Dynamics of Gubernatorial Approval: Evidence from a New Database[1]

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This paper introduces the State Executive Approval Database, a dataset of gubernatorial approval ratings that updates and adds to data previously collected by Beyle et al. (2002). In addition to the survey marginals, the dataset presents continuous quarterly and annual measures of the latent level of governor approval that are amenable for time series analysis. After evaluating how survey data availability varies across states and over time, I use the data to evaluate whether governors receive a honeymoon. While new governors do not have higher than expected levels of approval, the public expresses comparatively low levels of disapproval for new governors. This honeymoon is largely restricted to their first quarter in office and only occurs when they are elected to their first term. Governors who take office after their predecessor resigned get a slightly longer and more sustained reprieve from disapproval. Governor approval is also significantly shaped by unemployment levels in their state. These data will provide scholars with new opportunities to study accountability and representation at the state level.

[1] The author thanks the Allen R. Bennett Professorship for its financial support and Greg Love for his help with the wcalc codes (any kludgey code is my fault). Updtade versions of the SEAD dataset are available at https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/sead

Pat Quinn, then governor of Illinois (2009-2014) said that "I don't aspire to have high approval ratings. … I'd rather focus on honesty than popularity."[2] Yet most governors would disagree with the first part of that statement. Popular governors are more likely to have success in implementing their agenda (Rosenthall 1990, Dometrius 2002, c.f. Ferguson 2003) and, as a result, popular governors tend to propose ambitious policy agendas to leverage that popularity (Kouser and Phillips 2012). Governor popularity is also strongly related to their electoral fortunes when they seek reelection (Kenney and Rice 1983), a reality that Governor Quinn confronted when his 38% approval rating in his last quarter in office contributed to his narrow electoral defeat.

Leader popularity is also of interest to scholars interested in understanding the process of political accountability. If leader popularity rises with strong performance in office, then leaders should have incentives to focus on providing popular outcomes. Thus scholars often hope to document that leader support fluctuates with the economy, with changes in tax policy, with crime rates, or with performance in dealing with natural disasters to demonstrate the public is paying attention to how their leaders behave (e.g. Niemi et al. 1995, MacDonald and Sigelman 1999, Cohen and King 2004). A related question is whether the public has the sophistication to separate the actions of state-level officials from national ones (e.g. Simon 1989, Partin 1995, Orth 2001, Gelineau and Remmer 2006). If states are the laboratory for American democracy, then understanding how the public evaluates state leaders can provide new insights into how well democratic accountability and responsiveness work.

[2] Warren, James. 2013. "Can't Pat Quinn Get any Respect?" *Chicago Magazine*, Feb 11. https://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/March-2013/Can-Pat-Quinn-Get-Any-Respect/

Yet while national-level polls on presidential approval are common, state-level polls on governor approval are considerably rarer and, with the exception of the Job Approval Rating (JAR) database compiled by Beyle et al. (2002) which was last updated in 2009, have not been compiled in a single source. Then combining these surveys into a single series that can be analyzed requires ways to deal with differences in question wording, sampling methodologies, and other house effects as series are combined and to interpolate for missing data. As a result, there have been few time series analyses of governor approval that combine data from more than a handful of states and many fundamental questions about the dynamics of governor approval remain understudied.[3]

This paper details a database that could be used to resolve those issues: The State Executive Approval Database (SEAD) version 1.0.[4] This data updates and expands the JAR to the present day, roughly doubling the number of survey marginals that are available. Then I extract for each state a single continuous series of governor approval that is amenable to time series analysis. This database, which will be released with the publication of this article, will allow scholars to both more fully model the determinants of governor approval over time and the consequences of it.

[3] The Cooperative Election Study has a question on governor approval that allows for widespread coverage and can be used to study political accountability (e.g., Wolak and Parinandi forthcoming) but which is not amenable for time series analysis of dynamics, for studying events that occur distant from elections, or for studying the period before the CES was created.

[4] While the initial release of the SEAD database is confined to governors in the United States, I intend to collect data on presidential approval at the state level and on subnational executives in other countries as time, resources, and data availability permit and will include them in future releases.

This paper lays out the methodological challenges of conceptualizing and measuring governor approval and details the survey data collected for this project and how the availability of gubernatorial popularity measures varies across states and within them over time. I describe the procedure used to combine these data and extract the latent approval level of governors over time. I then illustrate the utility of this data by looking at whether governors benefit from honeymoons at the start of their term, a question that requires time series data to answer properly. It shows that while levels of approval are relatively unaffected by a new governor taking office, new governors experience particularly low levels of disapproval in their first quarter, although disapproval levels start to rise soon afterward. It also shows that governors replacing a governor who resigned receive experience particularly low levels of disapproval that last throughout their term. These dynamics suggest that leaders have a brief but potentially potent window to push through their agenda. These simple models also illustrate the power of comparable, time series measures of leader approval across a wide variety of states for our understanding of democratic accountability and representation.

The Availability of Surveys on Governor Approval by State and Time Period

Collecting data on governor approval has two simple logistical issues. The first is to identify and then access governor approval data – both academic and commercial – across states and over time. In this dataset, I focus on polls with state-specific samples instead of compiling data from polls that have national-level samples which can then be reweighted to reflect state-specific population characteristics (e.g. Lax and Phillips 2009) because the former generally relies on larger samples of respondents for each state and does not require assumptions about correlations between

attitudes and demographics being constant across states.[5] Some states have academic pollsters who collect and archive data on public websites. Other states have newspapers that sponsor polls and either archive them or publish them in archives that can be accessed online. Commercial survey houses then often meet market demands for timely readings of executive approval, but they are under no obligation to share their data; they may even have to honor client wishes that the data remain private or have the data available only at high prices.[6] Compiling these data thus requires identifying these various actors and recording the information on publicly available polls.

A second key challenge of data collection stems from the divergent conceptualizations and measurements of approval. I focus on attitudinal measures of support for the incumbent executive and do not collect data on vote intentions that reflect the popularity of the governor and also the popularity/viability of their opponent. But I cast a wide net of measures asking about the "approval", "favorability", or "ratings" of the executive's "management", "job", "performance", or "image". These questions are roughly comparable to the question wordings commonly used to measure presidential approval. I also restrict our data collection to questions asking about general job performance and not their work on a specific issue (e.g. managing the economy, responding to

[5] In particular, I do not include estimates from the Cooperative Elections Study (CES) because the sample sizes in many states tend to be very small. Yet because of the scope of its geographic coverage, subsequent releases will contain it so that users can decide whether to use latent series that include or exclude these samples and to ensure that their results are robust to the choice of indicators.

[6] Morning Consult, for example, used to publicly release ratings of governors from their online polls but placed the data behind a paywall in early 2020.

a natural disaster, or fighting the COVID-19 pandemic) that may not be correlated with other aspects of their performance. By focusing on this narrow set of questions I hope the approval series are likely to reflect a unidimensional construct of public support for the executive.

The starting point for understanding governor approval is the Job Approval Ratings (JAR) database compiled by Beyle, Niemi, and Sigelman (2002).[7] I extracted from the dataset measures of governor approval that are not domain specific (e.g. questions on how the governor is managing the economy) and are based on adults/voters/registered voters/likely voters and not subsamples such as just Democrats or Republicans or businesspeople. The resulting database has 5115 unique measures of governor approval going from 1947 to 2009, but has not been updated in the last 12 years.

To extend this dataset to the present, I used internet and social media searches and communications with scholars and pollsters to identify governor approval polls conducted since the JAR was released. I have collected an additional 5200-plus measurements of governor approval from polls with exclusively, state-specific samples through 2020,[8] for a total of 10,328 unique observations when combined with the JAR data.[9] The combined dataset has data from 1281 unique

[7] The JAR database is hosted and maintained by Jennifer Jensen (https://jmj313.web.lehigh.edu/node/6).

[8] Data collection has continued through 2022 but the first public release of the data stops in 2020. The goal will be to release an updated version of the dataset roughly annually.

[9] The SEAD dataset contains a variable identifying which surveys came from the JAR and users should cite both the SEAD and JAR datasets to recognize the contribution of the original compilers *and* also acknowledge Professor Jensen for her work maintaining JAR.

data series (series where the pollster and response options are constant).[10] For each survey I collected, where possible, the percentage of respondents giving the incumbent a positive rating and a negative rating. For variables with even numbers of response options, the scale is divided such that those above the midpoint are positive and those below are negative. For those with an odd number of response options, the middle category is excluded. From this, I also calculate the net approval rating of the governor (% positive-% negative) and the relative approval rating (the %positive/(% positive + % negative) that gave either a positive or a negative rating) to take into account differences generated by the presence of middle categories or non-response/don't know rates. If only the positive percentage or the net approval rating was reported, only that number is recorded. Thus using different measures will generate different numbers of observations.

[10] Because the method described below compares across series to generate the latent dataset, I need to divide the series into as few as possible. As a result, I combine series where respondents are given dichotomous choices (e.g. approve/disapprove) with those where respondents are given qualifications of those dichotomies (e.g. strong approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, or strongly disapprove) because I believe the opinions are anchored on the midpoint; in many cases survey firms will first ask the dichotomous question before asking if you strongly or somewhat approve/disapprove. The largest simplification, however, is that I do not systematically separate surveys from the same firm with different sampling targets (e.g. who sometimes release a poll of registered voters and other times release a poll of likely voters). Average ratings of Republican and Democratic governors do not differ between likely voters or registered voters. However, surveys of only adults tend to have slightly higher ratings of Democrats than they do Republicans.

The availability of data by state is outlined in Table 1. While all 50 states are included in the dataset, not all states have equal numbers of surveys available about them. Idaho, for example, has only had 50 publicly published measures of governor approval from 1985-2020. In addition to Idaho, Mississippi, North and South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming each average fewer than 2 surveys a year in the period since surveys first became available. Then there are other states like Michigan, New Jersey, and New York where an average year will have more than a dozen published surveys in it.[11] Then surveys are not distributed equally across years either (Figure 1); governor approval data exploded in availability after 2004 with the increase in web-based polls and online archiving and while levels of polling have remained high since, they have diminished in recent years.

(Table 1 and Figure 1 about here)

To understand some of the sources of these variations in the frequency of polling across states and within them over time, in Table 2 I model the number of measurements released in each state by quarter, starting in 1980. I focus on four sets of patterns. The first is whether polls on governors are shaped by the election calendar for governors, such that interest in the public's

[11] It is worth noting that even in the states where governor approval is polled most frequently, data is comparatively scarce. For example, the number of presidential approval polls conducted in El Salvador in 2020 (20, in a non-presidential election year) is greater than the number conducted in California in 2020 (12) and is roughly comparable to the number conducted in New York (21), Pennsylvania (22), or Texas (22) (see Carlin et al. 2018 and www.executiveapproval.org). Then while there were 445 estimates of governor approval in the United States in 2020, there are over 1010 national-level presidential approval surveys available in the United States in 2020.

evaluation of governors is limited to the lead-up to elections. Specifically, I look at whether the number of polls measuring governor approval is higher in each of the 4 quarters of a gubernatorial election year or in the two quarters before a special election (e.g. a recall). I interact this timer measure with the level of competitiveness of the race when the governor was last elected and with the competitiveness of the upcoming election, each measured as the difference between the two leading candidates and with higher values representing less competitive races because the press and the public are more likely to pay attention to competitive elections. I look at both the last election and the next election (albeit in separate models) because I don't know which temporal perspective is more likely to generate polling. For states where the next election will be held after 2020, the lead variable is coded as missing and those observations are excluded. The second explanation for polling frequency, in contrast, has nothing to do with the governor but evaluates if state-level polling infrastructure and poll timing reflect the presidential election calendar, with governor approval being added to surveys that are focused on presidential elections. Thus I look at whether there are more polls about governors in the four quarters of the presidential election year and whether this is especially true in years where the margin between the top two candidates in the previous election or the upcoming election was smaller. Third, I look at whether larger states are more likely to have more polls by controlling for the logged population of the state. Finally, I control for the temporal expansion of polls over time documented in Figure 1 by adding dummy variables for 5 year periods between 1980 and 2020. I model this as a negative binomial model with state-level random effects.[12]

[12] Overdispersion in the data makes the negative binomial specification preferable to a Poisson distribution.

(Table 2 about here)

The results in Table 2 show that surveys about governors are driven in part by the gubernatorial electoral calendar. Compared to an average quarter in a non-gubernatorial election year, the second, third, and fourth quarters of an election year see higher levels of polling about the governor. Interestingly, it is the quarter before the election that sees the greatest increase in polling and not the election quarter itself-this reflects a decrease in polling in November and December after the election.[13] The larger interaction terms in the second set of models suggest that the increase in polling is particularly pronounced in states where the upcoming election is expected to be tight and decreases as the margin between the two leading candidates in the next election increases. States where the previous election was tight also tend to see more polling on average, but the previous race does not shape polling dynamics in the lead-up to the next gubernatorial election. There is also an increase in polling the quarter before special elections. Thus polling about governors is often helping to inform observers about the governor's standing in the upcoming election.

Yet Table 2 also shows that surveys about governors are shaped by electoral dynamics at the presidential level that generate polling in a state. States that are expected to be competitive electorally tend to have more polls conducted in them. There is also a distinct electoral cycle in polling, although it differs somewhat in specification across models. Model 1 suggests that as the presidential election nears, polling about governors increases in states that were competitive last time, with polling especially high in both the quarter of the presidential election and the quarter

[13] While October is the month with the most polls, December is the month with the fewest number of polls in the dataset, followed by November and January.

before it occurs. In contrast, the second model looking at the competitiveness of the upcoming presidential race suggests that competitive states tend to have more polls on average but that non-competitive states are especially less likely to have polls in the quarters right before the election. Thus data availability on governor support is often a function of national-level factors that are not connected to the governor at all.

Finally, the distribution of polls is shaped by general structural factors. In particular, polling is more common in larger states than in smaller ones. Finally, the period dummies show that the frequency of polls has generally increased over time, with a particularly large increase in the period since the late 2000s.

These dynamics across states have important implications for what one can do with data over time. States with large populations, competitive presidential and gubernatorial elections, and with presidential and gubernatorial elections on non-concurrent cycles will have richer series than will small states without competitive elections. Moreover, there is less data on governor approval the further back in time one goes. These limitations of the data are important for working with the data-in some cases they make it impossible to estimate the measure of latent leader popularity discussed below.

Using the Data to Extract Measurements of the Latent Level of Governor Approval Over Time

Despite their breadth, the data on governor approval compiled and described have limitations in their use. For example, if multiple measures of governor approval have been conducted at the same point in time and take slightly divergent values, it is unclear which is the one that scholars should use as the measure of governor approval at that period. Moreover, if one is interested in changes in approval over time instead of just levels or to see how long an event

affects approval for, then one needs to not just have contemporaneous measures of approval but a way to connect them to other measures that come before or after them. [14] Dealing with these challenges requires a way to combine the data from various surveys into a single, ongoing measure of government approval.

To solve these issues, I treat governor approval as a latent variable that is not directly observable but is approximated through questions in public opinion surveys. Divergence across surveys can occur due to sampling variation, but surveys also have a range of methodological issues—including variations in survey question wording, survey house effects, item effects, and response effects—that can cause measures to systematically diverge. The various reported measurements of governor approval thus partially tap into the underlying concept but none of which perfectly measures it.

When estimating the value of a latent variable, one strategy is to combine data from multiple indicators over time to separate the latent variable from measurement noise and from systematic biases. Repeated observations improve the precision of estimates. Temporal variation within series helps mitigate the measurement problem inherent in survey research questions because temporal changes in attitudes measured in the same way over time reflect changes in attitudes, not particular aspects of the measurement instrument such as question wording or individuals' interpretations of survey items (Mueller 1970). By focusing on how series from the same firm with a constant measurement vary over time, I can isolate the latent attitude from its

[14] Previous studies using the JAR either took the average across surveys in a month or model approval as the dependent variable without taking into account any possible autocorrelation in the data.

measurement. Then covariation across multiple times series improves measurement reliability. Any given survey or series can be an outlier. Moreover, we should expect systematic errors owing to survey house effects (non-random differences in measures of approval unique to each polling firm) as well as item effects (variations in question wording biasing results in one direction or another). Aggregating among several closely related items across different surveys, however, allows the signal to stand out from the noise. If multiple series measure the same trend then it is unlikely to be a function of house effects, survey response effects, and other issues of measurement. Whether the various time series indeed tap the same underlying construct becomes an empirical question. If so, I can use the commonality in their dynamics to estimate a weighted average of executive popularity.

Combining data from multiple series also allows us to solve an additional problem that emerges from changes in the frequency of different survey series from the same state over time. Some firms poll only at election times, some periodicals that used to sponsor polls have stopped doing so, new players have entered the market but do not have historical data, and then firms occasionally change question wording. By using surveys from multiple firms and noting how they covary with each other, I can use that combination to adjust for gaps in any single series.

To combine the various series and to extract their common variance, I use the dyads-ratio algorithm, developed by Stimson (1991) to extract latent variables from multiple survey questions. The algorithm, implemented in various interactions of his WCALC software package,[15] is built on

[15] The SEAD v 1.0 uses an R version of the algorithm by Stimson and updated by Patrick English. https://github.com/patrick-eng/bootstrap.dyads . For a more detailed discussion of the history and mechanisms of the dyads-ratio approach, see Stimson (2018).

the idea that if a given time series is a valid measure of approval, then the ratio between any two values in the series is a relative measure of approval over time. The approach converts all series in ratios between each observation in each series and then the algorithm assesses the common variance among the resultant ratio series while taking into account their sample size as a measure of survey precision. From this, reliability measures for each series are produced and serve two purposes: (1) they are used to weight each series in generating the latent measure of approval, and (2) they indicate whether a unidimensional construct is supported and how strongly the input series correlate with it. Then since the input series are converted to unit-less ratios, the resulting output lacks units and the final step of the algorithm uses the weighted values of the original series to recode the ratios back into levels of approval.[16]

I can illustrate the need for these methods as well as the utility of the solution with data from New York. New York's large population makes it a frequently polled state (Table 1); 19

[16] Alternative methods to combine latent series have been proposed such as aggregate Bayesian item-response theory (McGann 2014) and Bayesian latent trait models (ex. Claassen 2019). While previous research has shown some differences in the production of measures of policy mood depending on the aggregation approach, this is much less of a concern regarding executive approval. (Citation suppressed) show that executive approval is less sensitive to the choice of aggregation methods than other data series are because of the relatively coherent nature and high frequency of the input series. One weakness of the dyads ratio is that it does not estimate uncertainty estimates and so users should remember that the latent series is based on estimates that have inherent uncertainty in them.

pollsters either currently publish measures of governor approval or have regularly done so in the past. Yet, these series differ in their temporal coverage and continuity. Some began polling regularly in the 1980s while others have only begun in the last year or two. Then the survey questions being used vary substantially across surveys. Polling questions tapping governor approval have included questions such as: "Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion about [Governor Name]?", "How would you rate the job that [Name] is doing as Governor? Would you rate it excellent, good, fair, or poor?", "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Andrew Cuomo is handling his job as governor?", and "Is your opinion of [Name] favorable, unfavorable or haven't you heard enough about him?" The specific response options (approve/disapprove, strongly approve/somewhat approve/somewhat disapprove/strongly disapprove, etc.) also vary by firm and/or time period. Some firms use a variety of question wordings; Siena College's research institute, for example, has asked questions asking respondents whether they "approve or disapprove" of the governor, whether they would rate his performance as "excellent, good, only fair, or poor", and whether they have a "favorable or unfavorable" opinion of the governor.

The variety of series available for New York governors is graphed in the first panel of Figure 2. Series differ in their length, with some being very short. Yet even if we look at the long-running series that would potentially allow for time-series analysis, they are not identical. The Figure 2b, for example, combines the long-running Quinnipiac University Poll's questions on governor approval, the Siena College Research Poll's questions about whether the governor is viewed favorably, and Marist College's poll asking whether the governor can be rated as doing an excellent job. Each series has certain advantages: the Marist College poll has the longest history but is asked less frequently than the other polls are, which means it misses variation, especially in recent years. The Sienna poll, in contrast, is much higher frequency but has a much shorter history

and this specific question was not asked for several years in the middle of the 2000s. Finally, the Quinnipiac poll has a longer history than the Sienna poll and a higher frequency than the Marist poll but a lower temporal frequency than the Siena poll and so it, like the Marist poll, misses some changes. Then the surveys all have different point estimates of how much the public approves of the leader, which are evidence of house effects or question wording effects. So Yet the series seem to rise and fall together (with occasional outliers), suggesting that there is a common latent series.

(Figure 2 about here)

Using all the series in Figure 2a, I used the dyads-ratio method to generate a latent series combining them for each quarter.[17] Figure 2c graphs the latent measure which covers the entire period for which data are available and has controlled for the house and measurement effects while still capturing the variation in approval that exists over time. It captures the rise and fall of governor support due to new leaders taking office, scandals, and the recent COVID pandemic that generated a rally effect for Cuomo. The raw data points that surround the line show how the latent series reduces the impact of outliers and is less volatile than individual surveys are (in part due to aggregating to quarters instead of months) but still follows the overall ebbs and flows of the data.

I have repeated the above process for all states in the dataset and these estimated approval

[17] New York is one of few states where a monthly series could be reliably estimated; I present the quarterly series here because quarterly data is the level at which most states should be studied given the frequency of data. Then while all series are included in the estimation process, series must contain at least two measurements separate quarters that overlap with eat least one survey to be used in the dyad-ratio calculations.

series are released as part of the SEAD v.1.0.[18] While I focus here on quarterly measures, the public release contains estimates at the annual level as well for scholars interested in policy outcomes that occur annually. I have estimated separate measures of the approval rating, the disapproval rating, the net approval rating, and the relative approval rating as described above. In some cases, there are too few surveys (or there is too little overlap across series) to estimate one of these series for a state; relative approval, for example, is only available for 46 states. Then even in states where the algorithm can generate a combined series, there can be temporal gaps where no polls were conducted (e.g., non-election years) or have series that don't overlap with other series. For example, there are 5 states where there have been no published polls of the governor's popularity (that I have identified) since December 2019.[19] The algorithm interpolates the old value until a new value is provided for that state. Users should consult the variable measuring the number of survey series available in a quarter in making their modeling choices; in the models below I exclude any periods where 3 quarters in a row were interpolated. Models looking at the effect of an event should exclude any events that occurred in quarters where opinion was interpolated to avoid downward biased estimates.

While the full set of series are available online, Figure 3 illustrates how quarterly series look in four different states to illustrate the divergence of dynamics across states. The solid lines represent the series and the hashes at the bottom denote quarters where at least one valid poll was

[18] Because the series is estimated with the addition of new surveys, each new release will have slightly different values for historical data as new surveys are added. Users should thus note the release version of the dataset when citing the data.

[19] Nebraska, North Dakota, Rhode Island, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

conducted. In each state, periods without surveys where executive approval is estimated to be constant are visible. Connecticut and Florida (and New York in Figure 2) are examples of states where governor approval ebbs and flows significantly over time and, in the case of Florida, displays significant volatility from month to month. Yet the flows are quite different in each state, reflecting state-level dynamics more than national-level processes. Louisiana is also a state where governor approval has varied quite a bit (e.g., increasing massively with the transition from Jindal to Bel Edwards) but where a lack of data makes the series quite short. North Carolina, in contrast, is a state where polling is frequent but where governor approval has tended to be fairly steady. Exploring the roots of these differences across states is one potential use of these data.

(Figure 3 about here)

An Application-Do Governors Have Honeymoon Effects

To illustrate how these data can be used to explore questions of approval dynamics, I examine here whether governors have consistent honeymoons. Previous work on American presidents suggests that there is a popularity cycle whereby executives start with higher support and also often get a bump at the end of their term (Mueller 1973, Stimson 1976), a pattern that has also been documented in presidential systems outside of the United States (Cuzán and Bundrick 1997, Carlin et al. 2018). That initial wave of warm feelings might give the executive leverage to enact their agenda early in their term. Yet there have been few systematic studies on whether governors experience a similar honeymoon and they reach divergent conclusions. Crew and Weiher (1996), for example, only find a honeymoon in one of the three states they study. Beyle et al. (2002) document a small honeymoon effect but argue that governors' honeymoons are weaker than presidents' are and find substantial variation across states. Finally, King and Cohen (2004) find that, on average, governor popularity is falling over time and then rebounds at the end of the

term. Thus, the degree to which governors get a honeymoon is an open empirical question.

The mixed results regarding gubernatorial honeymoons are somewhat surprising given the robust literature on presidential honeymoons. The divergence between governors and the president may reflect important differences in the opportunities facing executives at the national and sub-national levels. Governors are not as well-known as presidents, and their inauguration and early policy announcements are unlikely to be covered outside local media. Thus, governors are not launched into office with the same level of media attention that is expected to generate presidential honeymoon effects. Yet governors should gain support coming from their electoral victories and even local media coverage should generate some positive attention. Thus, I expect gubernatorial honeymoons to emerge in the data.

To answer this question, I use data from the EAD database as it is available from the period 1976 to 2019. I start in 1976 (for the states where data are available for this period) because this is when state-level unemployment estimates are first available and I stop in 2019 because the COVID pandemic dramatically changes the basis on which governors are held accountable (Singer 2021). I measure approval in three ways. I start with the measure of relative approval that previous work (e.g., Beyle et al. 2002, King and Cohen 2005) has suggested is the best way to take into account differences across surveys: the measure records the percentage that has a favorable opinion of the governor among all those that have an opinion. Specifically, it divides the percentage of the public who approved of the governor by the percentage that gave a positive or negative evaluation of the governor (i.e., excluding those that gave a neutral response or did not have an opinion). This measure of relative approval allows for greater comparability within a governor's term as levels of awareness of the governor change. After modeling this series, I then model the raw approval numbers and the raw disapproval numbers separately to see if any honeymoon comes from

governors receiving a bump in their approval that then fades or from governors not receiving disapproval early in their term.

To test for the presence of honeymoon effects, I follow Chappell and Keech (1985) and Carlin et al. (2018) and add dummy variables for the first, second, and third terms the governor is in office. If the governor has a honeymoon and is more popular than they would be in an average quarter, then each of these variables should be positively signed. Because Stimson (1976), Cohen and King (2004), and Carlin et al. (2018) find that leaders also receive a slight bump at the end of their term as the outgoing executive either runs for reelection or is able to stand above the election fray, I also add a dummy variable for the last quarter of their term. Because the honeymoon is likely to be larger for new governors than for ones the public is familiar with, I differentiate the starts of first terms from the start or second/third terms. I also do not interpolate any missing values in the first three quarters because the interpolated values are likely to miss honeymoon bumps that deviate from previous/subsequent quarters and so periods are excluded if a survey was not conducted in that quarter. To ensure that results are comparable across models and do not differ due to sample composition effects I only include the 44 states where reliable series could be estimated for all three outcome variables.[20]

While I focus on honeymoon effects, I control for other factors that may drive governor approval. In particular, I control for the state of the economy at the time of the survey. Previous work shows that governors are held accountable for the level of unemployment in their state, with

[20] The 6 missing states are Hawaii, Idaho, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Vermont. The results are substantively the same if all available series are used for each model; see Table A1 in the supplemental documents.

a debate over whether the public is more strongly attuned to the absolute level of unemployment or the degree to which state unemployment levels deviate from national trends (Crew et al. 2002, Cohen and King 2004, King and Cohen 2005). My analysis (not shown here) suggests that national unemployment trends do not have a significant negative effect on governor approval when state-level trends are controlled for and that results are similar when the raw unemployment levels are used instead of relative unemployment levels. I thus focus on raw unemployment levels in the analysis below. The average for the three months of the quarter is used to generate the quarterly measure and I include both the unemployment rate in the quarter of the survey and two lags to capture a potential delay in how the public learns about and responds to the economy. I then control for the demographic traits of the governor. While there has been no systematic study of whether governor approval differs for male and female governors, female presidents see different levels of support than male presidents (Carlin, Carreras, and Love 2020) and so I include a dummy variable for female governors. To see if unelected officials get a rally when they take office and also are held to different standards, I include a dummy variable for non-elected governors who took over after a governor was impeached, resigned, or died and also a dummy variable that designates the quarter that the governor was impeached/resigned or died along with two lags to see how long that effect lasts. Finally, I include a measure of the governor's partisanship.

I estimate the basic economy models using a generalized least-squares estimator. An Im-Pesaran-Shin[21] test indicates that all panels do not have a unit root and so I do not first difference

[21] Because the series are unbalanced, I perform the Im-Pesaran-Shin test. Test statistic of the null that all relative approval panels have a unit root is -12.4716 ($p<0.001$), that the approval series is

the data. The Woolridge test confirms, however, that there is substantial autocorrelation in these series that needs to be adjusted for.[22] To account for heterogeneity in the autocorrelation structure across states, I use a panel-specific AR(1) correction (Beck and Katz 1995). The estimated autocorrelation correction varies substantially across states, suggesting that a single pooled time correction such as a lagged dependent variable or pooled AR(1) term would not capture the serial correlation in these data.

The results in Table 3 confirm that the average governor does indeed get a honeymoon in their relative approval. In their first quarter, their relative approval is roughly 5 percentage points higher than it would be at any similar point of their term. That bump is relatively short-lived; their approval then tends to fall in their second quarter but it remains 1.8 points above its long-term trend while falling to just over 1.3 above their long-term trend in their third quarter. Any honeymoon is also limited to governors taking office for the first time; the approval bump in the first quarter of the second term is not significantly different from 0, although reelected governors do tend to have slightly lower levels of disapproval. The typical gubernatorial honeymoon is also smaller and shorter than the one received by the average newly elected president in the Americas (Carlin et al. 2018), suggesting that the media attention mechanisms drive presidential honeymoons are more limited for governors.

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entirely unit roots is 11.5793 ($p<0.001$), that all disapproval series have unit roots is 12.4716 ($p<0.001$), and that the unemployment series is all unit roots is -16.0169 ($p<0.001$).

[22] The test statistic that there is no autocorrelation in the relative approval series is 256.269 ($p<0.001$), 298.517 ($p<0.001$) for the approval series, and 246.282 ($p<0.001$) for the disapproval series.

(Table 3 about here)

The results in Model 2, however, suggest that the bump in relative approval that governors receive at the beginning of their term is not primarily driven by high levels of approval. Raw approval ratings tend to be only about 1 percentage point above their average in their first three quarters and are not significant at any point in later terms. Instead, the results in Model 3 suggest that the key driver of initial honeymoons is a substantial decrease in disapproval levels at the beginning of the term.[23] The combination of low levels of disapproval and flat approval levels suggests that those who are not disapproving are not approving of the governor either but instead are undecided, waiting to form judgments until the governor has had a few quarters to start governing.

A similar type of honeymoon emerges for governors who take office unexpectedly. Non-elected governors tend to have levels of relative approval that are roughly 2 percentage points more popular than their elected counterparts are. Governors who take office following the governor's resignation get an additional 2+ percentage point bump in their relative approval each of their first two quarters, although that gain does not continue into the third quarter.[24] That change is also driven by low levels of disapproval; governors who take office following a resignation have lower levels of disapproval than did their predecessor and that disapproval remains particularly low for two quarters before settling in. Governors who replace a dead governor do not receive a similar initial honeymoon effect, although that is based on a very small number (n=6, none since 2003) of

[23] Approval and disapproval effects do not linearly combine for relative approval ratings.

[24] The estimated gain in relative approval for a governor taking office after a resignation is over 3 points in models where no imputed data are used-see Table A2.

cases in this period.

The other results in Table 3 are largely consistent with the extant literature. Governor popularity tends to fall with higher unemployment, and that effect lingers for at least two quarters.[25] Increasing unemployment results in almost equal levels of falling approval and increasing disapproval. There is no evidence of a gender gap among governors in these data; holding the unemployment rate constant, female governors and male governors tend to be equally popular. Then Republican governors in this period tend to be less popular than Democratic governors, although the difference is less than a percentage point on average and becomes insignificant in the period since 2010. Further work using these data can add events that are not tied to the electoral calendar (e.g. scandals, disasters) to model the magnitude and length of their effects.

Taken together, the results in Table 3 show that the public does not disapprove of governors at the beginning of their term but instead withholds judgment about them until they have acted. That high relative approval can be potentially leveraged as a mandate to enact their policy priorities but will fade if the public does not like the results. Because any bump is relatively small and short-lived, governors looking to maintain their popularity have to deliver solid policy performance to have their popularity continue.

Conclusion

Governor approval is potentially a powerful tool to explain the choices that governors make

[25] Contemporaneous unemployment has a significant correlation with relative approval in other specifications (see online materials) so the specific timing of unemployment's effect is sample specific.

in pushing their agenda, the responses they get, and their political fortunes. The first release of the SEAD dataset is designed to help scholars isolate the causes and consequences of this variable. For example, while previous studies on governor honeymoons could only look at a handful of states and thus reached divergent conclusions, these data show that governors do get honeymoons, albeit ones that are smaller than presidential ones. The short duration of the honeymoon suggests that governors have a very limited window to leverage that popularity. Governors who take over after a resignation also tend to see a two-quarter bump in their popularity relative to the rest of their term and have an additional surplus of popularity for the rest of their term. Both of these increases in relative popularity are driven by changes in disapproval more than they are by changes in approval. These dynamics are difficult to identify without time series data like these.

While here I have used an examination of honeymoons on average to illustrate the utility of the data, further work could consider factors that cause honeymoons to vary. Governors in large states, for example, tend to have slightly larger and longer-lasting honeymoons than do governors of smaller states which may reflect the amount of attention they receive and their perceived policy role. The honeymoon also seems to be slightly increasing over time. Then I find no evidence that female governors have significantly smaller honeymoons than male ones do. But further work should examine specific elections (e.g. the margin of victory), the electorate (e.g. level of polarization), the media atmosphere, the institution (gubernatorial powers), and the candidate (their charisma or usage of populism) to see how these affect the popularity bump they receive. Similar comparative analyses can be made to identify other contextual factors that shape approval dynamics with regard to government performance and events.

This data collection effort also illustrates some of the holes in what we can know about governors with existing survey data. In particular, studying governors in small or less-competitive

states is difficult even with these data. There are 6 states that I cannot generate all the latent variable series for and there are many others where the series are relatively short or that have gaps. Data for some of these states may be accessible in the future with additional right resources to purchase commercial data or via the archiving of data that is not currently online. Yet scholars interested in the politics of these states will face data challenges in the foreseeable future. The lack of publicly available data in some states and time points also raises questions about whether governors in those states have less ability to use their popularity to pressure the legislature-how valuable is it to be popular in a state where no one knows you are popular?

Yet my hope is that the SEAD data can help launch additional research agendas on the causes and consequences of governor approval. For example, much of the work looking at how governors are held accountable for events (disasters, scandals, school shootings) or the economy focuses on governor election returns that may have occurred multiple quarters after the event being studied. Having approval data available over time also allows us to expand the study of gubernatorial accountability beyond merely analyzing the correlates of election returns that occur every 2-4 years. A particularly fruitful avenue of future research with these data may be the effect of the COVID pandemic. These data can allow us to study how the public evaluated the policy choices that governors made in the early stages of the pandemic and how the dynamics of approval in this period differed from earlier eras. I might also hypothesize that leaders' responses may have been shaped by their approval ratings, with popular governors feeling more empowered to diverge from their base's preferences. Other work might look at how support for outsider or populist governors differs from other governors. If states are the laboratory for American democracy, then understanding how the public evaluates state leaders can provide new insights into how well democratic accountability and responsiveness work.

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Table 1: Governor Approval Rating Observations by State, SEAD 1.0

State	Total Measures of Governor Approval	Measures by Source		First Year	Last Year	Unique Data Series
		JAR	Additional Sources			
Alabama	192	159	33	1980	2020	24
Alaska	110	51	59	1992	2020	20
Arizona	211	136	75	1987	2020	35
Arkansas	139	55	84	1985	2020	21
California	550	354	196	1961	2020	44
Colorado	177	70	107	1987	2020	20
Connecticut	304	223	81	1981	2020	14
Delaware	65	29	36	1994	2020	12
Florida	400	193	207	1979	2020	62
Georgia	184	103	81	1982	2020	31
Hawaii	70	41	29	1989	2020	16
Idaho	50	26	24	1985	2020	10
Illinois	170	98	72	1982	2020	26
Indiana	117	66	51	1983	2020	25
Iowa	219	121	98	1984	2020	22
Kansas	128	66	62	1990	2020	17
Kentucky	213	125	88	1980	2020	28
Louisiana	112	62	50	1987	2020	27
Maine	140	43	97	1992	2020	22
Maryland	179	86	93	1981	2020	22
Massachusetts	268	108	160	1989	2020	36
Michigan	434	147	287	1986	2020	33
Minnesota	387	293	94	1947	2020	30
Mississippi	73	38	35	1981	2020	14
Missouri	146	72	74	1985	2020	20
Montana	132	69	63	1986	2020	20
Nebraska	76	46	30	1986	2019	13
Nevada	131	45	86	1987	2020	30
New Hampshire	357	126	231	1990	2020	30
New Jersey	523	232	291	1983	2020	36
New Mexico	162	108	54	1976	2020	22
New York	682	301	381	1983	2020	34
North Carolina	380	105	275	1977	2020	52
North Dakota	69	38	31	1982	2019	12
Ohio	296	149	147	1983	2020	31
Oklahoma	108	69	39	1982	2020	18
Oregon	131	69	62	1985	2020	23
Pennsylvania	372	135	237	1979	2020	35

Rhode Island	138	85	53	1986	2019	17
South Carolina	99	38	61	1989	2020	17
South Dakota	63	28	35	1990	2020	12
Tennessee	115	45	70	1986	2020	14
Texas	243	103	140	1984	2020	35
Utah	107	44	63	1993	2020	21
Vermont	69	35	34	1986	2020	15
Virginia	332	131	201	1985	2020	35
Washington	196	102	94	1992	2020	17
West Virginia	100	50	50	1985	2019	13
Wisconsin	325	137	188	1984	2020	42
Wyoming	79	55	24	1976	2019	13

Table 2: Correlates of the Number of Surveys on Governor Approval Conducted in a Quarter

	Coefficient	(SE)	Coefficient	(SE)
Margin Last Governor Election	-0.009*	(0.001)		
Margin in Next Governor Election			0.005*	(0.001)
Governor Election Quarter	0.155*	(0.069)	0.396*	(0.069)
Governor Election*Margin Last Election	-0.001	(0.004)		
Governor Election*Margin Next Election			-0.017*	(0.004)
Quarter Before Governor Election	0.425*	(0.061)	0.560*	(0.062)
Quarter Before Governor Election*Margin Last Election	-0.002	(0.003)		
Quarter Before Governor Election*Margin Next Election			-0.011*	(0.003)
Two Quarters Before Governor Election	0.215*	(0.067)	0.262*	(0.069)
Two Quarters Before Governor Election*Margin Last Election	-0.002	(0.004)		
Two Quarters Before Governor Election*Margin Next Election			-0.005	(0.004)
Three Quarters Before Governor Election	0.074	(0.069)	0.227*	(0.070)
Three Quarters Before Governor Election*Margin Last Election	0.004	(0.004)		
Three Quarters Before Governor Election*Margin Next Election			-0.007	(0.004)
Special Election Quarter	0.309	(0.408)	0.324	(0.410)
Quarter Before Special Election	1.079*	(0.279)	1.061*	(0.282)
Two Quarters Before Special Election	0.401	(0.367)	0.427	(0.369)
Margin in the Last Presidential Election	0.001	(0.002)		
Margin in the Next Presidential Election			-0.008*	(0.002)
President Election Quarter	0.318*	(0.079)	0.072	(0.090)
President Election*Margin Last Election	-0.032*	(0.006)		
President Election*Margin Next Election			-0.014*	(0.006)
Quarter Before President Election	0.220*	(0.076)	0.146	(0.083)
Quarter Before President Election*Margin Last Election	-0.017*	(0.005)		
Quarter Before President Election*Margin Next Election			-0.012*	(0.005)
Two Quarters Before President Election	-0.022	(0.082)	-0.008	(0.088)
Two Quarters Before President Election*Margin Last Election	-0.005	(0.005)		
Two Quarters Before President Election*Margin Next Election			-0.007	(0.005)

Three Quarters Before President Election	-0.009	(0.084)	-0.022	(0.091)
Three Quarters Before President Election*Margin Last Election	-0.013*	(0.005)		
Three Quarters Before President Election*Margin Next Election			-0.010	(0.006)
Ln(Population)	0.434*	(0.043)	0.430*	(0.043)
Years 1986-1990	0.957*	(0.091)	0.842*	(0.091)
Years 1991-1995	1.455*	(0.085)	1.367*	(0.085)
Years 1996-2000	1.379*	(0.085)	1.324*	(0.086)
Years 2001-2005	1.549*	(0.084)	1.494*	(0.085)
Years 2006-2010	2.677*	(0.079)	2.639*	(0.078)
Years 2011-2015	2.120*	(0.081)	2.098*	(0.081)
Years 2016-2020	2.300*	(0.080)	2.289*	(0.082)
Constant	-3.998*	(0.370)	-4.032*	(0.377)
N Observations	8200		7892	
χ^2	3567.46*		3461.70*	
Negative Binomial Model with State-Level Random Effects, Standard Errors in Parentheses. * p<0.05 (two tailed)				

Table 3: Dynamics of Governor Approval

	Relative Approval [1]	Approval [2]	Disapproval [3]
Quarter 1, First Term	4.948*	0.919*	-7.617*
	(0.304)	(0.297)	(0.323)
Quarter 2, First Term	1.822*	0.850*	-2.669*
	(0.278)	(0.263)	(0.299)
Quarter 3, First Term	1.293*	1.013*	-1.316*
	(0.264)	(0.253)	(0.281)
Quarter 1, Second+ Term	0.562	0.205	-0.754*
	(0.315)	(0.304)	(0.335)
Quarter 2, Second+ Term	0.207	0.227	-0.362
	(0.311)	(0.298)	(0.330)
Quarter 3, Second+ Term	0.003	0.027	0.114
	(0.294)	(0.281)	(0.313)
Unemployment in the $State_t$	-0.169*	-0.150*	0.239*
	(0.072)	(0.071)	(0.077)
Unemployment in the $State_{t-1}$	-0.342*	-0.294*	0.320*
	(0.070)	(0.067)	(0.074)
Unemployment in the $State_{t-2}$	-0.181*	-0.130	0.142
	(0.072)	(0.071)	(0.077)
Elections Quarter	-0.004	0.176	0.081
	(0.161)	(0.157)	(0.176)
Female	0.383	-0.345	-0.359
	(0.522)	(0.475)	(0.539)
Non-Elected Governor	2.124*	1.113*	-2.622*
	(0.493)	(0.464)	(0.534)
Governor Resigned that Quarter	3.254*	-0.023	-3.514*
	(0.602)	(0.577)	(0.667)
Governor Resigned that $Quarter_{t-1}$	2.356*	-0.084	-2.502*
	(0.690)	(0.654)	(0.755)
Governor Resigned that $Quarter_{t-2}$	0.467	-0.316	-0.581
	(0.583)	(0.561)	(0.641)
Governor Died that Quarter	1.688	0.691	-1.037
	(2.079)	(2.289)	(2.227)
Governor Died that $Quarter_{t-1}$	-0.309	-0.024	4.572
	(4.569)	(4.280)	(4.316)
Governor Died that $Quarter_{t-2}$	-0.790	-0.576	-0.425
	(4.417)	(4.080)	(4.131)
Republican	-1.030*	-0.674*	1.180*
	(0.289)	(0.270)	(0.309)
Independent	-1.488	-1.004	1.884

	(1.245)	(1.322)	(1.289)
Constant	60.073*	53.883*	35.749*
	(0.663)	(0.584)	(0.696)
N Observations	4,560	4,560	4,560
N States	44	44	44
χ^2	416.61*	77.96*	759.2*
Generalized least squares estimates with panel-specific AR(1) corrections and heteroskedastic consistent standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)			

Figure 1: Distribution of Survey Marginals Over Time

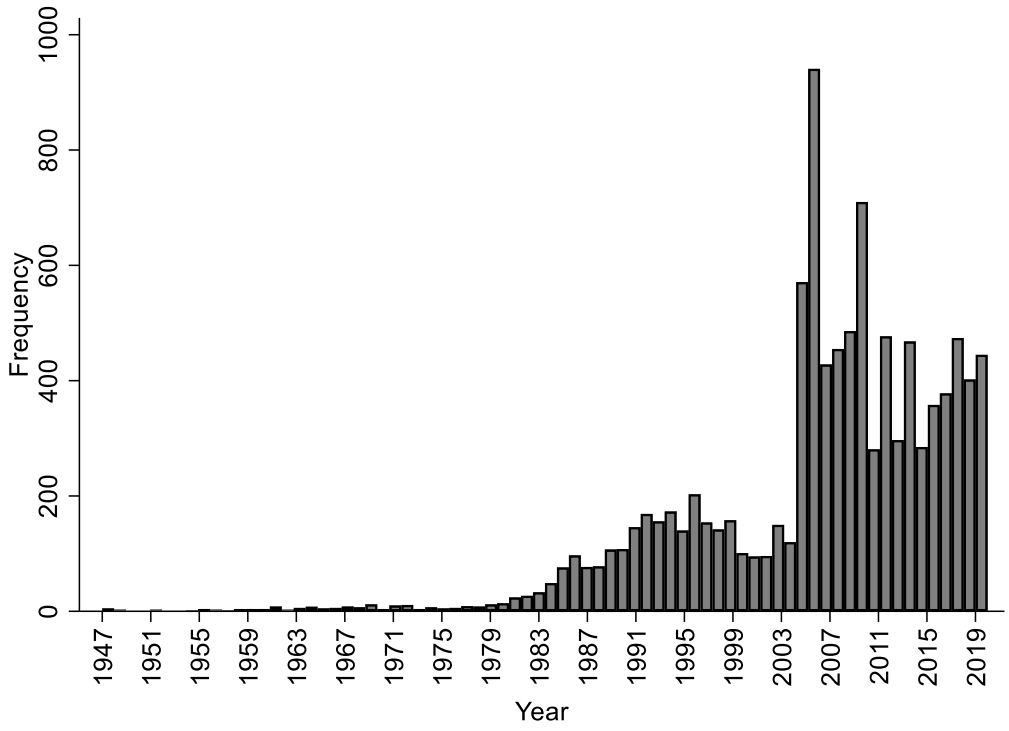
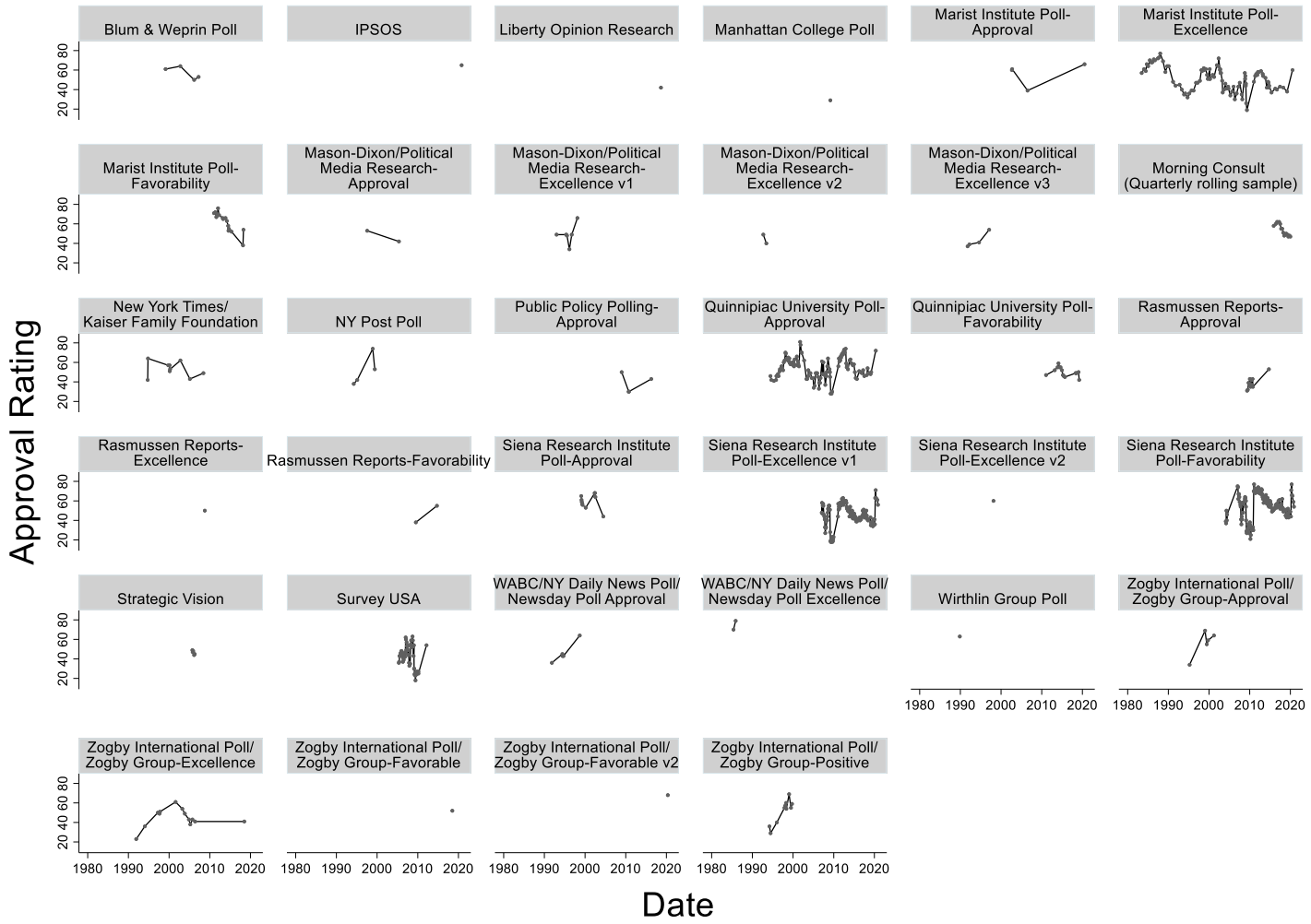
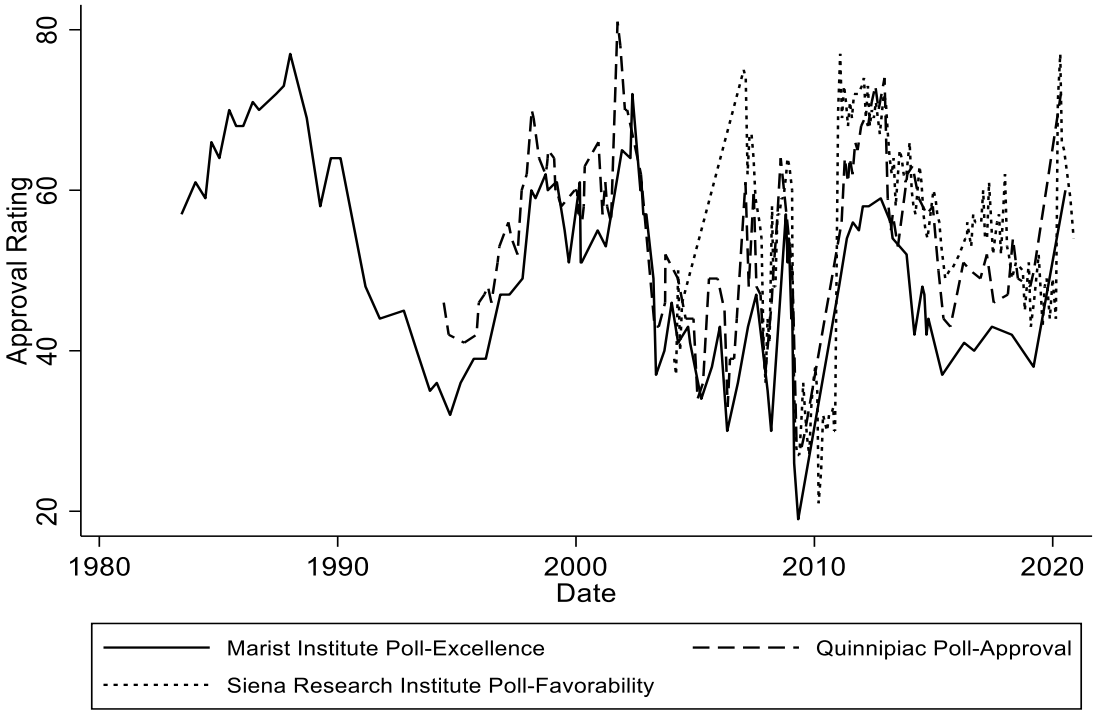


Figure 2: Input Series and the Latent Measure of Governor Approval in New York.

(a) All Input Series of Governor Approval in New York (34 Individual Series)



(b) Marist Poll-Excellence, Quinnipiac Approval, and Siena College Favorability Series



(c) Extracted Latent Series

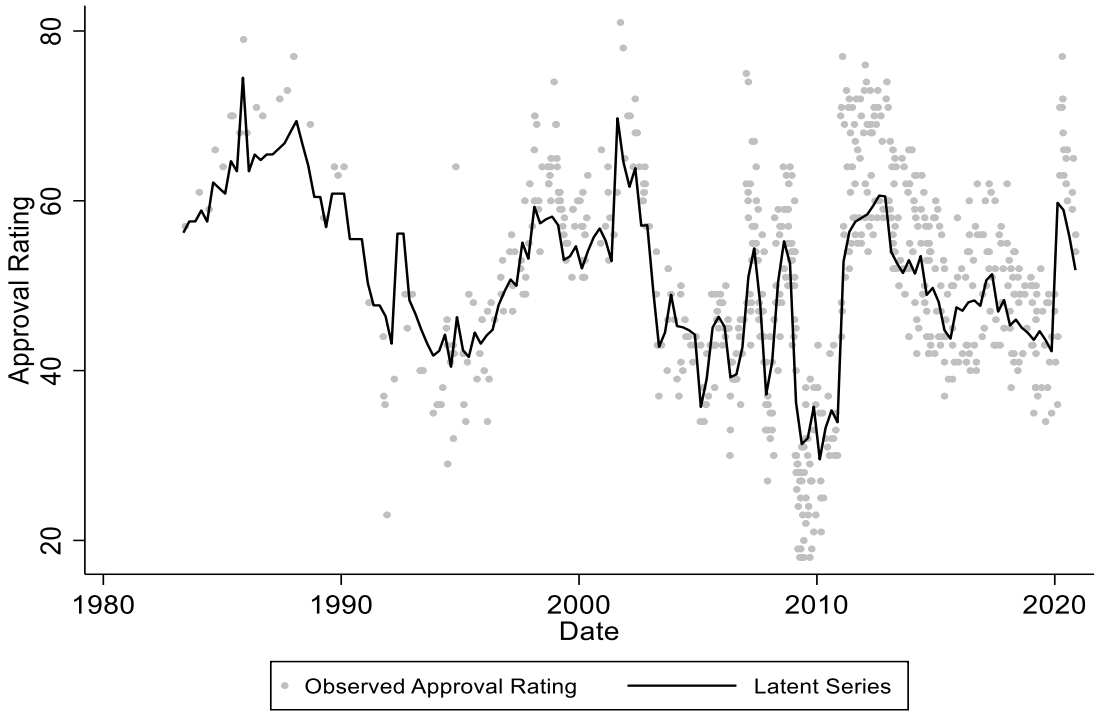
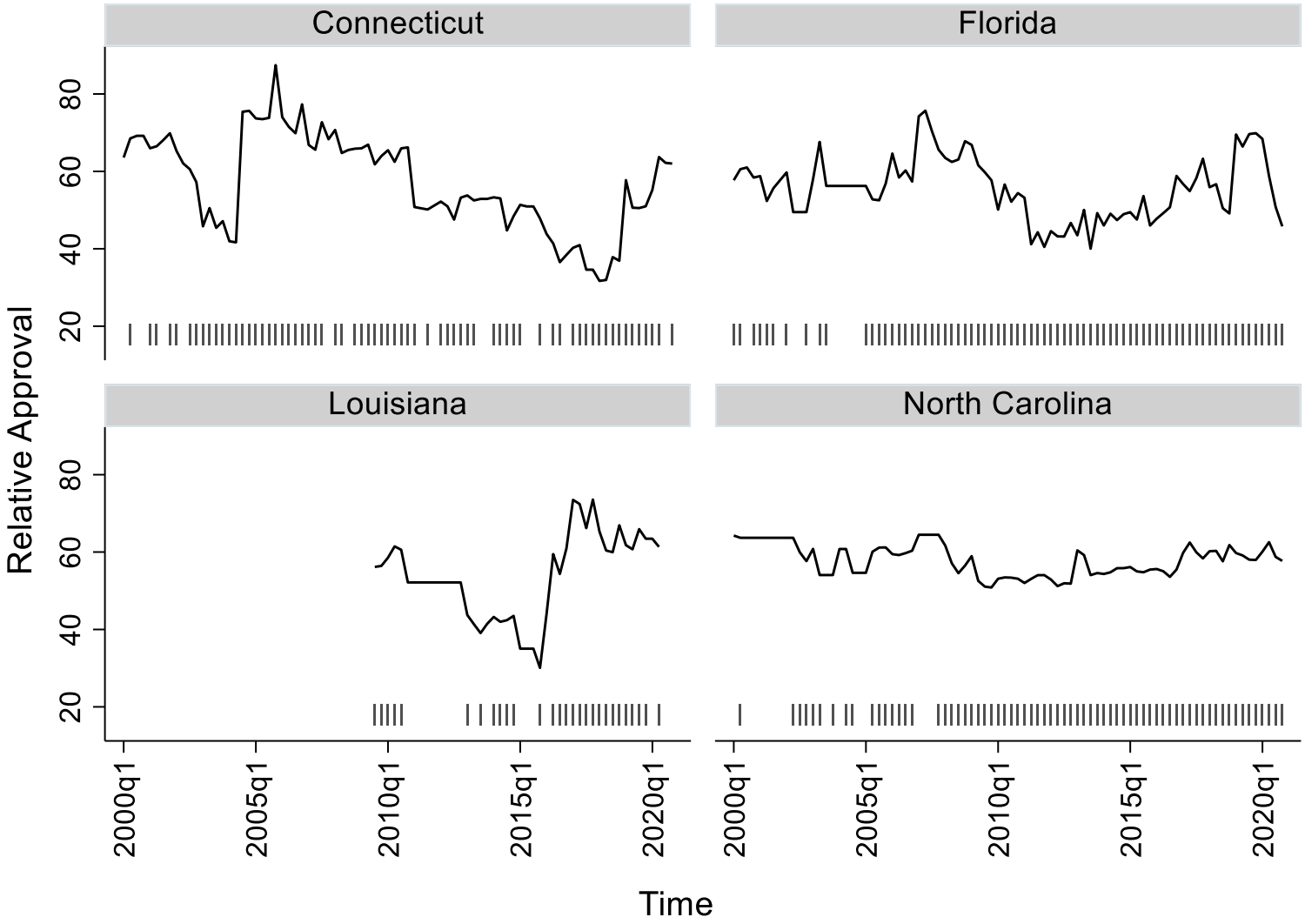



Figure 3: Relative Governor Approval by State, 1976-2020