State Legislative Aggregate Ideology Data
July 2020 Update*

Boris Shor†
Nolan McCarty‡

July 2, 2020

*We thank Project Votesmart for access to NPAT survey data. The roll call data collection has been supported financially by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School, the University of Houston, Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy program, and NSF Grants SES-1059716 and SES-1060092. Special thanks are due to Michelle Anderson for administering this vast data collection effort, and to Peter Koppstein for his magical software engineering. We also thank the following for exemplary research assistance: Steve Rogers, Michael Barber, Doug Murdoch, and Chad Levinson. Party data for Nebraska is included thanks to Seth Masket, who generously provided the informal partisan affiliations for Unicameral legislators. We thank Legiscan and the OpenStates project for providing public access to their roll call data.

†Department of Political Science, University of Houston; boris@bshor.com
‡Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University; nmccarty@princeton.edu

1 Introduction

The Shor-McCarty state legislative aggregate ideology data is being released as an update to the data underlying Shor and McCarty (2011). These are based on individual-level ideal point estimates (called "Shor-McCarty NPAT Scores") described fully in that article. Estimates are all in NPAT common ideological space to facilitate explicit comparisons across time and between states.

The data stretch from 1993 to 2018, newly incorporating the 2016 and 2017 state legislative elections, and filling in a portion of data missing in previous releases. There are now 2,268 aggregate chamber-year observations, compared with 2,025 in the last release.

As we do with each new release, the individual level data underlying this release has been been extensively cleaned to minimize the random noise inherent in acquiring roll call votes from printed journals and online sources.

The newest version of the data and codebook can always be found on the American Legislatures web site (http://americanlegislatures.com). We are actively working on additional data, and will be releasing updated data sets over time.

2 Overview

Ideology and polarization estimates are measured at the chamber level. Not all state-years have measurements, due to the ragged availability of state legislative roll call data. The authors are actively working on additional data, and will be releasing updated data sets over time.

We generated bootstrapped error estimates for our scores at both individual and aggregate levels. At the individual level, we take advantage of the simulations that underlie the Bayesian IRT model to get a sense of the estimation uncertainty of legislator ideology in roll call space. We then simulate a large number of state-specific mapping coefficients for each state. Then, for each simulation of the legislator's ideal point, we randomly draw (with replacement) one set of mapping coefficients, predicting an NPAT score each time. The standard deviation of the simulations is our bootstrapped error estimate. At the aggregate level, we ge quantities of interest using the individual common space scores and their bootstrapped errors. For example, in each simulation, we calculate a chamber median. Iterating

over a large number of simulations, we take the standard deviation of the simulated medians as our measure of aggregate uncertainty.

3 Codebook

`st`
State abbreviation

`alpha`
State code, alphabetical order

`fips`
State FIPS code

`icpsr`
State ICPSR code

`year`
Chronological Year

`*_chamber`
Whole chamber median, by chamber

`*_dem`
Democratic party median, by chamber

`*_rep`
Republican party median, by chamber

`*_majority`
Majority party median, by chamber

`*_diffs`
Distance between party medians, by chamber. Our preferred measure of polarization.

`*_distance`
Average distance between any two members, by chamber. This is an alternative, party-free, measure of polarization.

`*_dem_sd`
Democratic party heterogeneity, by chamber

`*_rep_sd`
Republican party heterogeneity, by chamber

`*_chamber_sd`

Whole chamber heterogeneity, by chamber

`*_dem_error`
Democratic party median error estimate, by chamber

`*_rep_error`
Republican party median error estimate, by chamber

`*_chamber_error`
Whole chamber median error estimate, by chamber

`*_majority_error`
Majority party chamber median error estimate, by chamber

References

Shor, Boris and Nolan McCarty. 2011. "The Ideological Mapping of American Legislatures." *American Political Science Review* 105(3):530–551.