



State Political Culture, Public Policy, and Traffic Safety

Lilliard Richardson
Professor

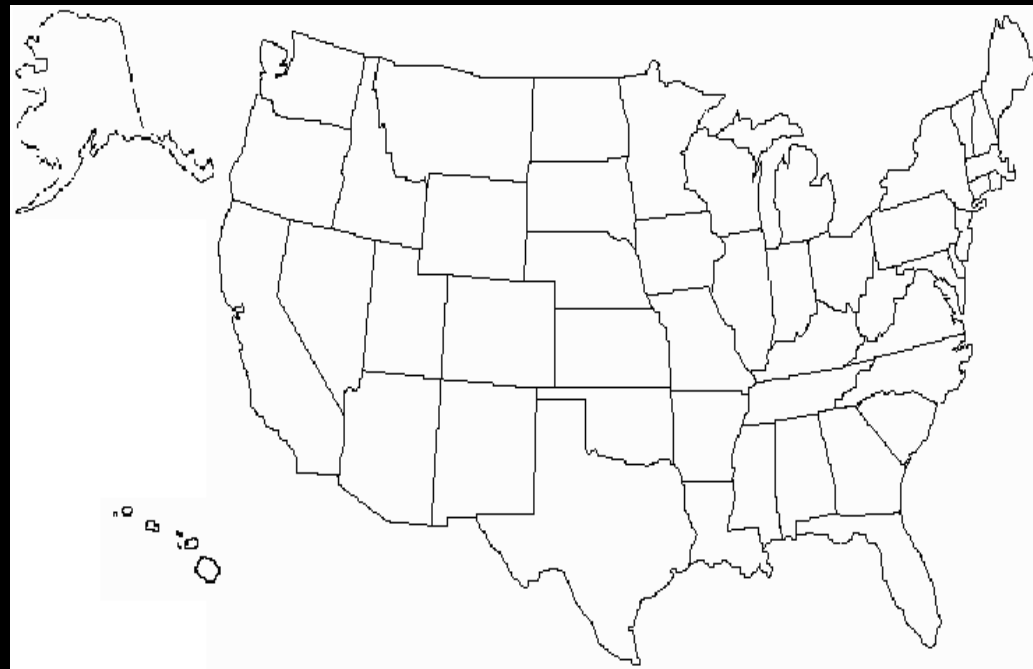
Truman School of Public Affairs
University of Missouri

Focus of Presentation

- States differ widely in their adoption of traffic safety policies
- How does a state's political culture affect the adoption of traffic safety policies?
- How can we study state culture?
- What are the gaps in our knowledge?

States set most traffic safety laws

- ❖ Licensing for drivers and vehicles
- ❖ Highway design, construction, & maintenance
- ❖ Motorcycle helmet use
- ❖ Law enforcement
- ❖ Child safety seats
- ❖ Seat belts
- ❖ Speed limits
- ❖ Alcohol sales
- ❖ Punishment



Policy Approaches to Alcohol Problems

Alcohol Control

Education

Rehabilitation

Detection of Impaired Driving

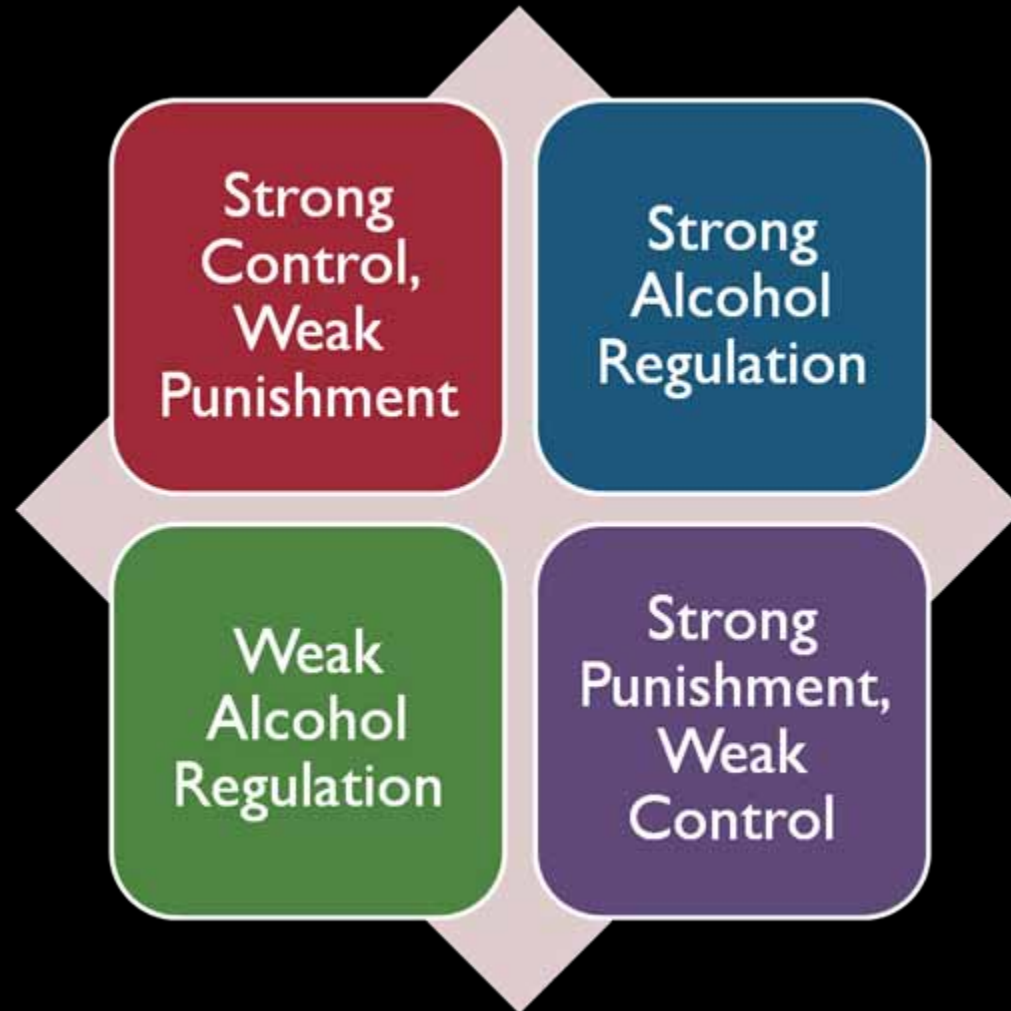
First-time Offender Punishment

Repeat Offender Punishment

Underlying Policy Frames

- Policy frames differ for each approach?
- Industry views different on each?
- Different philosophies underlying each?
- Examples
 - ❖ First-time vs Repeat Offenders
 - ❖ Rehabilitation versus punishment

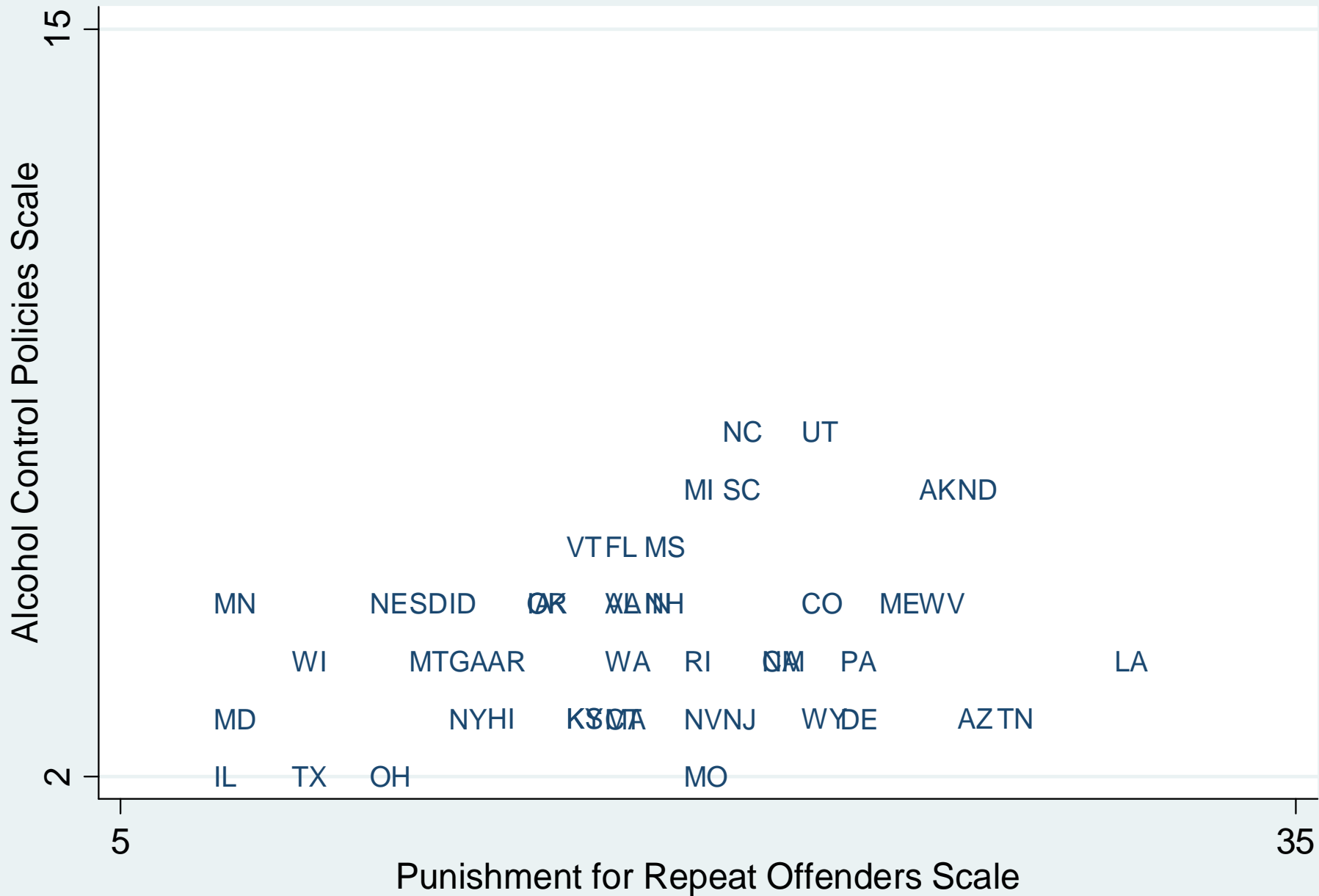
Limiting Access vs Punishment



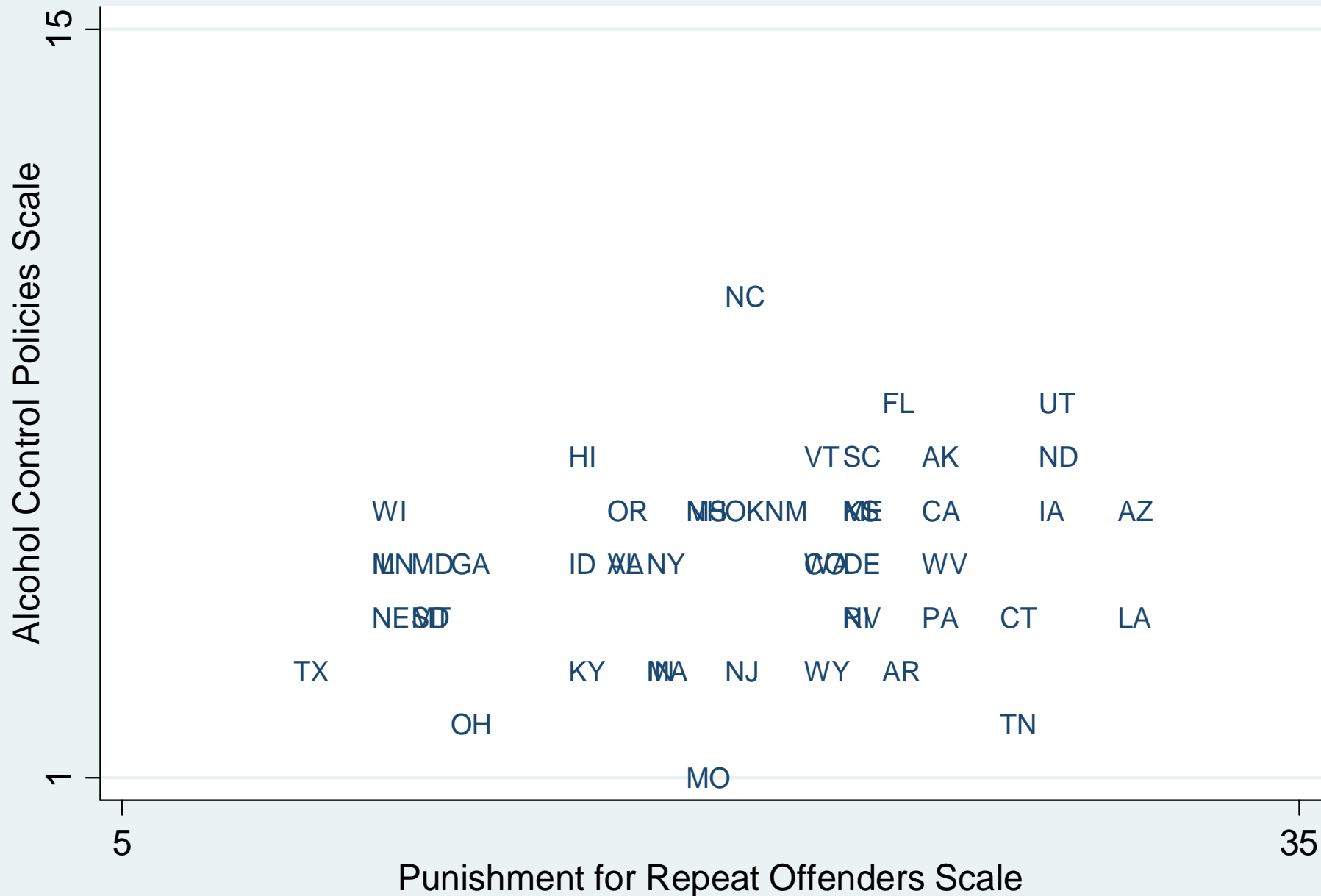
Two dimensions of alcohol policy

- Alcohol control
 - BAC .08
 - Open container
 - Anti-consumption
 - Dram shop
 - Zero tolerance
 - High BAC
 - Beer tax scale
- Punishment for 2nd, 3rd offenses
 - Implied consent (time)
 - Administrative per se (time)
 - Fines (constant \$)
 - Jail (time)
 - License revocation or suspension (time)

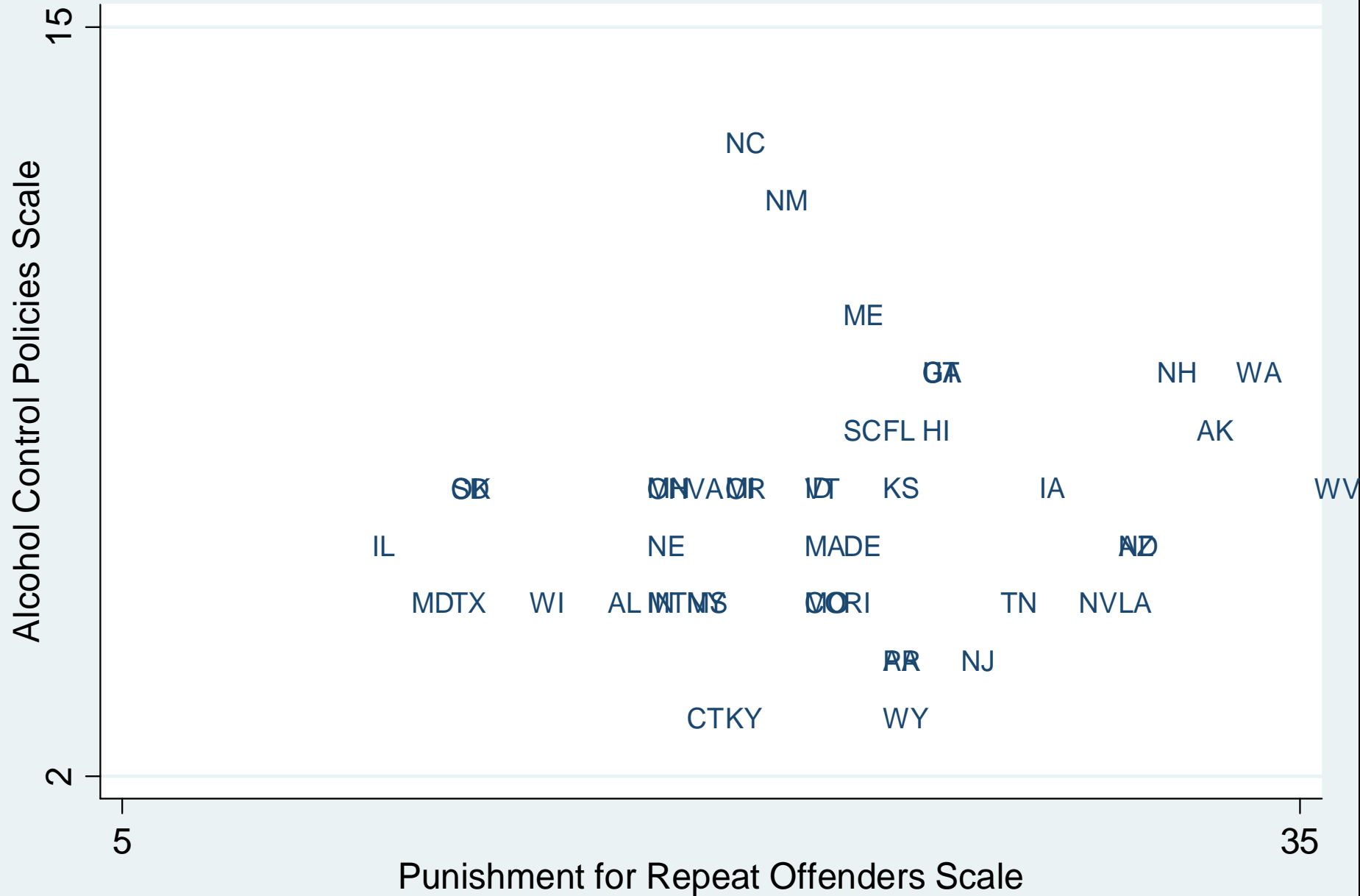
Alcohol Control versus Repeat Offender Punishment 1985



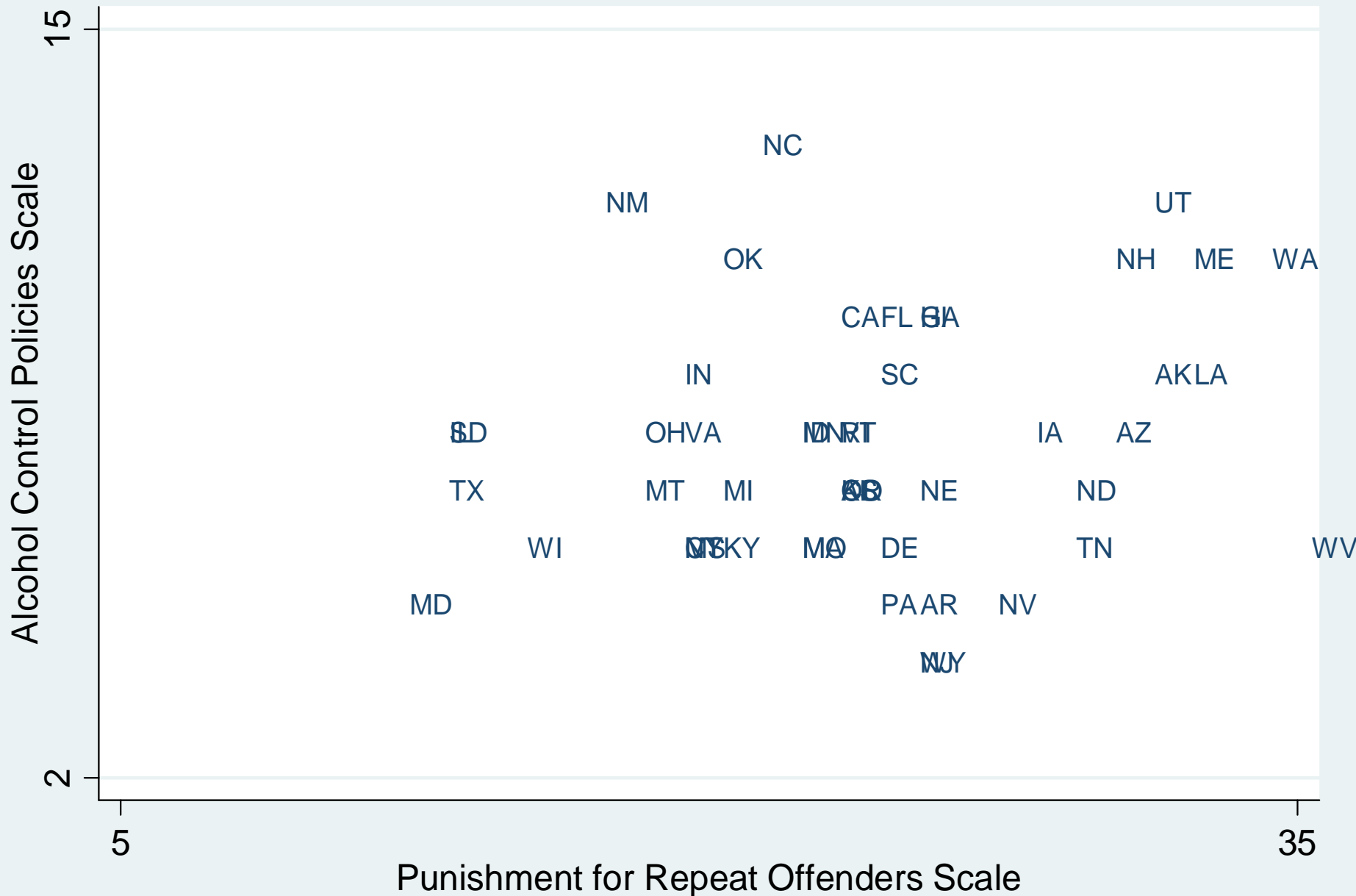
Alcohol Control versus Repeat Offender Punishment 1990



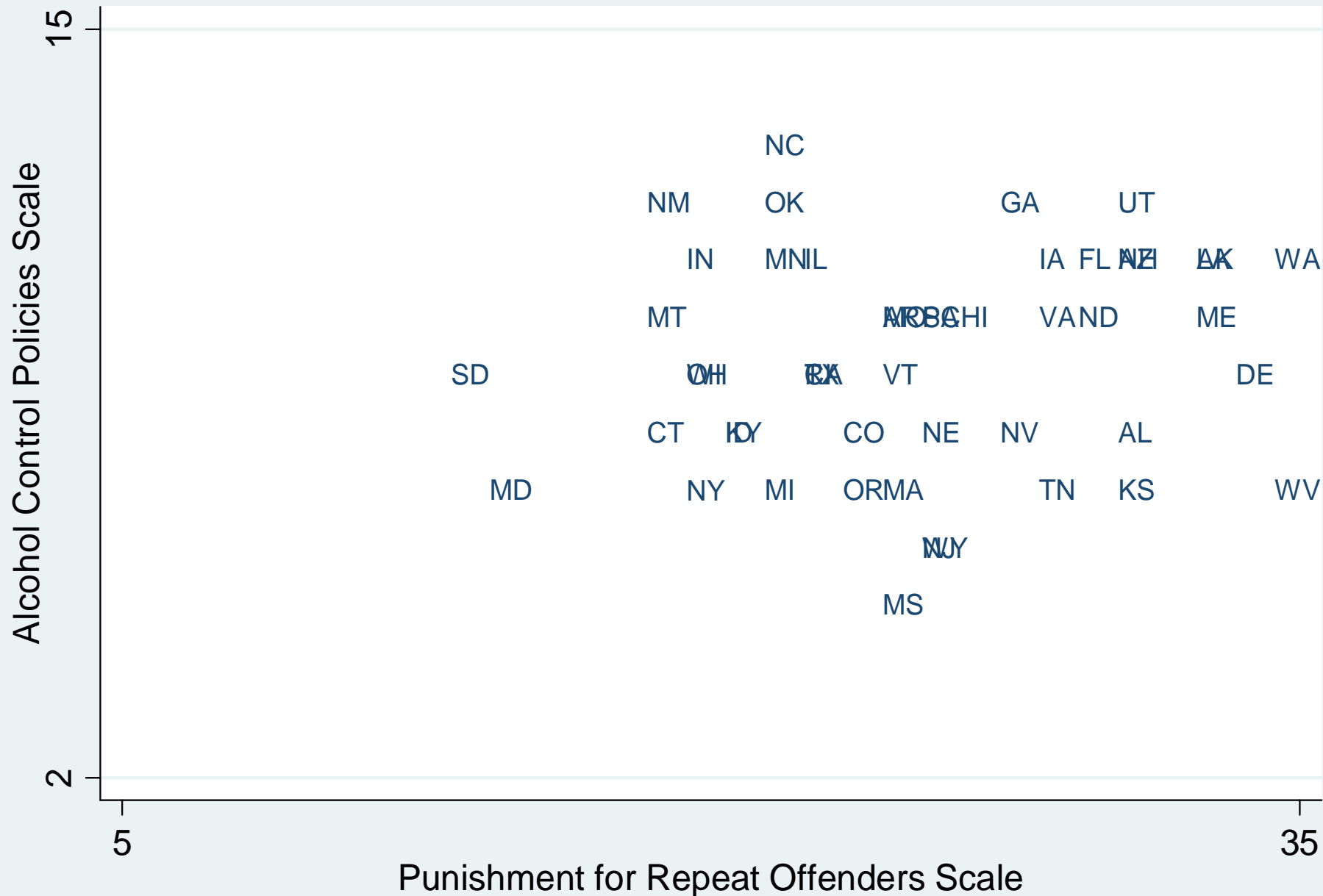
Alcohol Control versus Repeat Offender Punishment 1995



Alcohol Control versus Repeat Offender Punishment 2000



Alcohol Control versus Repeat Offender Punishment 2005

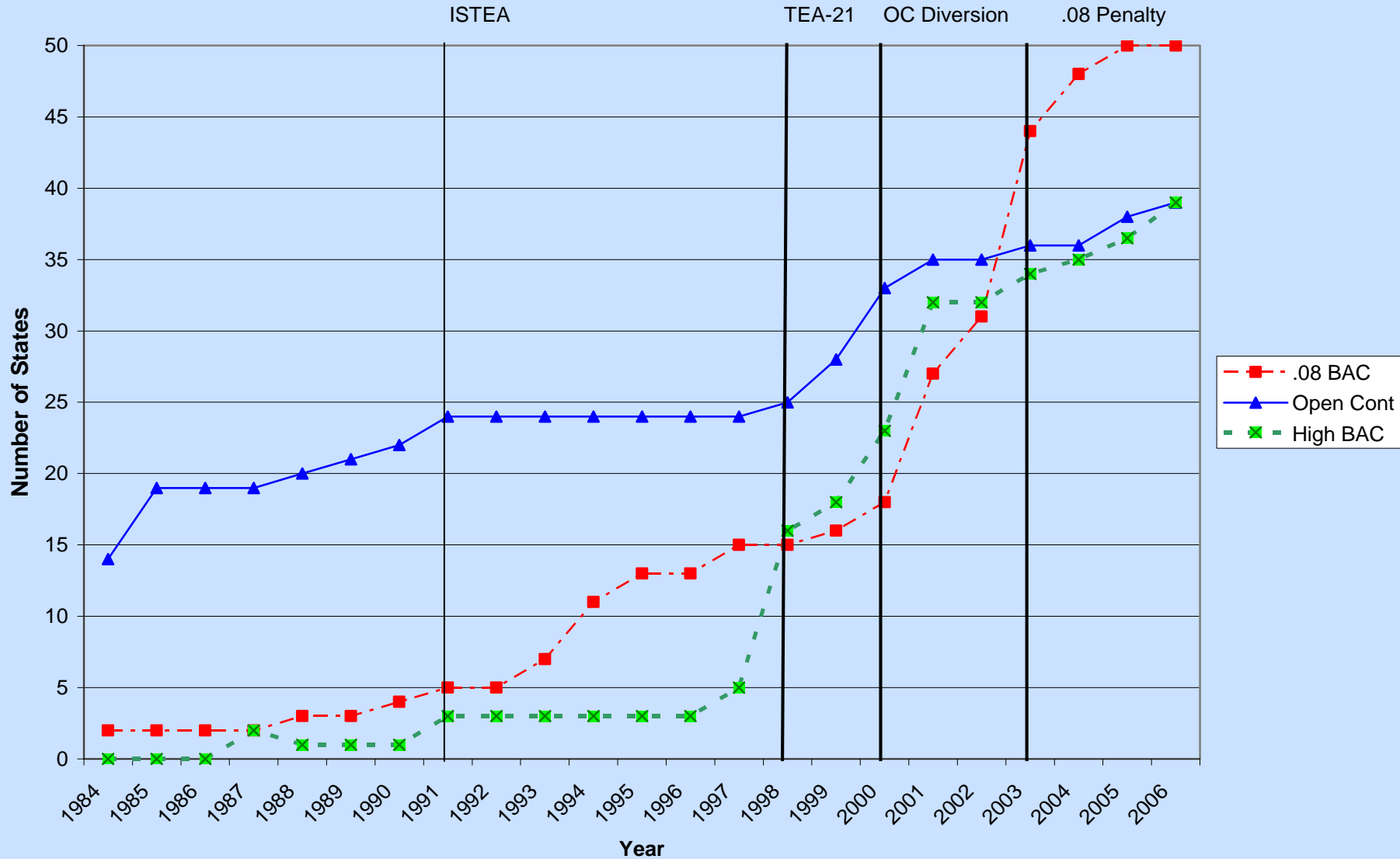


State Policy Adoption Factors

- Problem severity
- State political culture
- Interest groups
- Partisanship
- Ideology
- Political institutions shape responses
- Federal Pressure (using highway funds)
 - Grants – High BAC
 - Diversion – Open Container
 - Withholding – .08 BAC

Federalism and 3 Policies

Figure 4: Alcohol Law Adoption by October 1st of each year, 1984 to 2006



States differ widely on many other traffic safety policies

- Seat belt enforcement
- Age of child safety and booster seats
- Motorcycle helmets
- Speed limits
- Trucking regulations
- Graduated driver's licensing

Key gaps in knowledge

- State pattern not consistent across all different policy areas
- Partisanship and ideology matter, but we need a better measure of problem definitions affecting traffic safety
- State political culture matters, but how do we measure it?
- Need more nuanced models

Legislators Play Major Role

- Need further analysis of the factors shaping legislative decision-making
- What policy frames do they use?
- Know little about their acceptance of public health arguments
- Don't have interest group scorecards to characterize them easily
- Not clear how traffic safety votes fit into overall legislative behavior

Key questions for state culture

- What factors shape attitudes and beliefs of the driving public?
- What problem definitions are accepted by citizens?
 - Ex. - public health v libertarian
 - Ex. - rehabilitation v retribution
- What is the impact of citizen trust and acceptance of the legitimacy of law?
- How do these factors shape support for policy adoption and compliance with laws?

Citizen trust and legitimacy of law

- Citizen trust linked with support for government action on other policies
- Citizen support for open container laws and the use of checkpoints was associated with a reduction in the propensity to drink and drive
- Distrust could make one resistant to policy interventions, education, and persuasion

Research Agenda

- What factors shape traffic safety policy adoption?
- Impact of Federalism
- Impact of state political culture
- Survey of state legislators
- Survey of citizen views

Linking with Safety Culture Efforts

- Legislator problem definitions matter
- Legislators who don't accept public health arguments
 - May be resistant to education efforts
 - May not accept premises of safety culture arguments
 - May not support traffic safety policies

Linking with Safety Culture Efforts

- Target groups for public safety campaigns (young, unbelted, speeder, drinking drivers, rural drivers, pickup truck drivers and/or males)
 - May have an underlying predisposition that makes them unlikely to respond to public health messages
 - May reject the legitimacy of public safety laws
 - May oppose policy adoption
- Understanding more about how citizen views of government, ideology, personal behavior, and knowledge shape support for traffic safety laws could assist public safety advocates.

Thanks!

Lilliard Richardson

Professor

Truman School of Public Affairs

University of Missouri

Columbia, MO 65211

richardsonle@missouri.edu