"CORRELATES OF U.S. STATE PUBLIC POLICIES: ANNOUNCING A NEW DATABASE"[1]

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Abstract——*This research note introduces a new, public database entitled the Correlates of State Policy Project, available at www.ippsr.msu.edu/public-policy/correlates-state-policy. The database includes more than 900 variables with observations across the fifty U.S. states and the District of Columbia spanning years from 1900 – 2016. These variables represent policy enactments, policy outputs, or political, institutional, economic, social, or demographic factors that may influence policy differences across the American states and time. We document how we build on previous scholars' large-scale data contributions, describe the breadth and depth of our database, detail the structure and format of variables, and emphasize the advantages of this new resource. We also demonstrate the utility of the host site's online visualization tools to create U.S. state maps or other graphs for key variables of interest. Ultimately, we hope this central repository for state policy and politics variables will prove useful to researchers in the field.*

INTRODUCTION

There have been significant theoretical and methodological advancements in the study of politics and public policy in the American states over the last five decades. A sizeable share of our understanding of political behavior, policymaking, and political institutions at the state level is attributable to the data collection efforts of numerous scholars. A copious number of researchers have spent countless hours collecting, coding, cleaning, reformatting, constructing, and making data publicly available so others could continue to advance scholarly research.

Despite these important data contributions, many of the variables requisite for quantitative subnational research still have to be gathered from disparate, individual sources. Aptly put by Carsey et al. 2008, "[t]he variance that makes analysis of state-level processes so attractive to scholars also makes data collection efforts at the state level difficult" (432). To answer an empirical question, a scholar may have to search for and combine variables from academic journal articles, state legislatures, state agencies, the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), among other distinct sources. Ultimately, these data collection efforts can be time consuming, prone to error, and are likely reduplicative as other scholars have previously identified, gathered, and cleaned the same variables.

The study of politics and policymaking in the U.S. fifty states is long overdue for a central repository of key variables of interest. A few scholars—e.g., Carsey et al. 2008; Klarner 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d; Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger 2008—have made such an endeavor even conceivable by compiling and releasing large state politics datasets. These scholars' data files comprise variables covering state legislative elections, electoral competitiveness, gubernatorial information, economic and fiscal conditions, partisan balance, and state and local policy adoptions. While these datasets collectively cover many aspects of state politics, individually they are narrow in focus. Notably, dozens of non-governmental organizations (e.g., Ballotpedia, Council of State

Governments, NCSL, National Institute on Money in State Politics, Sunlight Foundation) and university initiatives (e.g., Stateminder from Georgetown University) have also amassed and made relevant state politics data publicly available. All of these data sources have certainly reduced a researcher's startup costs, but often still require knowledge of their existence; separate searches across these independent sources; and effort to collect, combine, and reformat selected variables. Each additional step not only prolongs the data gathering process, but also augments the risk of data transfer and manipulation mistakes.

With the goal of establishing a central repository for U.S. state public policy and politics variables to help streamline research efforts, we introduce a new, free and publicly available database entitled the *Correlates of State Policy Project*. This database currently includes more than 900 variables collected from multiple reputable sources with observations at the state-year level from years spanning 1900 to 2016. These variables represent policy outputs or relevant political, institutional, social, economic, or demographic correlates of the policymaking process that may yield differences across the American states or dynamic changes over time.

More specifically, the database includes state-year variables for the adoption of hundreds of policies across dozens of issue areas; measures for policy liberalism and innovativeness; aggregate measures of public opinion, partisanship, and ideology; institutional variables on state governors, legislatures, high courts, and electoral systems; economic and fiscal measures; and relevant demographic, criminal justice, education, health care, energy, environmental, and interest group variables. Although not exhaustive, the database is comprehensive, with observations spanning from 1900 to 2016. Additionally, there is a concrete system of support in place for maintaining, updating, and expanding the database. Our hope is that this database will become a "one-stop shop" for academics and practitioners looking for accurate and reliable variables germane to execute single-state, comparative, or time-serial studies of state policies and politics.

The database is available in several user-friendly formats at www.ippsr.msu.edu/public-policy/correlates-state-policy. The database can be downloaded as an Excel file with separate content area sheets, a CSV file containing the complete dataset, a Stata file, or an R package.[2] A detailed codebook with complete variable names, timespans, descriptions, original sources, and notes is also available in different formats. The hosting site also allows users to visually or graphically assess several variables for certain year ranges by employing online Google Chart tools.

In this research note, we start by describing the database, documenting how we build on existing datasets, highlighting variables of interest, and emphasizing our database's advantages. Next we detail the combining of data from multiple reputable sources, the structure of the dataset, and the format of the variables. We also give nod to the host site's embedded Google Charts tools to create U.S. state maps or line graphs for key variables, or to carry out exploratory analysis of state politics dynamics. In particular, we present basic visualizations of trends for Caughey and Warshaw's (2015) policy liberalism score and Berry et al.'s (1998) citizen ideology measures. We offer these graphics to underscore the utility of these online tools and of our newly pooled database. We conclude this note by discussing the possible uses and applications of the *Correlates of State Policy Project* database. Ultimately, we hope this resource will generate new and expanded opportunities for the study of policy and politics across the American "laboratories of democracy."

THE CORRELATES OF STATE POLICY PROJECT DATABASE

One of the problems that still plagues research on subnational policies and politics is the availability and access of data. The data usually exist but are frequently only obtainable from disparate, scattered sources (e.g., legislative statutes, state agencies, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations) across the fifty U.S. states and national government. And rarely do data originate in a useful or

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[2] The R package [csp] was created by EP expersso (see https://github.com/expersso/csp) and integrates the codebook into the dataset.

comparable cross-sectional or time-series-cross-sectional format. Moreover, the variables may not be manipulable, downloadable, or free. As such, researchers typically spend abundant hours identifying, collecting, cleaning, and reformatting data from these multiple sources, not to mention the possible financial expense for data—all before commencing analysis. Gathering state-level data is not for the faint of heart. What is more, researchers generally do so independently of one another, reduplicating the same search, collection, cleaning, and reformatting of variables.

Fortunately, over the last five decades, a great number of scholars committed to advancing scientific knowledge have willingly made their state-level data publicly available, accessible, and free. For example, Walker (1969) provided data on the adoption of 88 policies across the U.S. states before 1965 and corresponding composite innovation scores. Gray and Lowery (1988) collected, coded, and released data on each state's interest group density and its number of interest groups by sector. Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) and Berry et al. (1998) constructed and made available aggregate state-year measures of partisan identification, citizen ideology, and government ideology. Enns and Koch (2013) updated Stimson's (1999) policy mood measure and simultaneously estimate the percentage of Democratic Party, Republican Party, liberal, and conservative identifiers in each state from 1956 to 2010. Squire (2007, 2008) constructed and provided general measures for the professionalism of both state legislatures and state high courts. Brace and Hall (2009) assembled and disseminated data on the final decisions from all state courts of last resort for the 1995 to 1998 sessions. These aforementioned researchers and countless others' labors to collect, construct, and release data have not only furthered our understanding of state politics, but also drastically reduced the startup costs for innumerable other scientists.

Beyond scholars' individual decisions to make a variable or dataset available, recent trends have also positively increased the amount and accessibility of state-level data. For instance, the open source revolution has compelled many scientists to make large amounts of data transparent to the

public. This is the impetus behind the National Science Foundation's requirement that all federal grant recipients release their data. And it is the same philosophy undergirding the Sunlight Foundation's *Open States* project, making data on states' legislators, legislative committees, and bills available to the masses. Equally as noteworthy, major social science and policy journal publications have made recent pushes to standardize the replication and reproducibility of results (DA-RT 2014). Doing so not only enhances confidence in the scientific findings, but also unveils the data so others can build on these advancements.

Some of the most generous contributions in large-scale state policy and politics data have come from recent scholarly efforts. Boehmke and Skinner (2012) construct a revised measure for state policy innovativeness, the degree to which a state is willing to adopt a new policy, constructed from nearly 190 different policies spanning a century and various issue areas. The authors provide not only their dynamic measure of innovativeness, but also the state policy enactment data for each of these policies. Similarly, Caughey and Warshaw (2015) produce a new, state-year measure of the ideological direction of state statutes from 1936 to 2014. They too made both the policy liberalism construct and the 148 policies they relied upon to develop the measure publicly available.

Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008) also provide new constructs for policy liberalism and policy urbanism at the state level, and release the 170 odd policies used to create these indices. Indeed, their state and local policy database is one of the most comprehensive to date, although limited in its temporal dynamics as most variables only extend to the early 2000s. In addition, Carsey et al. (2008) make available updated state legislative election data from 1967 to 2003. They include incumbent reelection rates, the percentage of open seats by jurisdiction, degrees of electoral competition, among other variables relevant to the election of state lawmakers.

One of the most impressive data contributions has come from Carl Klarner (2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d). Klarner has compiled variables covering the economic and fiscal data for a state (e.g.,

consumer price indices, gross state product, personal income measures, state revenue and expenditures); electoral competitiveness of a state's political environment (e.g., updating measures from Ranney (1976), Holbrook and Van Dunk (1993), Shufeldt and Flavin (2012)); a state's gubernatorial institutional information (e.g., governor's demographics, electoral outcomes, term limits); and a state's partisan balance (e.g., number of legislators from each party by chamber, midterm penalties). Importantly, many of these variables extend from the 1930s to the 2010s.

Non-governmental organizations and academic institutions have also made vast amounts of state-level data transparent. For example, Stateminder, a data visualization project affiliated with Georgetown University, compiled and released hundreds of institutional, demographic, electoral, criminal justice, health care, economic, energy, environmental, education, and welfare variables. NCSL and the Sunlight Foundation provide extensive information on state's legislative makeup and activities. The National Institute on Money in State Politics (NIMSP) details state campaign finance laws and contributions made to candidates, while the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) provides extensive data on state trial and appellate courts. These, and several other non-governmental entities (e.g., Ballotpedia, Council of State Governments, National Governors Association, National Center for Education Statistics) have made the data gathering process for state policy and politics variables easier but not painless.

Even amidst scholars and organizations' estimable efforts to release newly constructed state-level measures and large amounts of variables, and recent trends to make data more transparent, researchers often still have to cobble together state politics data from scattered (albeit more accessible) sources. No central, user-friendly data depot for state-level policy and political variables exists. Other political science subfields have made more progress in this type of data endeavor; the Policy Agendas Project provides extensive data on American politics, while the Correlates of War

Project houses key variables relevant to understanding conflict across nation states. We hope our *Correlates of State Policy Project* database will fill the void in the study of U.S. state politics.

Although we are not the first to make large sets of variables germane to the study of state policies and politics publicly available, we build on past efforts (see Carsey et al. 2008; Klarner 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d; Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger 2008; Stateminder 2016). As such, we believe our database offers at least four principal advantages. First, the *Correlates of State Policy Project* database boasts breadth and depth. It includes more than 900 policy, public opinion, institutional, economic, social, and demographic variables from across the fifty U.S. states and the District of Columbia pooled from multiple reputable academic, governmental, and non-governmental sources.

More specifically, the database includes some 300 variables for dichotomous policy enactments at the state or local levels. These policy adoptions span the following issue areas: abortion, criminal justice, drugs and alcohol, education, environment, gambling, gay rights, governmental issues, gun control, immigration, labor rights, licensing, miscellaneous regulation, racial discrimination, tax, transportation, welfare, health care, and women's rights. The database also provides applicable policy output constructs, such as policy liberalism, policy innovativeness, policy priorities, and economic and social liberalism measures.

Beyond these policy measures, the data files also encompass state-level public opinion, partisanship, and ideology measures; variables relevant to state institutions including legislatures, governors, state courts, term limits, and direct democracy; electoral systems and outcome measures; state economic and fiscal variables; crime rates and other criminal justice variables; measures describing health care, education, energy, and the environment at the state-level; variables reflecting interest group density and the lobbying industries; and important aggregate demographic measures. Table 1 below offers a broader overview of the variables included in the database compiled from key sources.

TABLE 1: Description of the Variables Included in the Correlates of State Policy Project Database

Variable Categories	Variable Examples	Key Sources
Policy Measures and Policy Enactment Variables	Policy liberalism; economic liberalism; social liberalism; policy innovativeness; policy priorities; dichotomous policy enactment variables for abortion, criminal justice, drugs and alcohol, education, environmental, gambling, gay rights, governmental issues, gun control, immigration, labor rights, licensing, miscellaneous regulation, racial discrimination, tax, transportation, welfare and health care, and women's rights policies	Caughey and Warshaw 2015; Rigby and Wright 2013; Boehmke and Skinner 2012; Jacoby and Schneider 2008;
Public Opinion, Partisanship, and Ideology Measures and Variables	Citizen ideology score; state ideology score; state party identification score; policy mood; pct. Democratic identifiers; pct. Republican identifiers; pct. liberal identifiers; pct. conservative identifiers	Berry et al. 1998; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Stimson 1999; Enns and Koch 2013;
State Institution Variables (e.g., Governor, Legislature, State High Court)	Gubernatorial information; state term limits; midterm penalty; open seats; election years; number of local governments; number of legislators; partisan balance measures; state chambers ideological means; state legislative chamber polarization measures; ADA/COPE state government ideology measure; NOMINATE state government ideology measure; state legislative professionalism; state High Court professionalism; state Speaker of the House power; number of corruption convictions;	Klarner 2013a; Klarner 2013d; Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger 2008; Shor and McCarty 2011; Berry et al. 1998; Squire 2007, 2008; Bowen and Greene 2014; Mooney 2013; Melki and Pickering 2016;
Electoral Measures and Variables	General election vote totals; voting eligible population turnout rate; number of felons ineligible to vote; proportion of state House seats up for reelection; electoral competitiveness measures; campaign contributions by office; campaign contributions by sector; campaign finance regulations;	McDonald 2016; Klarner 2013b; Ranney 1976; Holbrook and Van Dunk 1993; Shufeldt and Flavin 2012; NIMSP 2016; Kulesza, Witko, and Waltenburg 2015;
Economic and Fiscal Measures and Variables	State minimum wage; unemployment rate; poverty rate; per capita income; median household income; income inequality; state consumer price index; housing price index; gross state product; total state debt; total state revenue; tax revenue from corporations; total state expenditures; legislative expenditures; state tax capacity; economic freedom measures; state assets; state liabilities; state unfunded pension and employee benefit liabilities; budget solvency index; number of patents; food stamp/SNAP benefits; number of AFDC/TANF recipients; number of school breakfast participants; welfare spending; number of business firms; number of bankruptcy filings;	Klarner 2013c; Frank et al. 2015; Pew Charitable Trusts 2016; Mercatus Center 2016; Norcross and Gonzalez 2016; UKCPR 2016; Hayes and Medina Vidal 2015;
Criminal Justice Variables	Motor vehicle theft rates and totals; property crime rates and totals; robbery crime rates and totals; murder crime rates and totals; violent crime rates and totals; gun background checks	USDOJ 2016; Stateminder 2016;
Education Variables	State education spending; instruction expenses per student; pct. of state population with a high school diploma; school dropout rate; pupil to teacher ratio; total pupil enrollment; 4th grade math scores; 4th grade reading scores;	NCES 2016; Stateminder 2016;
Health Care Variables	Total state population with government insurance; total state	Kaiser Family Foundation

	population without government insurance; total state population with private health insurance; health spending per capita; infant mortality rate; Medicaid enrollment; Medicaid spending;	2011; U.S. Census Bureau 2016; Stateminder 2016;
Energy and Environment Variables	Commercial sector energy consumption; residential sector energy price; total CO_2 emissions from fossil fuels;	USEIA 2016; Stateminder 2016;
Interest Group Variables	State interest group density; number of interest groups by sector	Gray and Lowery 1988; Lowery, Gray, and Cluverius 2015;
Demographic Variables	State population; population density; population by age group and gender; population by religion; population by race/ethnicity; number of licensed drivers; abortion rate; divorce rate; number of immigrants receiving green cards; number of refugees; political knowledge measure; social capital measure;	U.S. Census Bureau 2016; CQ Press Stateminder 2016; Kelly and Witko 2014; Jaeger, Lyons, and Wolak 2016; Hawes, Rocha, and Meier 2013;

Note: To access the entire *Correlates of State Policy Project* codebook with complete variable names, descriptions, original sources, and notes for variables across the fifty U.S. states and the District of Columbia that span years from 1900 - 2016, visit http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/public-policy/correlates-state-policy.

Most other large-scale state politics datasets are narrower in focus. For example, other data files might only provide binary variables on policy adoptions and not critical state institutional features. Or they might only cover state legislative elections at the expense of information on political behavior of elites and the masses. While we are not claiming our database is exhaustive, we have made a concerted effort to compile both common and obscure state policy and politics variables across diverse categories from multiple sources. Our comprehensive database will hopefully make analyzing the effects of political, institutional, economic, social, and demographic determinants of state policies easier.

The second main advantage of our database is its extension back in time. The database extends from 1900 to 2016. Although only a few variables extend as far back as 1900 (e.g., total state population), and a few variables (e.g., economic liberalism, social liberalism) only display observations for one year, the overwhelming majority of variables contain observations that span between two to eight decades. Furthermore, most variables are up to date through the current decade. This extensive record for variables makes the database useful in analyzing the dynamics of both policy change and political, institutional, economic, social, or demographic variation over time.

The third principal benefit of the database is its user-friendly design. Variables are coded at the state-year level. As a result, formatting across the variables is standard thus making data management and manipulation easier. The database is available as a Microsoft Excel file with separate content area sheets, a CSV file containing all the variables, or a Stata 14 file. Moreover, an R package which integrates the data with the variable descriptions from the codebook is also available. A searchable, detailed codebook containing complete variable names, timespans, descriptions, original sources, and notes is also offered in Microsoft Word or PDF formats. The comprehensive yet organized structure of the codebook should allow for easy searches and identification of variables, as well as facilitate further inquiry into a variable's timespan, primary sources, or coding notes. The host site also has embedded Google GeoChart and Line Chart tools to generate graphics or visually explore key variables of interest across states and time. The next section of this research note will provide greater details on the structure of the database and the utility of these online graphic tools.

The final advantage, and perhaps of most concern for *large-scale* databases, is the concrete system and plan in place to ensure the database is maintained, updated, and expanded. The *Correlates of State Policy Project* database is an initiative of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) at Michigan State University (MSU). IPPSR and MSU have committed resources for graduate- and undergraduate-student research assistance to help with ensuring appropriate data documentation, updating existing variables, adding new variables, correcting errors, and releasing new versions of the database in a timely manner. In fact, hundreds of additional variables—including more policy adoption, demographic, education, constitutional, energy, health, legislative,

governor, and ballot initiative variables, among others—are already planned for future versions of the database.[3]

More than thirty years ago, Jewell (1982) argued that the study of politics and policies in the U.S. states had been neglected. He pointed to the lack of available and accessible data from the subnational level as a key hurdle to overcome to bring the study of state politics front and center. Although much advancement has been made in data transparency in the last three decades, the *Correlates of State Policy Project* offers a central repository for state policy and politics variables. This database will ideally save researchers time, energy, and expense; mitigate data errors; and lead to greater understanding of politics and policymaking in the American states and possibly beyond. And hopefully it will make quantitative single-state, comparative, and time-serial studies of the American states even more plentiful and abundant.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DATABASE

This section of the research note describes the structure of the *Correlates of State Policy Project* database in greater detail, clarifying the timespan, format, sources, naming convention, and other pertinent details of the variables. In addition, we discuss missing observations as well as the potential for and plan to correct data errors. Finally, we highlight here the host site's online Google Charts tools to create U.S. state maps or line graphs, and perform exploratory analysis for more than a dozen variables across space and time. In particular, we offer example visualizations for trends in policy innovativeness (Boehmke and Skinner 2012) and policy liberalism (Caughey and Warshaw 2015) fashioned using the embedded graphic tools.

Our database contains more than 900 accurate and reliable state policy and politics variables for the fifty U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Appositely, some variables are missing for the

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[3] For a list of the proposed variables to be included in the database, see http://ippsr.msu.edu/sites/default/files/additional_variables.pdf.

District of Columbia and occasionally for a few other states (e.g., partisan legislative variables for Nebraska). Federal territories are entirely omitted from the datasets. The timespan for the database ranges from 1900 – 2016. While only the variables for state population date back to 1900, dozens of other variables extend as far back as the 1930s. Most variables display observations for between two and eight decades.

Variables are largely coded at the state-year level. There are a few economic and fiscal variables coded at the state fiscal quarter (Klarner 2013b), but they are the exception and not the rule and are identified in the codebook. The initial six variables in the database are for identification purposes. These include a year variable, state abbreviation, state number based on alphabetical assortment, state name, state Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) code, and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) state code. This consistent formatting scheme allows for easy data aggregation and manipulation. Concerning measurement levels, the variables are dichotomous, categorical, or continuous in nature. For example, most of the policy enactment variables are binary: 1 if a state adopted the policy in the given year or in a previous year, and 0 if a state has yet to enact the policy of interest. Most of the other policy, political, institutional, economic, social, or demographic variables are coded at the interval level.

The variables have been pooled from hundreds of reputable academic journal publications, state and federal governmental agencies, non-governmental entities, university institutions, and other public sources. These researchers' data collection efforts were no small feat, often requiring resilience and dogged persistence. We try to build on their individual efforts and offer a collective public good for the research field of state politics and public policies. Where possible, we relied on the variable names from the primary or original source. We opted for this naming convention strategy in case researchers were already familiar with these variable names. If two variables in the database were given the same name by different data sources, we used judgement to slightly modify

one of the variable names. In addition to copying variable names, we also largely kept with the variable descriptions and coding notes from the primary and original sources. These practices were adopted to fulfill the intent of the database as a variable warehouse, pooling variables from disparate sources. The variable names, timespans, titles, descriptions, citation for the primary or original source, and coding notes are all included in the searchable database codebook. The thorough yet structured design of the codebook should make the identification of variables, investigation of variables, or consultation of original and primary sources for variables stress-free.

Of course, pooling data from multiple sources can yield missing data or inaccuracies. These data gaps or inconsistencies may result from missing observations in the original source, coding errors made by the primary source, or data transfer mistakes on our end. For example, if observations are missing for a particular jurisdiction or year in the original source, these observations are also missing in our database. Perhaps not surprisingly, there are missing data for some of the variables for some of the years (although these tend to be isolated incidents). Moreover, if errors were made in creating or coding data by the primary sources, these mistakes will also be reflected in our database. Finally, although we have made several attempts to check the transferring of data, with thousands of observations across hundreds of variables, mistakes likely have been made. We encourage researchers to always check the accuracy of the data, relying on the original and primary sources. We also appeal to users to inform us if they uncover any errors. Importantly, as we are made aware of data inaccuracies, our team will correct the inconsistencies, update the database in a timely manner, and inform users of the changes via errata in future release versions.

In addition to the Correlates of State Policy Project database, the host site (http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/public-policy/correlates-state-policy) also has embedded Google GeoChart and Line Chart tools, allowing users the opportunity to create visual representations of the data or perform exploratory assessments of key variables of interest. Currently, the online tools

let researchers produce U.S. state maps or line graphs for more than a dozen variables (e.g., gross state product, income, legislative polarization measures, legislative ideology measures, policy innovativeness, policy liberalism, public opinion liberalism, state tax revenue, state expenditures, violent crime rate) from the 1980s to the 2010s. We plan to expand both the styles of online visualization tools and the quantity of key variables that researchers can graphically explore.

To simultaneously demonstrate the utility of these embedded visualization resources and our database, we present here both U.S. state maps and line graphs (created using the host site's Google Charts) for Caughey and Warshaw's (2015) policy liberalism score and Berry et al.'s (1998) citizen ideology measure. With theoretical (and sometimes methodological) motivations in mind, scholars are frequently interested in policy change in the American states (see Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Jacoby and Schneider 2008; Walker 1969). Relying on nearly 150 policies enacted in U.S. states from 1936 to 2014 and a dynamic latent-variable modeling approach, Caughey and Warshaw (2015) construct a yearly measure of policy liberalism for each U.S. state. States with a higher policy liberalism score (i.e., in the liberal direction) generally adopt policies that expand the size and scope of government or value personal autonomy over traditional views of morality. In contrast, states with lower policy liberalism scores (i.e., in the conservative direction) largely enact statutes that prioritize less government, fewer regulations, greater economic freedom, and enhance cultural traditionalism. Although these ideological concepts are not perfectly comparable across time, they reflect the broad ideological orientations of the last eight decades.

Caughey and Warshaw's (2015) policy measure is a critical summary of state policy output with great heterogeneity across and within the American states over time. Figure 1 below displays maps of state policy liberalism for the years 1984, 1994, 2004, and 2014. These years were selected because they represent presidential and off-year election years. These state maps were created using our database's host site Google GeoChart tools. Not surprisingly, the four maps spanning four

FIGURE 1: Correlates of State Policy GeoCharts for U.S. State Policy Liberalism
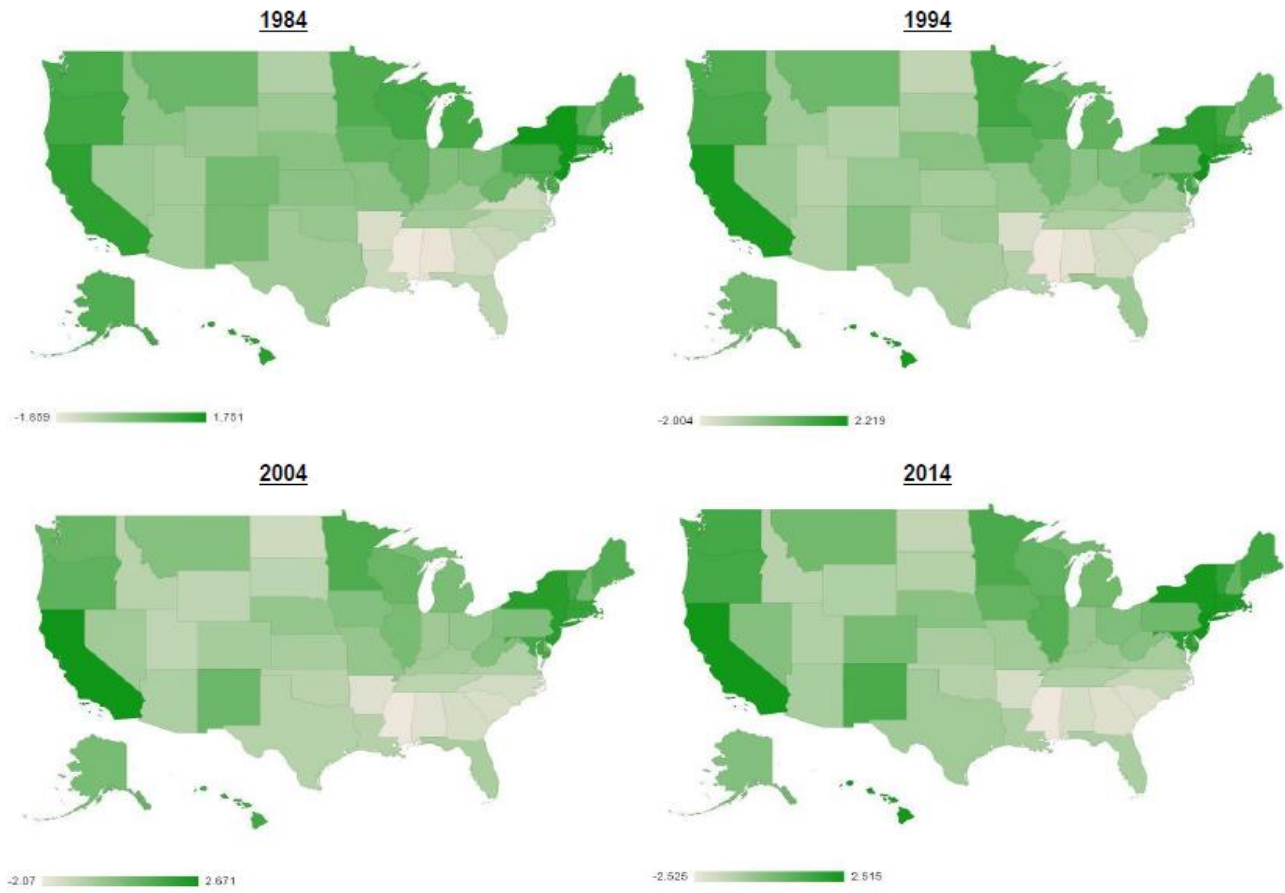
Note: Above U.S. state maps of policy liberalism scores (Caughey and Warhsaw 2015) for years 1984, 1994, 2004, and 2014 created using *Correlates of State Policy Project's* Google GeoChart tools. Caughey and Warshaw's (2015) state-year policy liberalism scores (i.e., the aggregated ideological direction of adopted policies) was constructed by relying on nearly 150 policies passed at the state-level from 1936 to 2014. Higher scores are shaded darker and indicate a policymaking that is more liberal.

FIGURE 2: Correlates of State Policy Line Chart for U.S. State Policy Liberalism, 1980–2014
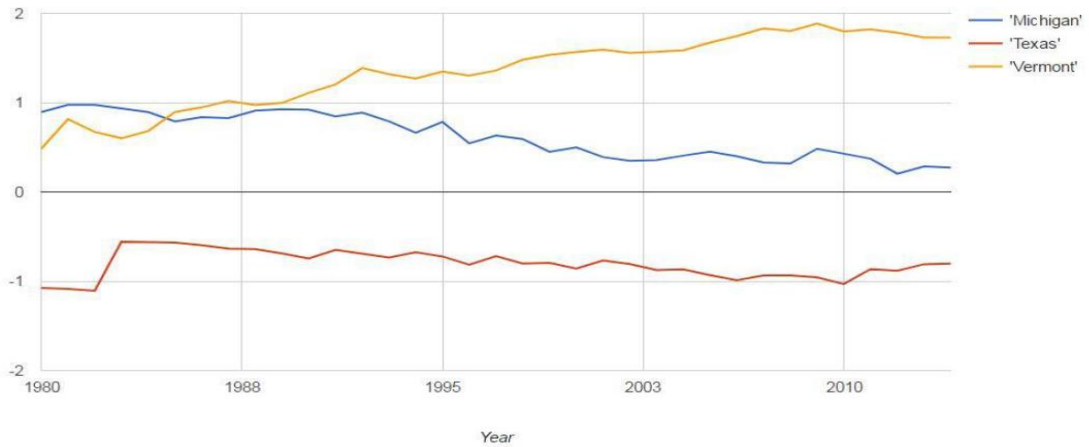
Note: Above line graph of policy liberalism scores (Caughey and Warhsaw 2015) for Michigan, Texas, and Vermont (1980 – 2014) created using *Correlates of State Policy Project's* Google Line Chart online tools. Caughey and Warshaw's (2015) state-year policy liberalism scores (i.e., the aggregated ideological direction of adopted policies) was constructed by relying on nearly 150 policies passed at the state-level from 1936 to 2014. Higher scores indicate a more liberal policymaking environment.

decades reflect a relatively stable picture of policy liberalism across the states: southern states tended to produce more conservative policies while northeastern, west-coast, and Great Lakes states engaged in more liberal policymaking. For example, Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi have tended to adopt the most conservative policies, while California, Massachusetts, and New York have consistently passed more liberal laws. While southern, Pacific coast, and northeastern states display less variation over time, Midwestern and western states appear to have witnessed a move in conservative direction since the 1980s.

Despite general stability in the aggregate, however, the individual state-year scores exhibit sizeable year-to-year movement. To illustrate this state-level variation over time, we generated Figure 2 above using the host site's Google Line Chart tools. The graph shows change in policy liberalism for Michigan, Texas, and Vermont from 1980 to 2014. Since 1980, Vermont's policymaking has become more liberal, Michigan's lawmaking has become more moderate, and Texas' policy activity has remained steadfastly conservative.

Beyond documenting fluctuations in policies across the American states, however, scholars are also frequently interested in why policy change occurs. In particular, researchers question to what extent there is a link between public opinion and policy change, asking whether policymakers are responsive to changes in mass attitude (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995). The breadth of the *Correlates of State Policy Project* database not only facilitates the ease of analysis of policy outputs, but also the impact assessment of political, institutional, economic, social, or demographic determinants—such as public opinion or mass ideology—on policy change. The database allows user to automatically consider contextual or institutional characteristics that might shape policy outcomes within and across states. For example, a researcher could assess the linkage between mass opinion and policy liberalism by relying on Berry et al.'s (1998) citizen ideology measure. The authors' measure for the ideological orientation of a

state's electorate is crafted using unadjusted interest-group ratings for a state's members of Congress as a proxy for the beliefs and worldview of its citizens.

Again, only for purposes of illustration and not explanation, we created Figure 3 below using our database's host-site embedded Google Line Chart tools. The figure displays changes in citizen ideology for Michigan, Texas, and Vermont since 1980. Interestingly, comparing Figures 2 and 3, we see that despite an increase in the liberal direction of Texas' electorate (see Figure 3), Texas policy output has remained largely conservative (see Figure 2). Furthermore, Vermont's increasing liberal citizenry matches its trend in liberal policymaking, just as Michigan's legislature has produced more moderate to slightly liberal policies in line with the state's electorate. Such visuals might suggest that policymakers in Vermont and Michigan are more responsive to the public than legislators in Texas. Of course, other institutional or contextual factors may be at play. While these online tools allow for graphic displays and visual explorations of data, our database makes numerous variables available to researchers so they can empirically model and parse the linkage between public opinion, policymaking, and other correlates of policy change over time in the American states.

FIGURE 3: Correlates of State Policy Line Chart for U.S. State Citizen Ideology, 1980–2013
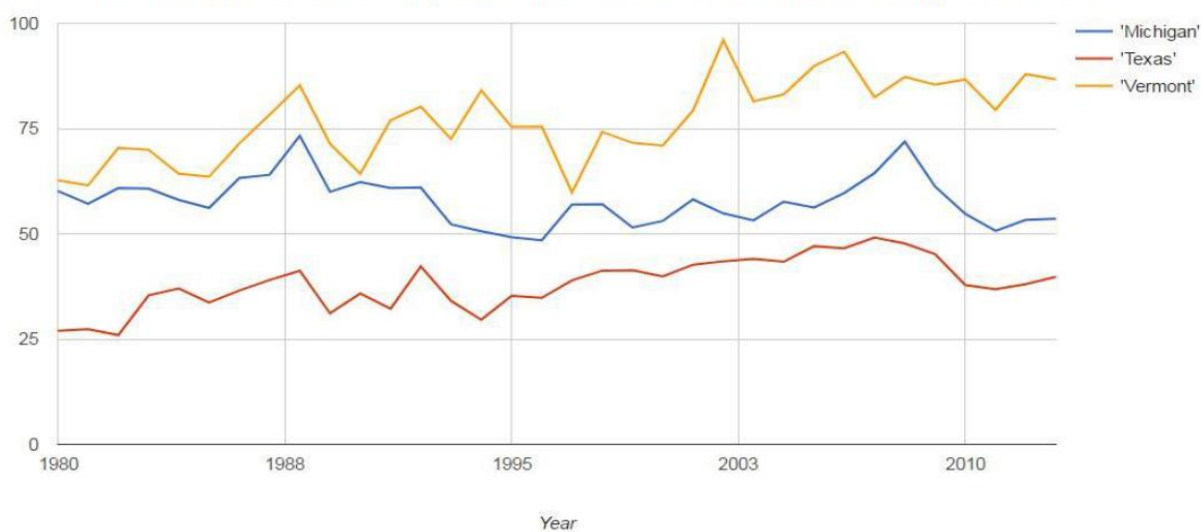
Note: Above line graph of citizen state ideology measures (Berry et al. 1998) for Michigan, Texas, and Vermont (1980 – 2013) created using *Correlates of State Policy Project's* Google Line Chart online tools. Berry et al.'s (1998) state-year citizen ideology scores (i.e., ideological direction of state electorate) was constructed by relying on unadjusted interest-group ratings for a state's Congressional delegation. Higher values indicate a more liberal citizenry.

APPLICATIONS AND USES OF THE DATABASE

As interest in testing central theories of American politics and policymaking at the subnational level has grown, state policy and politics data has become more abundant and accessible. Still the subfield lags behinds others in offering a user-friendly data depot for relevant variables collected from the fifty U.S. states across time. We believe the *Correlates of State Policy Project* database presents an opportunity for the state politics community to centralize data, reduce reduplication of collection efforts, and foster even more empirical single-state, comparative, or time-serial studies of the American states.

In particular, the database includes an abundant number of variables for any researcher interested in exploring the political, institutional, economic, social, or demographic determinants of state policymaking or policy change. For example, how might social capital in a state (Hawes, Rocha, and Meier 2013) influence policy change or responsiveness? Or to what degree does a state's degree of electoral competitiveness foster a more innovative policy environment? Or can issue-specific or aggregate-level patterns of diffusion be gleaned from analyzing the policy adoptions of more than 300 laws? Opportunities abound for inferential comparative and time-serial studies. Indeed, Bumgardner (2016) has already taken advantage of the data files to complete his dissertation assessing the impact of partisan polarization on political participation at the ballot box.

Alternatively, the extensive database also allows for policy enactment and change to serve as an independent variable and be on the right-hand side of state politics models. Building on the contributions of other large-scale datasets, the decades of observations for most of the database's variables should also facilitate greater exploration of the temporal dynamics of subnational policies and politics. Beyond producing new knowledge, the dataset could also be a vital pedagogical resource for undergraduate- or graduate-level state politics or research methods courses.

The database's comprehensive scope; extension back in time; user-friendly design and online visualization tools; and institutional backing to ensure its maintenance and expansion exemplify its advantages and utility. However, we also invite suggestions, notifications of errors, and submissions of additional variables to include or how to improve the database and the online visualization tools. Ideally, contributions of comments and additional data from the state politics research community will bolster the richness of this resource. At the very least, we expect this data dump will save researchers time, energy, headache, and possibly even financial expense in identifying, gathering, formatting, and managing variables. We also hope scholars can capitalize on this database to shed further light on policymaking processes and outputs, and the role that political, institutional, economic, social, and demographic factors play in the policy dynamics across the American states and time.

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