State and Local Public Policies Database 2011: Codebook

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Introduction

This database codes more than 200 public policies for each American state as of December 31, 2006 and as of December 31, 2008. In some cases, local policies are coded at the state level as well. The database is maintained on the World Wide Web at www.statepolicyindex.com and is free to the public. Public policies are categorized by topic into individual Microsoft Excel 97/2003 files. For information on sources and what each variable measures, consult the individual spreadsheets.

This document provides a guide to using the individual spreadsheets and summary data and state rankings on composite indicators of public policy, known in the literature as state "policy ideology" (Wright, Erikson, and McIver 1987; Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger 2008).

When using this database, please cite our published article describing and analyzing the project: Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger 2008.

References

Sorens, Jason, Fait Muedini, and William Ruger (2008). "State and Local Public Policies in 2006: A New Database." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 8 (3): 309-26.

Wright, Gerald C., Jr., Robert S. Erikson, and John P. McIver (1987). "Public Opinion and Policy Liberalism in the American States," *American Journal of Political Science* 31(4):980-1001.

Guide to the Spreadsheets

Each Excel spreadsheet starts with a different letter identifying the issue set under investigation. The individual variables in that spreadsheet all begin with the same letter, to ensure, for the purpose of data analysis using variables from different files, that no two variables have the same name.

Each spreadsheet has two worksheets: "Data" and "Metadata." In the "Data" worksheet, the first row contains a detailed description of each variable and its coding rule, while the second row gives the standardized variable name. In a few cases additional details about a variable's coding are contained within an Excel "comment" in the first row. The first column lists the states in alphabetical order (federal territories are excluded because of their differing policy powers), and the second column gives the year: usually 2006 and 2008, but some statistical data were collected for other dates as well.

In some spreadsheets, for instance "a_fiscal.xls," some variables were constructed from other variables, and in those cases the equations, where possible, were left intact so that the structural relationship among variables is clear. Be aware that when copying and pasting these constructed variables into new spreadsheets, they will need to be pasted as "values only" in order to retain the numerical values.

The "Metadata" spreadsheet displays the variables down the left-hand side in two columns, with detailed source information corresponding to each variable available in the other columns.

The only file that deviates from this general format, due to its size, is the occupational licensing spreadsheet (k_lic_09.xls). The field of occupational licensing is huge, and it was not possible for us to identify every occupational license in every state from the statutes. Instead, we used one secondary source, which we found to be of mediocre reliability, and coded 25 randomly sampled occupations (from among those licensed in some but not all states) from primary sources. Details are available in the "Metadata" tab of the spreadsheet. We also use occupational employment statistics to create summary estimates of the percentage of each state's workforce covered by an occupational license.

Finally, the "summary.xls" spreadsheet includes all the individual policy variables, except those variables that were used solely to construct composite variables, as well as the results of principal component analysis on those policy variables (the state policy ideology indices), and some institutional and opinion ideology measures.

The following files are included in the database:

- Codebook.pdf – This file
- a_fiscal_09.xls – Fiscal Policies
- b_guns_09.xls – Gun Control Policies
- c_drugs_09.xls – Alcohol, Marijuana, and *Salvia* Laws
- d_mala_09.xls – General *Mala Prohibita* and Civil Liberties Issues
- e_educ_09.xls – Education Laws
- f_land_09.xls – Land Use and Environmental Laws
- g_labor_09.xls – Labor Market Regulations

- h_health_09.xls – Health Insurance Regulations
- i_smoking_09.xls – Smoking and Tobacco Laws
- j_util_09.xls – Utilities (De)Regulation
- k_lic_09.xls – Occupational Licensing Requirements
- l_forf_09.xls – Civil Asset Forfeiture Laws
- m_ed_09.xls – Eminent Domain Reforms
- o_courts_09.xls – State Liability Systems Surveys
- p_abor_09.xls – Abortion Laws
- q_death_09.xls – Death Penalty
- r_enfor_09.xls – Law Enforcement Statistics
- s_marr_09.xls – Marriage and Partnership Laws
- t_elec_09.xls – Campaign Finance Laws
- v_race_09.xls – Affirmative Action/Racial Preference Bans
- summary.xls – Summary File with State Ideology Measures

Changes from the First Edition

We have made numerous changes and improvements in the 2011 edition of the database. We have fundamentally reconceived the occupational licensing (see previous section) and civil asset forfeiture measures. The latter policies are now measured on the basis of comprehensive research from the Institute for Justice (Williams, Holcomb, Kovandzic, and Bullock 2010). Williams et al. regress actual forfeiture takings on three measures of civil asset forfeiture policy. Using their regression estimates, we reconstruct a summary indicator of civil asset forfeiture policy for each state on the basis of its policies in each of these three areas.

Another significant change is that we now measure tax revenue and spending as a percentage of personal income rather than "adjusted GSP." The reason we have done so is that personal income appears to be much more accurate indicator of state and local governments' tax base than any alternative. We discovered this by regressing total tax and expenditure figures on personal income, GSP, adjusted GSP, and earnings by place of work – all together and individually. We found that personal income was the best predictor of tax revenue and expenditure, and that once it was included in a model of taxation or spending, none of the alternative indicators of tax base had a statistically significant, positive association with either variable.

We include a number of new variables in this edition of the database, including more gun laws, *Salvia divinorum* prohibitions, a reconceived, disaggregated indicator of state fireworks laws, state religious freedom restoration acts (RFRAs), restaurant trans-fat bans, texting while driving bans, policies for taking DNA from criminal suspects, laws affecting whether it is legal to audio-record public officials such as police, more land-use policies, state attempts to regulate greenhouse gases, a reconceived summary indicator of workers' compensation regulations, Arizona's E-Verify employer mandate, Massachusetts' individual health insurance mandate, more arrest statistics for certain categories of nonviolent crimes, and state affirmative action prohibitions, which receive their own spreadsheet. There are now more than 200 individual policies available in the summary.xls spreadsheet, and of course many of those are disaggregated into finer-grained measures in the individual policy spreadsheets. Almost all new variables have been back-coded to December 31, 2006 to maintain a time series.

State Policy Ideology (summary.xls)

The file "summary.xls" includes most of the individual policies (some of them incorporated into higher-level indices) as well as the first two components from principal component analysis (PCA) on these policy variables. The third component extracted from PCA was obviously capturing some distinctive aspects of Alaska, and therefore it was rejected along with all components below it (in terms of eigenvalue). The two significant components that remained represent two dimensions of state policy ideology: liberalism-conservatism and civil libertarianism-authoritarianism (what Sorens et al. (2008) called "policy urbanism"). The following scatterplot inverts both dimensions for greater intuitive comprehension. The left-right "X" axis represents "policy conservatism," and the vertical "Y" axis represents "civil libertarianism."