Abstract:

Ideal-point estimation, in which estimates of legislator ideology are computed from roll-call votes or other similar data, has become relatively commonplace in political science. However, little is known about the properties of these estimators. The two most common examples—Poole and Rosenthal's NOMINATE and Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers's IDEAL—are both complicated by the Neyman–Scott problem.

This talk presents several theoretical results regarding ideal-point estimation when the number of bills is allowed to grow but the number of legislators is fixed. I show that consistent estimators of the ideal points are impossible in the most common parametric ideal-point models. I provide counterexamples to consistency of common ideal-point estimators with regard to the rank-order of the ideal points. Finally, I show that consistent estimation of the rank-order of the ideal-points is possible under reasonably weak assumptions even if the most common current estimators do not do so.