Interpreting Legislative Ideal Points
With Help from the Ideological Discourse*

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Abstract

Most interpretations of ideal point estimates such as NOMINATE scores treat the revealed space as an ideological space. This paper projects the ideal points of ideological pundits into the same estimated space and find evidence that the space is jointly generated by ideology and some other force, orthogonal to ideology as it is defined by the pundits. This second force is most likely party, although it probably includes other forces as well. On the grounds that ideology may be influencing party leaders to adopt its divisions, and that party and ideology are more correlated today than in the 1950’s, this paper begins to disentangle which force was responsible for the increased association. Preliminary evidence suggests that ideology draws party toward itself.

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Poole and Rosenthal’s NOMINATE scores and similar scores using similar methods have become bread and butter for the study of almost any question that intersects Congress. And with good reason. The scores reduce each member’s long voting record to one or two numbers, which can then be used in conjunction with whatever measures are relevant to the researcher’s question. Patterns in NOMINATE scores have illuminated a great number of substantive issues.

But the precise interpretation of the NOMINATE scores is not immediately clear, and it matters. Strictly speaking, the scores just tell us who has similar voting records. Two legislators with similar scores are likely to vote together. Without interpretation, the model does not tell us why. Scholars then use the content of the votes to help parse which issues load on the first dimension and which load on the second dimension. This leads us to at least tentatively label the dimensions. The first is typically the economic/liberal vs. conservative dimension, and the second varies with the dominant cross-cutting issues of the day, from slavery to bimetallism to civil rights.

Poole and Rosenthal themselves are generally more careful than to simply label the dimensions without careful discussion of their constituent votes. Certain issues tend to be on or not on the first or second dimension, but the dimensions themselves are changing in their meaning.

I argue for a particular interpretation of the scores for the 1950s, a time when a two-dimensional space is required to summarize voting in congress. This interpretation is not without precedent. Poole and Rosenthal themselves make it in their book introducing their method, before going on to focus on other issues. But it is not the common interpretation of the scores, and it has not been directly tested. I test it in this paper.

I bring to bear preference information from outside Congress, information that is not constrained in the same way that elected officials are. Specifically, I use an original dataset of the opinions of pundits and commentators to define ideological preferences independent
of Congress. Then, identifying decisions in that dataset that match votes in the House, I connect the two sets of actors. This allows us to compare the patterns of preferences of actors who are not motivated by party or constituency with those who are.

I find that in the 1950s, at a time when voting in the Congress was multidimensional, preferences among pundits were not. If we interpret the pundit preferences as more closely linked to ideology, we find that Congress is organized along this same ideological dimension, with the addition of an orthogonal party dimension.

This paper proceeds as follows. I first discuss some of the difficulties with interpreting \textsc{nominate} scores, and why that matters theoretically. In the second and third sections, I discuss the data to be used and the model and its estimation. The fourth section presents results, and the fifth section discusses their implications and outlines directions for further work on this project.

1 Difficulties with Interpretation

The basic ideal point estimation model, of which \textsc{nominate} is the best known, can be justified by appeal to a random utility model of legislator behavior. The model assumes that each legislator has an ideal point in some n-dimensional space (usually n=2), which represents the policies, in that dimensional space, that they most prefer. When voting, they vote for the alternative the bill or the status quo which is closer to that ideal point. However, there are also non-spatial considerations that introduce random noise into their preferences, and thus into their voting (See e.g. Poole and Rosenthal, 1997, pp. 234-237).

The model estimates the ideal points that are most likely given the distribution of votes, and given that underlying random utility model. Figure 1 shows the estimated space for the 81st Congress, 1949-1950. This paper focuses on this Congress, but the ultimate aim of this project is to move beyond it.
Given the random utility model, how are we to interpret this space. It seems clear that both dimensions contribute something important. Both parties are clearly separated from each other. But if you project the ideal points onto one of the two labeled dimensions, there is some overlap. You need both dimensions to distinguish members of each party.

The axes in Figure 1 are labeled as they usually are. The first dimension is the “economic” dimension, while the second is the “other” dimension, usually interpreted as “Civil Rights” for this period. This interpretation is generally because economic cutting lines tend to be more or less perpendicular to the first dimension, while race cutting lines are more or less perpendicular to the second.

However, Poole and Rosenthal do not make this interpretation.

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. (p. 45-46).

Poole and Rosenthal’s interpretation is at odds with the dominant use of the first dimen-
sion as a measure of ideology. In more recent periods, such usage might be appropriate. But not in the 1950s, and not universally.

Why then, do so many users of NOMINATE scores treat the first dimension as an economic ideology dimension? There are two possible reasons. One, naturally, may simply be ignorance. What works in the 1990s is extended naively to other periods. But there is a substantive reason to reject this interpretation as well.

The second reason is that this interpretation based on the claim that party loyalty exerts some independent influence on member behavior, above and beyond their preferences on issues. There are few votes that can be substantively identified as “party” votes, independent of any issues (the vote to elect the Speaker being the obvious exception). If you believe that preferences are the primary determinant for Congressional behavior, you might argue that Figure 1 accurately shows a two-dimensional issue space, and the “three-party” system is a useful marker for members preferences in this two-dimensional space. Republicans tend to be moderate on race issues and conservative on economics, Southern Democrats are moderate on economic issues and conservative on race, and Northern Democrats are liberal on both issues. Party loyalty is not a determinant. Party, especially when modified by region, is just a convenient shorthand for preferences.

This alternative interpretation is quite defensible. For one, it is more closely connected to the random utility model outlined above. The random utility model assumes that choices are due to policy and some randomness, and nothing more. The party-plus-ideology interpretation posits an unusual policy space. Party loyalty is not a dimension on which we tend to think policies can be plotted. Rather, party loyalty would seem to be a non-policy component to the legislator’s utility function. But it is also a non-random component, and thus not captured by the random utility model, on which most ideal point estimation rests.

There are, of course, some ways to reconcile these two interpretations. Perhaps ideology and party are the primary dimensions, but race and economic votes might still differ in
the degree to which they present the trade-off between party and ideology in this period. Southern Democrats might have been more likely to choose ideology over party on race, and less likely on economics. This interpretation, however, very much rests on understanding the competing forces that are merely inferred from the data. And thus it, too, is not consistent with the simple random utility model.

Distinguishing these interpretations is important, for several reasons.

1. An immediate issue is the now well-worn parties vs. preferences debate (e.g. Krehbiel, 1993, 1999; Cox and McCubbins, 1999, 2004; Binder, Lawrence and Maltzman, 1999; Snyder and Groseclose, 2000, 2001; Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart, 1999; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2001), in which scholars ask what determines the actions of Members of Congress, their own preferences (either personal, or derived from their districts) or some form of party discipline. Using NOMINATE scores to answer this question is difficult, because the scores simply summarize the behavior to be explained. However, a number of works have used creative approaches in conjunction with NOMINATE scores or the estimation methodology to get at this question. Do the scores generated by party-whipped votes differ from those generated by other votes, for example?

These methods, then, sidestep the interpretation method, acknowledging that both ideology and party (and other things) may go into the scores. Disentangling the effects is not necessary. If they could be disentangled, however, or if at least ideology could be separated from “everything else,” we could then find where behavior deviated from preferences, and perhaps attribute that to party.

2. A variety of work has used first-dimension NOMINATE scores as measures of ideology to predict various outcomes. If the goal is to summarize voting patterns, NOMINATE is fine. Likewise if the application is for a period when ideology and party are closely aligned and thus both on the first dimension, as in the current Congress. However, if
the construct meant to be measured is truly something like liberalism to conservatism, then a better measure would be to use the orthogonal projection of the scores onto the dimensions that is substantively ideology. I know of no research that has used this approach.  

3. My own primary reason to want a better interpretation of the ideological space is to help understand the relationship between party and ideology more broadly, outside the institution of the Congress. I argue elsewhere (Noel, 2006), that the coalitions that make up parties are first created by ideologues who organize issues into packages. These ideologies are then adopted by various politically relevant actors, especially the activists who form the backbone of parties. Parties then adopt the issue agendas of these actors and reflect the packages designed in the crucible of public debate.

If this theory is true, then it is necessary to identify and compare the ideological dimensions in the Congress space with ideology as it is defined outside the space. I have shown that specific issues are absorbed into the main dimensions of the ideological, non-Congress space earlier than they are absorbed into the Congress space.

The strategy employed here is to put two kinds of actors into one space (Bailey, 2005; Bailey and Maltzman, 2007). First, we will use the members of the House of Representatives. Theirs is the space we are attempting to interpret. Second, we will use pundits and other thinkers. These actors are not elected officials, and they are therefore not subject to any kind of party pressure. They are, of course, still political actors. They may sometimes make arguments that are more expedient than principled. However, they are still clearly less subject to party than are elected representatives. They are also less subject to constraint by voters. Thus any significant differences between these two groups are likely to be due to electoral or party constraints.

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1For simple regression, using both first- and second-dimension NOMINATE scores might capture this effect, but the coefficients would not be directly interpretable.

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I would further claim that these pundits do reflect, the most closely, that which we call “ideology.” The concept of ideology is complicated (Knight, 2006; Gerring, 1997), and I will not fully expound on it here (Noel, 2006, 2010, But see). For simplicity’s sake, I take ideology to be that which binds together opinions on various issues. Ideology is what makes someone’s position on religious issues tend to be related to their position on economic issues, for example. Further, I believe that ideology is at least partly socially constructed by intellectuals and pundits, whose “creative synthesis” (Converse, 1964) leads to constraint across issues and the creation of ideology. In that case, the constraint apparent among the pundits is, almost by definition, ideology.

If the reader is willing to accept this definition, then aligning the pundits to the Members of Congress will give us ideology. Short of that, the pundits are still not as subject to party constraints or electoral considerations as are MC’s, and thus they measure preferences without those constraints and considerations.

2 The data

The data analyzed here are from two sources. The first is simply roll-call data for the 81st House, 1949 to 1950. All votes are included. The second is an original dataset of the opinions expressed by political pundits and thinkers from roughly the same period, 1949 to 1956.²

Opinions for this second dataset were drawn from large samples of a number of publications. For monthly and weekly publications, effort was made to collect every article published in each year studied. For daily publications, large samples were taken from each month. Publications were selected for inclusion based on their perceived relevance to politics. In the 1950s, publications studied include The Atlantic Monthly, Human Events, Harper’s

²The pundit data extends until 1956 because this is when The National Review began publication, and I sought to include this important publication in the data. It is my intention to link the 1950s pundits to every Congress from 1950 through to the 1960s.

All articles studied are opinion pieces. News articles in newspapers are not coded, even when they might imply some opinion. Soft news articles in journals of opinion are coded, but only when the opinion is explicit. These are not inferred positions but explicitly stated ones.

Data were collected by the author and a team of undergraduate researchers. For each opinion article, researchers recorded the author, source and the issue(s) on which an opinion was taken, and what position (for or against) was taken. Articles were coded for all positions taken in them, which in most cases was more than one. Researchers also wrote a detailed abstract of the article. Articles include unsigned editorials for each publication, which are attributed to the “editorial board” of the publication. I reviewed each article code, checking it against the abstract, and in some cases, against the original article. A subset of articles (about half) were double-coded to confirm the reliability of each coder. In data analyzed so far, only once have two coders concluded that the same article took opposite positions on an issue.

Data from the publications was supplemented by direct searches on the names of all writers to capture articles written shortly before or after the year in question. In the few cases in which a writer is an important figure in American history, biographical information is used to fill in positions on issues not addressed in available sources from a given year.

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3With some exceptions, researchers took a course on political ideas in American history, and data collection was part of their grade. Students applied to take the course, and only students with excellent academic records were allowed in. The following students participated in the project: Adriana Ahumada, Ashley Alexander, Lauren Burt, MacKenzie Canniff, Glen Hai Chen, Faith Christensen, Laura Claster, Jeff David, Patricia Daza, Janice Dru, Chelsea Ehrke, Jon English, Jeremy Evans, Christine Fogle, Cristina Grant, Michael Gross, Helen Gurfinkel, Daniel Gutenplan, Lisa Hathaway, Blake Holland, Jeff Hollis, Lance C. Huang, Tiffany Hwong, Joy Karugu, Suneal Kolluri, Sean Kolodji, Patrick Lam, Camilla Liou, Jessica MacKenzie, Keith Martin, Katie Mason, Daniel Miller, Alli Nash, Doug Nichols, Tina Park, Erika Raney, Justin Scott, Matt Schupbach, Matt Seibert, Shawna Spoor, Kevin Thelan, Mike Tiernay, Mary Vardazarian, Naya Villarreal, Minh-Tam Vuong, Cynthia Wang, Rachel Ward, and Mike Wendland.
Biographical information is used only when it reflects opinions that were held in and around the year in question, and it is only used for figures who otherwise appear in the dataset from the search on names.

As should be evident, these data differ in several ways from the data usually used to estimate ideal points of Members of Congress from their recorded votes. I discuss the most important of these differences below.

First, defining the issue is tricky. For Congress, we know that everyone is voting on the same issues even if we don’t know exactly what the bill is about. For the pundit data, I need to define the issue from the context. On the one hand, overly general issue definitions can mask significant differences from writer to writer. For instance, an advocate of slavery in general might still support the end of the slave trade. Quite often, writers who oppose slavery nevertheless do not favor the immediate abolition of slavery. On the other hand, overly specific issues degenerate into minutia, where each writer is writing about some very narrow matter unaddressed by others. Effort was made to be as specific as possible while still maintaining a large number of responses on each issue. Similar issues are clumped together in general issue areas (taxes, foreign policy, race, gender, labor, trade) and then broken down further as appropriate. Some adjustments in the definitions of the issue were made as the coding was in process as I and the coders became aware of nuances in policy discussions that were not known to us ex ante. Decisions to change an issue from more to less specific were made after careful reading of the abstracts and original articles to be sure they were appropriate. Often, a writer will take a position that is only implicit: Someone who favors the right of unions to call a strike also favors labor unions in general, although the reverse is not necessarily true.

How to frame the issue is also important. Opinions can be considered in terms of policy prescriptions, groups (or individuals) who are affected, or abstract principles that are invoked. Effort was made to focus on the first two, especially policy. However, pundits are
not constrained to propose detailed policy options. Coding of general principles had to be
done with care. We are not interested in who supports freedom of speech in the abstract,
but in who thinks freedom of speech should apply to offensive art and who thinks it should
apply to hate speech. Many writers also take up groups, individuals and programs for praise
or reproach. These too are informative. The implied “policy” is just that we should have
more people or programs like this, or do what we can to support people or groups like this.

Second, many pundits address the same issue more than once, and at different times.
Usually, they take the same position. In the very few cases when they do not, it is usually
because the issue has not been defined in a sufficiently nuanced way. The issue in such cases
is redefined. In other cases, a better judgment can be made on the basis of the entire set of
articles.

Third, different pundits address different issues. In analyses of legislatures there may be
some abstentions, but by and large, every legislator faces and usually votes on the same set
of issues. The pundit-by-issue matrix produced by my coding procedure is “missing” just
less than 90 percent of the possible observations (that is, compared to a scenario in which
every pundit addressed every issue that has been raised in the year). This missingness is
misleading, however. It comes largely from the many writers who take on two or three issues,
or the many issues that are addressed by only a few writers.

I could focus on the editorial boards and a few key writers who all address most of the
leading issues. If I analyzed only this data, this project would be akin to the estimation of
ideal points of the nine members of the Supreme Court (Martin and Quinn, 2002), although
with fewer issues. Dropping the remaining cases would leave less “missingness,” but it would
also throw away useful information. The major issues are addressed by nearly all of the major
writers, but the additional issues and writers help to clarify the relationships. We cannot
learn much about those issues or writers, but we can learn something about the underlying
dimension, which in turn tells us something about the other issues. So long as we don’t make
too much of the estimates of those issues and pundits that appear infrequently, including everything provides more information about the space as a whole.

Finally, pundits are free to describe their ideal point on a given issue with more detail than a legislator can on an up-or-down vote. Each article was thus originally coded on a five point scale: Solid support, lukewarm support, neutral, lukewarm opposition and solid opposition. (More nuanced coding would be possible on some issues, but that would require more careful investigation than is possible over a large number of issues.) However, for the analysis in this paper, the codes have been collapsed to a binary support/opposition. (Neutral is treated as abstention.) There are three reasons for this decision. First, as an empirical matter, nearly all responses are at the extreme ends of the five-point scales. Lukewarm positions in on op-ed pages and in opinion journals are, unsurprisingly, rare. Second, coding the nuances is less reliable. It is usually easy to tell what “side” a writer is taking. Less easy is identifying how close she is to the “cut point.” Third, writing styles can confuse the issue. Some writers take a more conciliatory tone, while others are more confrontational. Disentangling these idiosyncratic styles from actual position is tricky. Thus for the present analysis, this characteristic of the data is not exploited. For this application, the pundit data consist of 100 pundits across 143 issues.

Earlier analyses of these data (Noel, 2006, 2007, 2005) suggests that the pundits in the 1950s exist in a one-dimensional space. Higher dimensions do not significantly improve classification or fit. As mentioned above, I will argue that this is the ideological space, at least as defined by the pundits.

To connect the two datasets, I and several research assistants went through the roll calls from the 81st Congress and identified every one that appeared to match, in substance, to the issues identified by the pundits. Of the 275 roll calls, only 26 overlap with the positions taken by the pundits. This is not a very large number for connecting the two spaces. However, I intend to extend this analysis into further Congresses, which will increase the overlap
In some cases, the connection is immediate. When the pundits take a position on a bill before Congress, those votes are the same. Even here, however, it is important to distinguish votes on final passage from votes on amendments.

On other issues, the connection is less direct. Pundits took positions on “price controls,” but a variety of specific price controls were debated in Congress. We coded the decisions as in agreement if the specific policy in the bill was clearly in the same direction and of significant magnitude as the general issue. This connection is a potential source of noise in the estimates. However, since the estimated ideal points for most pundits are at the extremes, even before linking them to these issues, it is unlikely that there are many nuances that would change their positions. When there are nuances, the pundits raise them specifically, so they can be identified.

3 The model and estimation

I estimate a two-dimensional IRT model, following Clinton, Jackman and Rivers (2004), with both legislators and pundits in the same space.

The model is identified through the Members of Congress, whose ideal points are fixed as the values of their dw-nominate scores. This does mean we are mixing the Clinton, Jackman and Rivers model with the dw-nominate model, but the consequences are slight. Ideal points estimated from the different approaches are highly correlated.\footnote{The principle difference is in the error structure. NOMINATE assumes Gaussian errors, while the Clinton, Jackman, Rivers IRT model uses quadratic errors. In the center of the distribution, these two distributions are very similar.}

I choose to use the IRT model because the technology exists to add another, hierarchical element to the model. I model the ideal points of each pundit as a draw from a higher-level distribution for each publication. This is because many of the pundits in the dataset address very few issues. However, each publication is represented on nearly every issue.
It would be possible to simply treat every article in a given journal as representing the same ideal point, that of the journal’s editorial board. This would collapse the data down to eight almost complete cases, one for each journal. But this is surely inaccurate. Even among ideological fellow travelers there can be disagreement. Some publication editors even take pride in the diversity of opinion presented. On the other hand, we would be ignoring useful information if we didn’t account for the relationship between different pundits writing for the same journal. Ideological birds of a feather do tend to flock to the same publications.

A reasonable middle ground is a hierarchical model, in which each pundit’s latent trait is a draw from a journal-specific distribution. A hierarchical model does more than address the missingness problem. Even without missingness, the model is more efficient by borrowing strength across observations involving pundits writing for the same outlet. That is, we add to the model above these hierarchical parameters:

$$x_i \sim f_{MVN}(\mu_{journal}, \tau_{journal})$$

(1)

where $\mu$ is the mean for the journal and $\tau$ is the journal’s “precision,” or the inverse of the variance ($1/\sigma^2$). Both $\mu$ and $\tau$ are parameters to be estimated. This is a reasonable model of the actual process. Editors presumably have ideal points, but they are also willing to accept writing by pundits who deviate from them to some degree. And the editors probably differ in how much deviation they are willing to accept. The New York Times consciously wants to include a mix on its editorial page, so we would predict that its precision parameter would be smaller. Other publications burnish a particular point of view, and do not publish articles that deviate very much from it. The closer to the editors’ preferences, the more likely the writer will choose to submit or work for the editor as well as be accepted or hired.

The model will estimate just how ecumenical each publication is. If the ideal points from

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5The results of such a model, when estimated, have not substantively differed from those presented here.
the journal appear to be all over the map, the estimated ! will be small (and "2 large). On the other hand, an ideologically pure publication will have a larger !. The model treats the “editorial board” itself as just another pundit in that mix, which has an ideal point of its own, also just drawn from the journal’s distribution. The editorial board’s ideal point can be very different from the hierarchical parameter. Thus the hierarchical parameter measures the editors in their capacity as gatekeepers, while the editorial board ideal point measures them in their capacity as opinion-holders.

4 Results

Figure 2 replicates Figure 1 with the new data. The new figure differs from the old in that it now includes the ideal points of the pundits.

Second, the figure now has the ideal points of the pundits. Alongside Northern and Southern Democrats and Republicans, we find conservatives located at the upper right of the figure, and liberals located in the bottom left. The pundits are not in a perfect line, but it is close. And they are separated into two clusters, with each cluster defining the pole of a liberal-conservative dimension. The variation that is not on this dimension is likely mostly noise, as will be discussed in a moment. The estimated locations of the editorial boards are also included. They are in an almost perfect line.

The angle of this ideological dimension is almost exactly as Poole and Rosenthal describe it. The liberals are a little to far to the right for this interpretation, but setting that concern aside for a moment, this figure confirms the notion that ideology in 1950 was a significant force in Congressional voting, and that it was orthogonal to a party dimension. This ideological dimension includes racial issues, cold-war and foreign policy issues, and
economic issues. The dimension is not a race dimension, but the ideological dimension. It
thus suggests that we should not think of the dimensions as race vs. economics, but as
ideology vs. party.

More than that, the results give us some guidance as to where those dimensions are.
Theoretically, we know that voting records are the product of many different forces, and we
often assume that forces we are not interested in (say, that are not ideology) are random or
can be purged in some way. Now, we can disentangle the ideology dimension from the rest
of the influences. And this dimension is not where much of the literature might expect it to
be.

4.1 The Dynamics of Ideology and Party

The results in figure 2 compare ideological pundits from 1950 with legislators from 1950. As
time moves forward, we might expect to see these two groups growing closer to one another.
Analysis underway but not yet complete so far confirms this.

But I make the theoretical claim that ideology influences party. If that is true, simply
seeing the two groups come into alignment is not sufficient. Are the pundits pulling the
legislators toward themselves, or are they moving in response to legislators. We can get at
this question by comparing the ideological pundits from a fixed point in time – the 1950s –
with legislators from future congresses.

Figure 3 presents these results. Pundits from the 1950s have been projected into the
nominate
space from 1950, 1970 and 1990. Since the pundits are held fixed, any tendency
for the dimensions to collapse would not be because the pundits are moving toward the
legislators.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

More analysis is needed to bolster the impression from Figure 3. We would want to see
if ideology as defined at other times exerts such an influence into the future, and confirm that holding party fixed does not show a similar gravitation toward the party for pundits into the future. This analysis is underway.

5 Discussion

The ultimate goal for this project goes beyond simple interpretation. If we can take the pundits to describe ideology as it was defined in the 1950s, and we can then link them to votes in congress through to the current period, we could test whether the issue organization provided by the pundits becomes the dominant ideology. This would supplement existing evidence that suggests just that.

However, the process of interpreting ideal points is interesting in its own right. As noted above, most scholarship treats the first dimension NOMINATE score as a measure of ideology, or at least as a measure of the economic policy component of ideology. This is because most scholarship takes the random utility model at face value, often implicitly.

One implication of this approach would be that if we could identify the angle of the ideological dimension with some precision (and this method is as yet not very precise), we should use the orthogonal projection of the ideal points onto that dimension, if we want a measure of ideology. As noted above, no work that I am aware of uses this approach. Alternatively, researchers interested in “ideology” might specify more precisely what they mean by ideology, and perhaps use measures directed only toward those votes on a particular issue (e.g., Bailey, 2005, who examines only ideology on a civil liberties dimension.).

A second implication is that there does appear to be some political behavior that is driven by something other than ideology, and this something is most likely party. Much of the literature on Congress has dwelled on this question, and some may consider it unresolved. However, if party is an independent force is roll call voting, we may wish to include it
directly in our ideal-point estimation procedures. Current techniques, when interpreted in accordance with the random utility model, do not account for systematic non-policy components, of which party loyalty clearly is one. And not just a minor one, but perhaps the most important one.

If that is the case, then at least for some applications, we should consider a model of legislator behavior in which party loyalty is directly modeled, rather than allowed to be another “dimension” that may or may not be correlated with ideology. Estimating this model – and distinguishing it from the existing relatively simpler might not be easy. (And in some applications, might not be necessary.) But we should move toward it.

Most of these observations are not necessarily new. This paper aims to provide new evidence from outside the legislature that they should be taken seriously.
References


Figure 1: NOMINATE for the 1949-1950 Congress
Figure 2: 1950’s Pundits projected into 1949-1950 Congress

- Cutting Line of Speaker Vote
- Orthogonal to Speaker Vote
- Best Fit for Pundits
Figure 3: 1950’s Pundits projected into three Congresses
- Cutting Line of Speaker Vote
- Orthogonal to Speaker Vote
- Best Fit for Pundits