

PICK YOUR POISON: ON SELECTING ROLL CALLS TO SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT

by

ALICE E. KISAALITA

(Under the Direction of Michael S. Lynch)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation takes up the question of how interest group ratings contribute to our understanding of legislator ideology. By judiciously picking which roll calls are included in our estimation techniques, we can gain a more accurate perspective of how legislators line up on the liberal to conservative or other issue-specific scale. This behavior becomes problematic when the standard for distinguishing the “important” roll calls from the multitude of available votes rests on biased, partisan, or otherwise unsound grounds. After fleshing out the consequences of the biased and/or non-standardized subsetting behaviors of interest groups (both general and special-issue) during the creation of interest group ratings, I consider a mathematical standard for creating subsets of ideologically relevant roll calls by which we can efficiently order legislators along a liberal-conservative line. Through an examination of the ADA, ACU, and NEA over the course of more than thirty years, I find that the selection habits of interest groups for which roll calls to include in their legislator ratings actually serve as a mirror into their own political motivations. Additionally, I analyze the consequences of subsetting the roll call record into smaller sizes for the purposes of ideal point estimation in general. I find that a small subset does not necessarily produce inconsistent estimations, but certain kinds of votes can substantially alter the resulting ideal points relative to NOMINATE scores.

INDEX WORDS: Interest Group Ratings, Legislator Ideology, Roll Call Votes, Ideal Point Estimation, Item Response Theory, US Congress

PREVIEW

PICK YOUR POISON: ON SELECTING ROLL CALLS TO SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT

by

ALICE E. KISAALITA

B.A., The University of West Georgia, 2011

B.S., The University of West Georgia, 2014

M.A., The University of Georgia, 2017

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2020

ProQuest Number:27741530

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent on the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 27741530

Published by ProQuest LLC (2020). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All Rights Reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

PREVIEW

©2020

Alice E. Kisaalita

All Rights Reserved

PICK YOUR POISON: ON SELECTING ROLL CALLS TO SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT

by

ALICE E. KISAALITA

PREVIEW

Major Professor: Michael S. Lynch

Committee: Scott H. Ainsworth
Anthony J. Madonna

Electronic Version Approved:
Ron Walcott
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one earns a doctorate degree on their own, even if only one or two others show them support along the way. I am so lucky to have so many people in my life who have encouraged, supported, advised, and challenged me throughout my pursuit of this degree. I would like to sincerely thank each and every person who has helped me reach this goal. Several people deserve special acknowledgement and thanks in this regard.

I can honestly say that I would not be where I am today without the guidance, encouragement, and friendship of my major advisor, Dr. Michael S. Lynch. He has been a pillar of support for me since the very beginning of my graduate studies. He taught me to enjoy describing the world with statistics, probability, and uncertainty when at first I was sure I only liked “real” math like algebra and calculus. He challenged me to expand and develop my computer programming skills even though there were plenty of easier roads I could have taken to get the job done without improving myself. He encouraged me to go to EITM, he has included me on several working projects that have kept me interested in political science and enhanced my marketable skills immeasurably, and he showed me how to teach and how to conduct compelling research. Without Michael, this dissertation would not exist. As my mentor and guide in academia he has nurtured my innate desire for knowledge, and I have flourished under his care.

But Michael has been more than an academic mentor and guide to me. I speak with Michael about politics, economics, mathematics, education, and philosophy, but I also rely on him for advice on life in general. He took me seriously when I questioned whether to continue with the Ph.D. or stop at the Master’s degree. He provided me with exceptional resources to help me decide between being a professor or taking a private sector job. He was there for me when I got married, when my mother fell ill, when I moved to Texas in the middle of my degree, and for everything else that happened over the last five years. He has always shown respect for my thoughts and concerns

on every matter I brought to him, and I count him among my greatest friends. Michael, it is hard for me to put in to words how much your guidance, care, and support has meant to me over these five years. I am truly, sincerely, and forever grateful for the time and attention you have given to me, for the unending support you have shown me, for the excellent discussions we carry on, for the knowledge you have imparted to me, for the confidence you place in my abilities, and for our friendship. Thank you.

Dr. Scott H. Ainsworth epitomizes what it means to be a professor. He exudes wisdom, thoughtfulness, consideration, and curiosity in all he does, and he serves as an exemplar for me when I think of the kind of person I want to be as I continue to grow and learn what it means to be human. Scott taught me that being a political scientist involves describing people's collective and individual behaviors philosophically, and I very much enjoyed our discussions about which philosophical frameworks apply in which contexts. He is willing to engage with me in conversations that get to the heart of these quandaries and provide a perspective filled with experience and expertise. Scott, I sincerely thank you for always making yourself available to me for advice, guidance, and interesting discussions. You always have a set of authors ready-to-hand for me to read, a follow-up thought from our previous conversations, or a new perspective from which I can learn. You have my utmost respect, and I am truly grateful for your part in my intellectual development.

Dr. Anthony J. Madonna showed me what it means to truly love your work and to be so passionate about a subject that every detail inspires and excites as you learn more about it. His attention to the minutia within the history and proceedings of Congress continually inspires me, and I plan to emulate his example and work ethic wherever I go. Thank you, Tony, for always being there to listen and give advice to me as I continually questioned my place in the world and where I am going. You helped me realize that there is not only one way to define success, and you always encouraged me to find my way towards happiness as I define it for myself.

Two other faculty deserve a special mention here. Dr. Janet Donohoe taught me philosophy at the University of West Georgia, and she was my primary advisor throughout my first and still favorite degree. She is also one of the reasons I aspired to go this far in academia. Dr. Donohoe

showed me just what it means to have a love of wisdom, and I am so truly grateful to her for her part in my growth as a thinker. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Keith Poole, with whom I had the honor of working at the University of Georgia. His work laid the groundwork for my dissertation, and I am grateful for the time and advice he gave to me.

I think it might be impossible to fully quantify the ways in which a husband supports his wife in the pursuit of her Ph.D. Ssempe Kisaalita has been there for me every day along the path to this degree, showing me unending love and support as I worked through classes, homework, studying for comprehensive exams, writing and defending the prospectus and the chapters that follow. He keeps me motivated when I feel like quitting, he walks through complex ideas with me, he listens to my problems and offers knowing advice, he believes in me even when I lose faith in my own abilities, and he makes amazing dinners every night while I work. He is a quiet, loving, intelligent, hard-working, dedicated, and diligent partner whom I can always look to for love, support, and encouragement. This dissertation would not exist without him. Thank you so much, Ssempe, for all this and more. I hope that I give you the same support for your dreams and goals as you have shown for mine.

Of the many people in my life whom I look up to, my mother is the first and most important inspiration to me. Dr. Lesley Barker has shown me what it truly means to be a strong, intelligent, admirable, independent, and thoughtful woman, and I am proud to be her daughter. Not only did she instill in me an insatiable desire to learn, she taught me how to do so humbly, so that I can gain insights without presuming to know everything. She showed me the value of cultivating an eclectic set of perspectives by which to evaluate the arguments presented by the world. She helped me think through the work I did for this dissertation and gave me invaluable feedback on the ideas herein. All my life she has encouraged me in my pursuit of knowledge, spurring me on and on to ever greater academic accomplishments as she herself followed a similar path simultaneously. My mother is an amazing woman, and I will be forever grateful to her for raising me to be the person I am today. Thank you, Mom. You are my role model and my inspiration.

I am lucky to have two sets of parents whom I can look to for love, support, and encouragement. My parents-in-law, Dr. William and Rose Kisaalita, have welcomed me into their family as if I were one of their own. I am so grateful to them for showing me such love and support in all aspects of life, including the pursuit of my Ph.D. They have read chapters, discussed ideas, given me advice, and helped me think through how I will use this degree after it is finished, and they have done so with genuine care for my well-being. Thank you both for being there for me along this journey. I cannot tell you how much your love and support means to me.

I want to thank my many siblings for the myriad ways in which you have all been there for me as I completed this degree. Esther, Nancy, Audrey, Lottie, Colin, Roger, Ntumwa, Nkaku, Nami, Aditya, Jeff, Dave, Joe, Whitney, Dani, and Erik, you are each so important to me and I love you all. You have done so much for me throughout my life, and I thank you one and all for loving me, supporting me, laughing with me, and being there for me as I accomplish this dream of mine.

Finally, I thank my friends, Simon McClelland-Williamson, Jordan McKissick, Sam Marcotte, Matthew Jordan Suwalski, and Haley Lattke, who have been there for me through thick and thin. Simon, you are the first friend I made at UGA, and I cannot imagine going through graduate school without you. From math camp to comprehensive exams, knitting to crocheting, and everything in between, it is my pleasure to know you. Jordan, you and I make a great team, whether it is studying together or co-authoring. I know you will be successful in whatever you choose to do. Sam, we study different parts of political science, but I always found your perspective to provide an interesting take on things that I would not have heard otherwise. Know that I appreciate you, and I am glad to have you as a friend. Matthew, you are a consistent delight to have in my life, and I am so glad you came to graduate school at UGA. Life there would have been much duller without you. Haley, you are the sweetest, gentlest person I know, and I wish you nothing but happiness for your life. You brought a softness to graduate school that made the roughest parts easier to handle. To each of you, thank you for spending your time with me, for growing and learning with me, and for being such good friends. Without your encouragement, I do not think I would be where I am

today. As I said, no one can really do this alone, and I am so glad that I gained your friendship as we went through graduate school together.

PREVIEW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Interest Group Ratings in the House of Representatives	5
1.2 Issue-Specific Scores: The Case of the National Education Association	7
1.3 Abbreviated Ideology	9
2 CONSTRUCTING A MIRROR — INTEREST GROUP RATINGS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 1980 - 2017	12
2.1 Abstract	13
2.2 Introduction	13
2.3 Literature Review	16
2.4 Theory	22
2.5 Data and Methods	28
2.6 Results	29
2.7 Conclusion	32
3 ISSUE-SPECIFIC SCORES — THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION	34
3.1 Abstract	35
3.2 Introduction	35
3.3 Literature Review	37
3.4 Theory	45
3.5 Data and Methods	48
3.6 Results	50
3.7 Conclusion	53
4 ABBREVIATED IDEOLOGY	56
4.1 Abstract	57
4.2 Introduction	57
4.3 Literature Review	60
4.4 Theory	65
4.5 Data and Methods	66

4.6	Results	67
4.7	Conclusion	80
5	CONCLUSION	83
	REFERENCES	88
	APPENDICES	97
	Appendix A	97
	Appendix B	99

PREVIEW

LIST OF TABLES

2.1	Average Information (TIF) Across Five Thetas (1980 - 2017)	27
2.2	Relative Intra-party Variance and Inter-party Distance, 1980 - 2017	30
3.3	Vote Counts for NEA-Related Topics, 110th - 113th Congresses	49
3.4	Correlations for All, NEA-Related, and NEA-Chosen Votes	51
3.5	Correlations for All, Education-Related, and NEA-Chosen Votes	52
4.6	Correlation to Full Record by Vote Types – Final Passage Votes	72
4.7	Correlation to Full Record by Vote Types – Amendment Votes	73
4.8	Correlation to Full Record by Vote Types – Procedural Votes	75
B.1	Correlations for All, NEA-Related, and NEA-Chosen Votes to Random 20	99
B.2	Correlations for All, Education-Related, and NEA-Chosen Votes to Random 20	100

LIST OF FIGURES

2.1	Theta Estimates for 2016	32
4.2	Average Correlation to Full Record for Increasing MinVotes	70
4.3	Average Correlation of 100 Samples of nLegs to the Full Record	79
4.4	Average Correlation of 100 Samples of nLegs to a Random 20 Votes	79

PREVIEW

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On April 6, 2017 three roll call votes took place in the Senate that paved the way for Justice Neil Gorsuch's confirmation to the Supreme Court the following day. The first was an unsuccessful attempt to invoke cloture¹. The motion was defeated with 55 yeas and 45 nays. Notably, on this vote four Democratic senators (Heidi Heitkamp (D - ND), Joe Manchin (D - WV), Joe Donnelly (D - IN), and, surprisingly, Michael Bennet (D - CO)²) voted with the rest of the Republicans to invoke cloture, and one Republican (Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell) voted strategically against this motion so that he could bring it up again later³.

The second roll call in this series of confirmation-related events changed the rules of cloture so that a simple majority, rather than the full 3/5ths majority of 60 votes, is now required to invoke cloture and stop debate for confirmation of presidential nominations. This rule change implemented what has become known as the "nuclear option" in the popular vernacular because it upended a centuries-long tradition in the Senate of respecting the right of the minority party to filibuster judicial nominations to the Supreme Court. It is important to note that this is not the first time that the nuclear option has been used. In November of 2013, Senate Democrats led by Majority Leader Harry Reid imposed this same rule change for most judicial nominations, with the notable exception of Supreme Court nominations. The nuclear option rule change that was implemented

¹Invoking cloture means to stop debate, which, under the rules of the Senate, required a 3/5ths majority (60 votes) to proceed.

²This was the only vote on which Senator Bennet defected from the majority of his party, and it can be explained by noting that Justice Gorsuch is from Colorado. In a statement on FaceBook, Senator Bennet explained his position, saying, "I am proud Judge Gorsuch is from Colorado...He is a qualified judge who deserves an up-or-down vote. That is the tradition of the Senate, and it is why I opposed a filibuster before the rule change"(Meltzer (2017)).

³Under the rules of the Senate, a motion to reconsider a previously taken vote must be made by a member who voted with the prevailing side (in this case, the nays prevailed). So, Senator McConnell, alone among the Republicans, voted nay so that he could have the right to bring up the same question again later.

for Neil Gorsuch's nomination simply extended these changes so that all presidential nominations, including those for the Supreme Court, could now be confirmed by a simple majority rule vote. This second roll call changed the rules of the Senate by a straight party-line vote of 52 Republicans against 48 Democrats with no defections from either party.

Once the rules were changed, a third vote took place to invoke cloture under the new simple-majority rules. While this vote received the exact same vote total of 55 yeas and 45 nays, this time the result was that cloture was invoked, the minority party filibuster ended, and the up or down confirmation vote could take place on the following day. The second cloture vote under the new rules was approved with the support of every single Republican senator (this time Sen. McConnell voted with his party) as well as three Democratic senators (Heidi Heitkamp (D - ND), Joe Manchin (D - WV), and Joe Donnelly (D - IN)) each of whom represents a state that leans Republican. These three Democratic senators voted again with the Republicans on the actual confirmation vote on the following day, and Neil Gorsuch was confirmed as a Justice of the Supreme Court with a 54-45 roll call vote on April 7, 2017.

All four of the votes detailed above were necessary in order to confirm Justice Gorsuch, but only one of them, the straight party-line vote to impose the nuclear option rule change, was used in the interest group ratings created by the American Conservative Union (ACU). The ACU creates a yearly rating of US legislators in order to assess and display how liberal or conservative a particular legislator is based on a subset (usually 25) of their roll call votes. These ratings purportedly "reflect how elected officials view the role of government in an individual's life," and they are "designed to educate the public about how consistently their elected officials adhere to conservatism" (Letter from the Chairman, ACU 2017 Ratings of Congress). These ratings are often cited by prominent politicians in Congress, and they are frequently used to demonstrate to the voting public a commitment to the conservative agenda. A high rating offers conservative members of Congress bragging rights to the public, and a low rating can be used as electoral fodder for primary challengers. The ACU prides itself on selecting roll call votes that provide important distinctions among legislators and give a broad picture of the ideological leanings of Congress members from

a small set of votes. “The votes selected by the ACU are not always considered the ‘most important’ votes; instead, the selected votes we score help reflect the ideological distinctions among our elected officials” (Selecting the Votes, ACU 2017 Ratings of Congress).

With their stated goals in mind, however, it is useful to see exactly where the ACU places legislators like Senators Heitkamp, Manchin, and Donnelly, all three of whom voted with the Republicans on three out of the four votes related to the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch. Given that voting behavior, it might be reasonable to expect that the ACU conveys this information to the public and portrays these three as moderates who are sometimes willing to work across the aisle. Instead, in their ratings for 2017, the ACU placed all three senators in the “Coalition of the Radical Left,” a category reserved for legislators who receive scores less than or equal to 10% agreement with conservative principles. Both Donnelly and Heitkamp received scores for the year of 0/21 on votes which are supposed to show the range of ideological distinctions among legislators, while Manchin voted only twice with the conservative positions chosen by the ACU and received an 8% rating for the year. In fact, with his 8% conservative rating, Senator Manchin achieved the highest (i.e., most conservative) rank among the Democrats and Independents in the Senate that year. By contrast, the lowest ranking Republican (Susan Collins (R-ME)) had a score of 48%.

Clearly there is some disconnect between the stated goals of the ACU and the actual ratings that result from their selection of important or ideologically distinctive votes. There is a 40-point gap in the ideological spectrum in which no senators are classified (between 8% and 48%), which, unless the Democrats in the Senate really are completely devoid of conservative principles, puts the lie to the ACU’s claim to provide a broad ideological picture across the board. By contrast, the DW-NOMINATE scores for the 115th Senate also have Joe Manchin as the most conservative Democrat and Susan Collins as the most liberal Republican, but Senators Heidi Heitkamp and Joe Donnelly are listed as the second and third most conservative members of the Democratic party, rather than some of the most liberal (recall that the ACU gave both of those senators a conservative score of 0%). Indeed, the difference between Senators Manchin and Collins is 0.053 on a scale from -1 to 1, while the difference from Senator Manchin to the most liberal member of the Democratic party

is 0.707, showing that Senator Manchin is located much closer on this measure of ideology to the conservatives than to the liberals in the Senate. But if the motivation for the ACU to create these legislator ratings is not to provide a broad ideological picture of the legislature, as they claim, then what is it?

My project is to answer this question, not just for the ACU but for other interest groups as well, who likewise produce legislator ratings based on a selected sample of roll call votes. I posit that other motivations, besides purely educational ones, underlie the selection of roll calls that are used in interest group ratings. Such motivations could include, for example, electoral motivations, maintaining partisan brand names, forcing reluctant legislators to vote with the interest group's preferred policy position or risk a lower score, and making specific legislators look more or less extreme than they really are.

In order to find out exactly what motivations are really driving the creation of these scores, I treat each interest group rating as a "test" of a legislator's ideology. Then, using a technique borrowed from the educational testing literature, I assess, not the resulting position of the legislator, but the revealed selection biases of the interest group who created the test. This technique uses item response theory to provide information about how well a particular test is written. It estimates how difficult each question is written to be, how well each question discriminates among test-takers at different levels, and finally how the test takers line up relative to one another on the ability scale being measured. By analyzing the roll call votes (e.g., the "ideological test" questions), I can use the interest group ratings as a mirror to see into their creators' motivations. Are they picking votes that target specific political opponents, for example? Or do they choose votes that make one party look better as a whole than another? These kinds of questions can be answered by turning the interest group ratings back on the interest groups themselves.

The three essays in this dissertation each expose new insights into the behaviors of interest groups who use roll call votes to rate members of Congress. I argue that the set of roll calls which are used in any ideology estimation technique has an effect on the order of legislators that is produced by that method. When the full roll call record is subsetting, as it is in interest group

ratings, then the choice of roll calls used to create the ratings often reveals more about the motives, priorities, and potential biases of those doing the estimation than about the legislators' ideologies. In the first essay, I trace the motivations of interest groups through their choice of roll calls and expose the groups' potential partisan biases using item response theory. In the second essay, this technique is applied to special interest groups like the NEA to show how the motivations of interest groups can be tracked and analyzed even if they order legislators based on single-issue preferences instead of general ideological leanings. Finally, the third essay examines the consequences of subsetting the roll call record at all, as interest groups do with every set of legislator ratings.

In general, this dissertation points to the need to better understand the uses, limitations, and possibilities of ideal point estimation techniques as they appear in political science. In addition, it exposes interest group ratings as an important tools to produce insights into the political world, and ones that should not be left dormant and forgotten as they have been since the development of NOMINATE scores. The rest of this introductory chapter is devoted to spelling out in more detail each of the three essays in this dissertation.

1.1. Interest Group Ratings in the House of Representatives

The first essay in this dissertation examines how interest group scores reveal the motives of the interest groups themselves. I focus on the ADA and the ACU because these two groups both claim to provide an overall picture of legislators' ideology with their ratings. Additionally, these two groups have also been used historically by political science research on legislator ideology (see, among others, Canes-Wrone et al (2002), Berry et al (1998), Groseclose et al (1999), Poole (1981), Poole and Rosenthal (1998), Reeher (2001)). Analyzing these two groups in particular makes the comparability of my results to other interesting studies much more feasible, and exposing the historical motivations of these two groups sheds new light on many interesting older problems. Finally, these two groups are the oldest partisan interest groups of their kind in the US, so their ratings, spanning over three decades and more, provide enough variation to make interesting statistical conclusions about the data.

I begin my analysis starting from 1980 to the present day. Although the ACU began publishing their legislator ratings in 1970, they did not make their choice of roll calls available to the public for the first decade in which they created their scores. The first year in which the actual votes that the ACU used are available to the public is 1980. The ADA makes all of their votes public from 1947 onward, but I analyze their records beginning with 1980 as well in order to ensure comparability with the ACU's scores.

After collecting the votes that the ADA and ACU used in their yearly interest group ratings over the designated time period, I run them through a Bayesian IRT model, which produces three parameters of interest. I use these parameters (alpha, the difficulty of the question; beta, the question's ability to discriminate among test takers; and theta, the estimate of where the test takers line up relative to one another) in my analysis of the ADA and ACU yearly legislator ratings of the House of Representatives with the following questions in mind. Are the groups picking questions that allow them to distinguish liberals from conservatives along the whole range of ideology, or are they picking questions that largely only distinguish one party from the other? Are there roll calls that these groups could have picked, but did not, that would have made for a better test of legislator ideology? How do the interest group ratings change the order and cardinal locations of legislators on the ideological scale relative to their positions in NOMINATE? What do the roll calls themselves reveal about the interest groups who chose them? Are interest groups choosing questions in response to changing institutional features, electoral challenges, or to pressure legislators into supporting specific policy goals? How do the interest group ratings line up with the stated goals of the interest groups themselves?

I find that the interest group ratings are crafted strategically, with an eye to distinguishing among members of the groups' preferred party, and making individual House members look more powerful than they really are in the face of party politics. Rather than presenting a complete picture of ideology using a few key votes, as they claim to do, the ADA and ACU choose votes that produce artificial divisions among their preferred party. These divisions can be used to pressure members to vote more or less conservatively or face potential electoral consequences.

This chapter offers several important contributions to the field of political science. First, the field of political science is broadened by applying the item response theory model from the educational testing literature to the analysis of roll call votes. This analysis allows new insights into the behavior, ideology, and relative preferences of legislators and interest groups to be exposed. Additionally, I build on existing literature about the nature of interest group ratings, including their tendency to lump enemies together and create artificial polarization, and I illuminate the need to update these findings to better reflect the institutional changes that have taken place in Congress over the last four decades. These new insights and analyses reveal interest group ratings as useful tools for political scientists to remember, even though their use has declined since the development of NOMINATE scores. These ratings are a valuable set of data that bring to light useful information about legislators, roll calls, and the groups who create them.

1.2. Issue-Specific Scores: The Case of the National Education Association

In my second essay, I shift gears to focus on a special application of the technique employed in my first article. So far, the IRT methodology has been used to examine measurements of general ideology from liberal to conservative. This chapter will demonstrate its usefulness in political science as a tool to analyze tests of any underlying ability given a set of topically related roll calls by looking at the interest group ratings created by the National Education Association (NEA).

While it is not the only single-issue interest group that creates legislator ratings from subsets of roll calls, the NEA is an ideal candidate for this study for many reasons. First, the NEA has a long history of advocating for its single-issue, support for public education. This means that there is ample data with which to study and track their motivations and priorities through time. Second, while their stated goal has remained consistent over the duration of the NEA's existence, their means of achieving that goal may have changed over time. Employing the IRT technique to their legislator ratings can shed some light on which of these goals received particular emphasis over the course of the NEA's history. Finally, the high-profile nature of the NEA along with its vast influence in the American political process make understanding its motivations a high priority

among political scientists and politicians alike. The IRT methodology can provide this kind of insight through its unique perspective on the choices the the NEA makes, and this will contribute to our overall understanding of the political interactions between legislators and one of the most influential lobbying groups in the country.

The NEA's legislator ratings are designed to provide the group's membership with an ordering of legislators on an educational dimension based on their relative preferences on this subject. I examine their ratings for both the House and the Senate over four Congresses, the 110th - 113th. I argue that the same technique that exposes the motivations of the ADA and ACU using their choice of votes can be applied to the NEA to evaluate their purposes in creating these scores and assess their success in accomplishing their goals over time.

After examining the NEA's explicit statements about the purposes and structure of their scores, I run the scores through the Bayesian IRT model and perform the same kind data analysis as in the first essay. This allows me to gain leverage on many important questions such as the following. Has the NEA computed scores in a consistent manner over time, or have they shifted from a bi-partisan, issue-focused group to a partisan group that merely distinguishes Republicans from Democrats in modern congresses? Is there a better subset of the roll call record that could provide a broader look at education-related preferences than the subset chosen by the NEA? Does the NEA construct their ratings differently for House members than for Senators due to differences in the two chambers' institutional features?

This technique can also illuminate many interesting features of the legislators themselves. I examine how the ordering of the legislators produced by the NEA's interest group scores compares to their general ideological line up using alternative sets of roll calls, and track this measurement through time. How often does the education dimension line up with the liberal-conservative dimension? In addition, I analyze how the content of education-related legislative preferences has changed over time. Has the NEA focused its priorities on roll calls related strictly to education, for example? Or has the NEA allowed other issues such as labor or finances to influence their ratings? These kinds of questions highlight the necessity of examining special interest groups like

the NEA in terms of tracking their motivations and priorities, and the IRT methodology borrowed from the educational testing literature and applied to the NEA's legislator ratings provides a unique perspective into the answers to these questions.

I find that the NEA does not choose roll calls that expose an education dimension that is separate from the liberal to conservative one that most political scientists rely on. They tend to include votes that are not strictly related to education in their ratings, which muddies their claim to be the authority on the educational preferences of members of Congress. Their ratings tend to line up with the liberal-conservative dimension found when analyzing all of the available roll calls in a particular Congress. Interestingly, a look at strictly educational roll calls as identified by recognized political experts⁴ also fails to produce a distinct education-related dimension that differs significantly from the liberal to conservative ideological one.

This chapter offers several important contributions for political science. First, it provides an important counterexample to a recent article by Sarah Anderson (2012), who claimed that interest groups that focus on special issues should be used to augment conclusions about Congress that rely solely on NOMINATE scores or the full roll call record to estimate legislator preferences. At least in the field of education, I find evidence that counters her conclusions of a distinct dimension. This chapter also echoes a well-known but rarely used lesson for any science: that repetition is necessary for validating scientific conclusions. I present an important robustness check on previously established conclusions using new data and new techniques, and the conflicting conclusions reveal the need for more research, data, and techniques to finally establish the correct answer.

1.3. Abbreviated Ideology

My third essay begins with the premise that interest groups might actually have the right idea, although they are not necessarily going about it the right way. Given the miscellanea often included in the roll call record, a smaller roll call set could potentially give a cleaner, more precise calculation of legislators' ideology than the full roll call record. But, if this subset is to be useful

⁴The Comparative Agendas Project