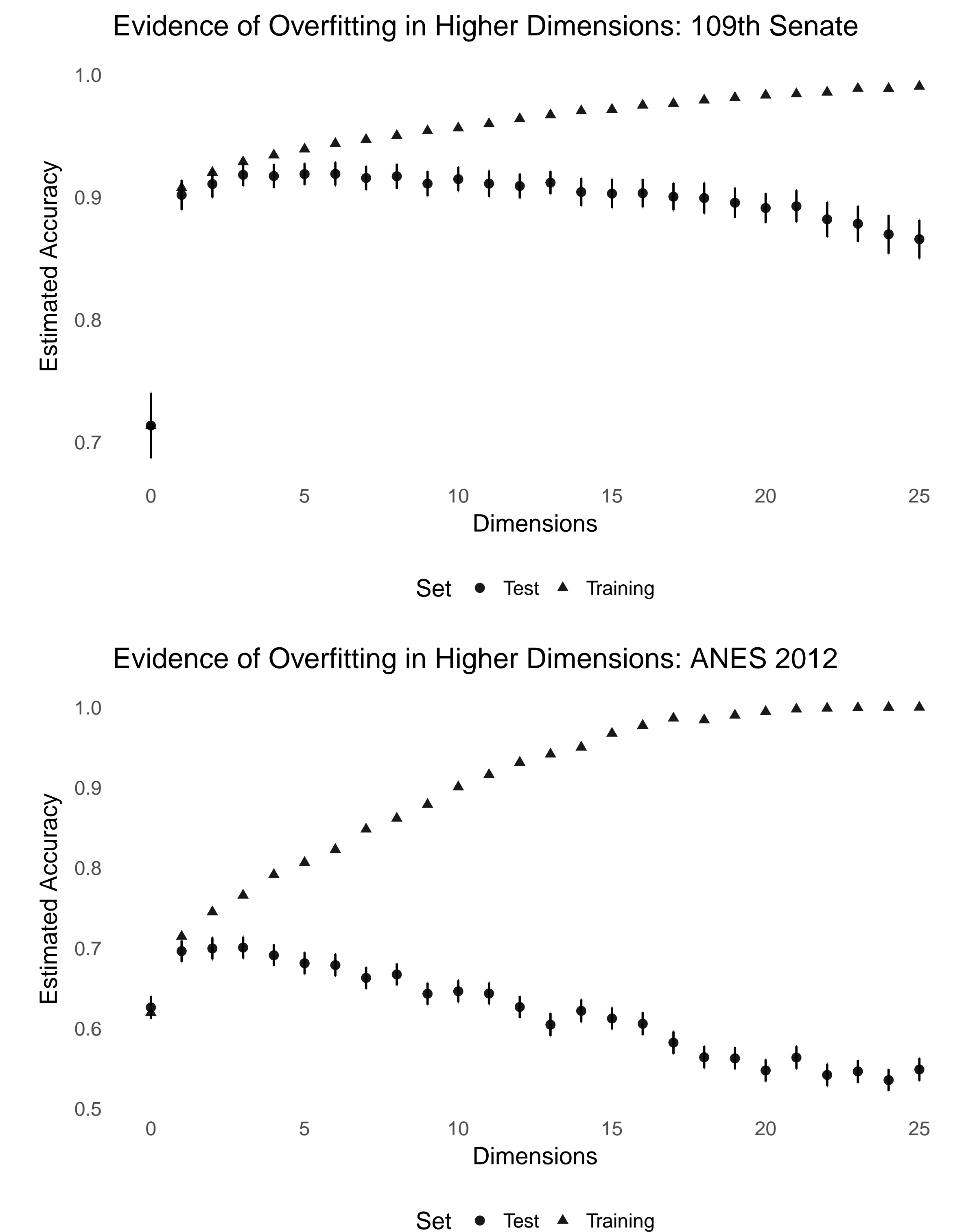
- So far, ideal point validation has only been done in-sample, which is prone to overfitting
- We use cross-validation to (1) tune dimensionality (2) measure constraint as improvement of ideal point model over intercept-only model



## CONSTRAINT



## MULTIDIMENSIONALITY



## CONCLUSIONS

- Multidimensionality and constraint are not the same: low dimensional preferences need not be highly constrained
- The public and politicians are best summarized by one dimension; higher dimensions overfit
- Unsurprisingly, the public appears to be much less constrained than politicians.
- Members of the public who claim to be ideological are more constrained than the public in general.