Interpreting Ideal Points With Help From The Political Discourse

OR

Why Everything You Know About NOMINATE Scores Is Wrong

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Center for Political Studies
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What does this picture mean?

81st Congress (1949–1950)
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81st Congress
(1949–1950)

Dimension 1
Dimension 2

RACE
ECONOMICS

81st Congress
(1949–1950)

Dimension 1
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RACE
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Interpreting
NOMINATE

What's at Stake?

Using Pundits for Interpretation

Influence of Ideology on Party

Conclusion
Similarly ...

(from www.voteview.com)
“In the three-party-system period [of Republicans, Southern Democrats and Northern Democrats], it is useful to think of a **major-party loyalty dimension** as defined by the axis through the space that captures party-line votes. This dimension can be thought of as ranging from strong loyalty to the Democrats to weak loyalty to either party and to strong loyalty to the Republicans. (In other periods, when party cutting lines are vertical, the horizontal dimension can be thought of as both a party-loyalty dimension and an economic dimension.) **An axis perpendicular to the party-loyalty dimension would then express a liberal/conservative dimension** that is independent of party loyalty. Votes with cutting lines that are on neither the party-loyalty axis nor the independent liberal/conservative axis represent votes in which legislators make a trade-off instead of voting on their liberal/conservative positions, they maintain some loyalty to their parties Almost all votes reflect, to some degree, this type of tradeoff.” (Poole and Rosenthal, p. 45-46).
What does this picture mean?
What’s at Stake?

Both interpretations are useful. *nominate* is about data-reduction. The 1st dimension is the best one dimension. The 2nd dimension is the best one dimension after we account for the 1st dimension. Interpretation depends on the question. Party vs. preferences. If party has an independent influence beyond preferences, it is in places like the 1950s that we will observe it. *Econ+Race* interpretation is derived directly from the theoretical spatial model (which is used to justify the empirical model). *Party+Ideology* interpretation is not. *nominate* as an independent variable. Research that uses only the first dimension of *nominate* as a measure of ideology may be in error. Interaction of Ideology and Party. I argue that Ideology is a separate process, and that Party leaders respond to it.
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Theory: Ideology leads parties

- **Ideology** is the result of intellectuals, activists and others arguing about what should be.

- **Party** is an institution created by politicians to win and exercise power.

- Ideology shapes the issues space. Then Party operates on it.
  - A party usually has a reason it wants power.
  - That reason might be an ideology
  - Ideologues want to make their ideology be the party's purpose.
  - Ideologues can influence activists, other actors within the party to force the party to go along.
  - Party leaders who are indifferent on policy have reason to go along with an ideology.
Goals for this Talk

1. Convince you that the **Party+Ideology** interpretation is more consistent with the data.
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2. Convince you that, having parsed **ideology** from **party**, we can make inferences about the influence of one (ideology) on the other (party).
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  ② Fix legislator’s ideal points to those from DW-NOMINATE.
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  3. Estimate pundit ideal points in that space.
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1950’s Pundits projected into 1949-1950 Congress

1950 Pundits vs. 1950 legislators

Dimension 1

Dimension 2
Cutting line of vote for Speaker measures party

1950 Pundits vs. 1950 legislators
The **Party** dimension is orthogonal to the cutting line.

1950 Pundits vs. 1950 legislators
Ideology dimension is best fit for pundits (orthogonal regression).
Interaction of party or ideology

• If ideology at $t = 1$ influences party at $t > 1$, then the party dimension should move into alignment with ideology at $t = 1$.

• *Mutatis mutandis* if party influences ideology.

• We can project ideology from any period into Congress from any period.

• Hold ideology fixed (at say 1950) and see if Congress rotates to match it.

Angle=76°

Angle=70°

Angle=44°
More complete test involves more periods

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