

Full-Time, Part-Time, and Real Time: Explaining State Legislators' Perceptions of Time on the Job

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ABSTRACT

One of the oldest and most distinctive characteristics of American political culture is its anti-government, anti-politician bias. One manifestation of this attitude in state government today is the effort to maintain part-time “citizen” legislatures, whether through term limits, low salaries, or session length restrictions. But, realistically, how part-time is the job of a state legislator? We discuss findings from a national survey of state legislators in which they report spending more time on the job than one might anticipate given the presumably part-time nature of many state legislatures. As expected, we find that legislators serving in bodies characterized as full-time, professional legislatures spend more time on the job than those in part-time institutions, but we also see significant variation across states in both groups. We also find considerable variation among individual legislators, which is related to factors such as holding a leadership position and a legislator’s demographic characteristics. We also show how time on the job is allocated among specific components of representation.

ONE OF THE MOST ENDURING FEATURES of American political culture is an animosity toward professional politicians (Wills 1999). One way this anti-government bias materializes today is through efforts to keep state legislatures as part-time institutions, epitomized by low pay, restricted sessions, and most recently, term limits. But just how part-time are state legislatures in practice? For example, do house members in Texas—each of whom represents 140,000 constituents and helps oversee an annual state budget of over \$60 billion—really work only 140 days in a two-year period, as stipulated by the Texas State Constitution? Clearly, legislators in every state, even the least

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populous ones, do not work only when the legislature is formally in session. But how much additional time do members put into the job, and how does this vary systematically by state and individual legislator?

This question is important because it may affect the calculus of potential candidates deciding whether to run for the legislature. If the job requires a larger investment of time than conventional wisdom suggests, we are likely undervaluing the work and eliminating potential candidates who cannot devote the required time to the job, given the pay rate. To put it in other terms, it is altogether possible that our traditional estimate of the incentive structure for state legislators and potential state legislators is incorrect. Moreover, if the workload is greater than generally recognized, the public underappreciates the legislative task.

We explore time on the job as reported by state legislators themselves. We believe these self-assessments provide a valid accounting of the time these public officials actually devote to their job. In general, legislators say they spend more time on the job than one might anticipate given the part-time nature of many state legislatures. Not surprisingly, members of professionalized legislatures report that they spend more time on the job than those in part-time “citizen” legislatures, although we find considerable variation among states in both groups. There is systematic and significant variation within states as well, with women and minority legislators, Democrats, career-oriented members, and legislative leaders reporting that their legislative jobs are more nearly full-time, regardless of the type of legislature in which they serve. We also find that while legislative activities related to policymaking explain some variation in time on the job, constituency activities play a much greater role in this determination.

THE SCOPE OF LEGISLATIVE WORK

State legislators’ time commitment to their job is one of the components in the widely used concept of legislative professionalism, and as such, it is generally measured by the number of days that a legislature is in session each biennium (Squire 2000; Hamm and Moncrief 2004). This measure is easily obtainable and seemingly objective, making it a convenient and comparable indicator of the time required of individuals who serve in our state legislatures. At first glance, it seems reasonable that legislatures with year-round, annual sessions require their members to commit much more time to the job than those legislatures that meet biennially for only a few months.

Yet, the total days in session is far from a perfect measure of time commitment to the legislative job. First, some legislatures measure their sessions

by calendar days (which includes weekends) while others count only actual “legislative days” (when the body is actually working in committee or on the floor). Additionally, some legislatures have different session lengths in the first year of the biennium than in the second, which complicates the problem of creating an annual measure of time commitment. A few state legislatures, such as New Jersey’s, typically spend only one or two days in actual session per week, but do so throughout the year and, therefore, are usually reported as being in session year-round.

Moreover, it is well known that the legislator’s job does not end when the session ends. For example, there are interim committee meetings to attend. In Florida, for instance, the legislature holds regular “committee weeks” once a month throughout the year when all members are expected to be in Tallahassee to prepare legislation for the next session despite the constitutional limit confining legislative sessions to 60 days per year. Many state legislatures create interim committees that hold hearings around the state and draft legislation for the next legislative session.

Constituent service, or casework, is now also an important part of the state legislator’s job (Freeman and Richardson 1996; Ellickson and Whistler 2001; Rosenthal 2004). Casework occurs both during and after the legislative session ends and has become increasingly time consuming (Moncrief, Thompson, and Kurtz 1996, 62). Occasionally, even a simple constituent complaint or request can absorb hours of a legislator’s time, as an Oklahoma state representative discovered:

A constituent called him at home to complain about the overgrowth of weeds on the median strip of the local highway. Although the representative tried several times, he could not get the highway department to do anything. So, he drove his own lawnmower to the highway and cut down the weeds himself. That is casework above and beyond the call of duty. (National Conference of State Legislatures 2000, 16)

Similar to casework are the endless telephone calls at home, some of them expressing opinions or concerns, others making a specific request, but all of them time-consuming; and they do not end when the session ends. Smith (2003, 39) relates a story told to him by a Missouri legislator:

I had a lady once, she’d call my house every weekend because she went out to the lake and she said the water patrol and the highway patrol was shooting at her. And, as I started to inquire, I found out this lady didn’t have all her furniture. She was a few pieces shy of having a full house.

In about half of the states, legislators have personal staff to help with casework, but even in these states, the legislator needs to stay in contact, overseeing and managing the staff. In many states, such as Idaho and Montana, legisla-

tors do not have any personal staff at all, so they must handle casework on their own. In still other states, such as Colorado, Georgia, and West Virginia, legislators have access to personal staff only during legislative sessions.

In addition to committee hearings and casework, legislators are often expected to attend meetings of local organizations in their home districts, from chambers of commerce to the Lion's Club. As one former Massachusetts legislator noted:

The requirement to be one of them is onerous, draining, time-consuming, and relentless. There are always far more events, meetings, and conferences to attend than one human can accomplish . . . Legislators, as representatives, have to be constantly available to one and all. (Rosenthal 2004, 24)

Years ago, Vermont state legislator Frank Smallwood nicely described this disconnect between the ideal of the part-time legislator and the reality of the situation. Smallwood, a college professor, explained the tension between his legislative job and his "real job":

Every day became a blur of conflicting demands: meeting classes, grading student papers, preparing lectures, serving on college committees, following up constituency chores, studying bills, answering letters, giving speeches, appearing on radio shows, meanwhile with the telephone ringing, ringing, ringing all day long. (Smallwood 1976, 222)

Finally, campaigning for election can also be considered part of the legislator's job. After all, one can only do the job once elected. All legislators, except those who have decided not to run again, must devote at least some time to running for re-election. Even those who are in a safe seat work to ensure that the seat remains safe and that they do not face a challenge from within their own party in the primary. Of course, many campaign tasks involve the same activities noted above: attending meetings, giving speeches, and generally staying in touch with constituents.

Thus, serving as a state legislator requires many duties, some of which extend beyond the actual legislative session and, thus, are not necessarily captured by measuring the number of days the legislature is in session. We undertook this study to find out how much time legislators actually spend on the legislative job by assessing their perception of their time commitment. The remainder of this article focuses on this measure and its correlates.

THE TIME-ON-THE-JOB SURVEY

In 2002, we mailed a questionnaire to all 7,382 state legislators in the United States.¹ We received 2,982 completed questionnaires, for a response rate of 40 percent. To assess a legislator's self-perceived time on the job, we asked the

question: “Averaged over an entire year and taking into account session time, interim work, constituent service and campaigning, what proportion of a full-time job is your legislative work?” Respondents were given five response categories (90 percent or more; 70–90 percent; 50–70 percent; 30–50 percent; less than 30 percent). Note that this question specifically refers to all phases of the legislative job, including interim work and campaigning.

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses to this question and a composite summary score for each state. As a group, legislators—even in citizen legislatures—reported considerably more time on the legislative job than might be assumed. Nationwide, almost three-quarters of all responding legislators said the job is at least half-time. More than one in five said being a legislator is at least 90 percent of a full-time job, while only one out of 20 claimed they spent less than 30 percent of a full-time job. These figures align with Rosenthal’s (2004, 21) assessment of legislative time on the job, based on his own survey of legislators in five states.

The composite scores for time on the job follow a general cross-state pattern that we would expect based on well-known assessments of state legislative professionalism (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Squire 2002). About half or more of the respondents in California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin said their job was basically full-time (90 percent or more of a full-time job). On the other hand, almost no respondents in Georgia, Montana, North Dakota, New Mexico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, or Wyoming made this same claim. In fact, over half of the respondents in Montana, North Dakota, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming said the job was less than half-time.

Despite the fact that the general pattern follows expectations, there are some surprises. A large proportion (75 percent) of the Arizona and Colorado respondents said they spend at least 70 percent of a full-time job on legislative work, and over two-thirds of Missouri and Oklahoma legislators made the same claim. None of these legislatures is considered full-time by the standard measures, supporting our argument that there is more time devoted to the job than mere session length.²

WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR TIME ON THE JOB? A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

The composite index from Table 1 indicates that, although time on the job is related to traditional measures of state legislative professionalism, it is not perfectly related to such measures. The correlation between Squire’s

Table 1. State Legislators' Perceptions of Their Time on the Job

State (n of responses)	Percentage of Full-Time Job					Composite Index
	>90	70-90	50-70	30-50	<30	
AK (34)	20.6%	26.5%	50.0%	2.9%	0.0%	71.73
AL (45)	15.6	33.3	31.1	20.0	0.0	68.19
AR (78)	17.9	24.4	33.3	23.1	1.3	65.87
AZ (44)	45.5	29.5	18.2	4.5	2.3	79.71
CA (31)	64.5	19.4	6.5	9.7	0.0	83.99
CO (48)	25.0	50.0	22.9	2.1	0.0	78.23
CT (72)	22.2	30.6	33.3	13.9	0.0	70.68
DE (28)	21.4	17.9	50.0	10.7	0.0	68.82
FL (43)	34.9	27.9	27.9	9.3	0.0	75.65
GA (56)	3.6	26.8	44.6	25.0	0.0	61.53
HI (37)	24.3	32.4	32.4	8.1	2.7	72.31
IA (70)	5.7	38.6	32.9	21.4	1.4	64.73
ID (46)	6.5	19.6	41.3	32.6	0.0	59.44
IL (46)	47.8	34.8	15.2	2.2	0.0	83.12
IN (61)	9.8	21.3	41.0	27.9	0.0	61.94
KS (92)	7.6	19.6	43.5	26.1	3.3	60.00
KY (55)	14.5	21.8	47.3	14.5	1.8	65.73
LA (45)	22.2	35.6	26.7	15.6	0.0	71.73
MA (60)	60.0	18.3	10.0	10.0	1.7	81.79
MD (63)	14.3	36.5	31.7	14.3	3.2	67.97
ME (91)	17.6	27.5	30.8	24.2	0.0	66.65
MI (51)	58.8	19.6	17.6	3.9	0.0	83.66
MN (80)	17.5	41.3	27.5	13.8	0.0	71.41
MO (77)	31.2	37.7	22.1	9.1	0.0	76.57
MS (37)	8.1	18.9	32.4	35.1	5.4	57.30
MT (83)	3.6	12.0	22.9	38.6	22.9	47.71
NC (69)	30.4	34.8	24.6	10.1	0.0	75.16
ND (83)	0.0	4.8	15.7	49.4	30.1	40.53
NE (30)	20.0	26.7	36.7	16.7	0.0	68.59
NH (192)	8.9	16.7	22.4	37.5	14.6	53.58
NJ (26)	30.8	3.8	46.2	19.2	0.0	67.23
NM (55)	1.8	25.5	23.6	43.6	5.5	54.88
NV (30)	6.7	16.7	43.3	26.7	6.7	57.76
NY (77)	67.5	16.9	9.1	5.2	1.3	85.41
OH (63)	49.2	33.3	14.3	3.2	0.0	83.14
OK (67)	35.8	32.8	22.4	7.5	1.5	76.95
OR (43)	32.6	25.6	23.3	16.3	2.3	72.23
PA (86)	62.8	22.1	8.1	5.8	1.2	84.83
RI (37)	0.0	13.5	48.6	32.4	5.4	54.32
SC (46)	19.6	23.9	37.0	17.4	2.2	67.13
SD (57)	1.8	3.5	8.8	52.6	33.3	37.10
TN (45)	11.1	22.2	51.1	15.6	0.0	65.04
TX (60)	25.0	28.3	28.3	15.0	3.3	70.54
UT (51)	2.0	9.8	27.5	47.1	13.7	48.08
VA (65)	13.8	21.5	33.8	29.2	1.5	62.51
VT (74)	2.7	10.8	52.7	33.8	0.0	56.21
WA (44)	20.5	38.6	31.8	9.1	0.0	72.78
WI (51)	49.0	31.4	11.8	5.9	2.0	81.35
WV (43)	14.0	14.0	32.6	32.6	7.0	58.44
WY (58)	0.0	3.4	17.2	46.6	32.8	39.89
TOTAL (2925)	21.7	23.9	28.0	21.3	5.1	66.55

Note: The composite index score for each state is the mean value of all individual responses from that state, using the midpoint for the first four categories (95 percent, 80 percent, 60 percent, and 40 percent) and 30 percent for the final category. The total composite score is weighted by the number of responses in each state.

Source: 2002 survey of state legislators by the Joint Project on Term Limits.

(2000) index of professionalism and our composite index is reasonably strong ($r=.74$), but interestingly, our time-on-the-job measure correlates more highly with legislative compensation ($r=.69$) than with the other components of the usual professionalism measure, session days ($r=.57$) and staff ($r=.56$).

Table 1 also shows the differences among states with respect to how much time their legislators estimate they spend on the job. While there is a distinct modal response category for many states, others produced substantial dispersion of responses. For example, in Maine one in four respondents said the job was less than half time, yet about 17 percent of the respondents reported that the job was basically full-time. What accounts for such variation in the perceptions of time-on-the-job estimates among individual legislators, even within the same state? Shifting our unit of analysis to the individual legislator, given the shared institutional environment within a state, what individual-level characteristics can explain the differences among legislators in the time they spend on the job? To answer this question, we model legislators' responses to the time-on-the-job question in our dataset as a function of both state-level institutional characteristics and individual characteristics.

State-Level Institutional Characteristics

The more time demanded of legislators and the more resources available to them, the more time we expect legislators to spend on the job. Therefore, three measures we include in our model are the standard measures of legislative professionalism: *compensation*, *staff*, and *days in session*.³ The number of constituents should also relate to workload; the larger the district population, the greater the demand for a legislator's services. In practice, population measures are often logged to make the effect linear in a regression model, as very large populations do not have such extreme effects as their size would suggest. We follow this practice, including in the model the natural *log of district population*.⁴

District (and chamber) size may also influence time on the job in another way. Members of the smaller of the two chambers in a state legislature can be expected to spend more time on the job than members of the larger chamber for reasons having nothing to do with district population. The smaller chamber has fewer people to serve on committees, meet with interest groups, deal with staff and executive branch bureaucracies, and in general, pass the same number of bills as the other chamber. This difference, of course, would increase the more dissimilar the size of the two chambers. New Hampshire is the extreme case. With 400 members in the house and only 24 senators (a ratio of almost 17:1), we anticipate that the workload is much greater for senators than for house members. In Alaska, by contrast, there are 40

house members and 20 senators, a ratio of only 2:1. We would not expect the time commitments to be much different between members of the two Alaska chambers. While other states have small legislatures, particularly in the West, with a 2:1 house-to-senate ratio, other states have more substantial differences between the number of house and senate seats. These include Vermont (5:1), Missouri (4.8:1), Texas (4.8:1), Maine (4.3:1), Connecticut (4.2:1), Pennsylvania (4:1), and Michigan (2.9:1). Another nine states have a 3:1 ratio of house to senate seats. To assess the impact of this distinction, we add a variable that measures the difference in chamber size (*house:senate relative size*) within each state legislature.

While both size variables are theoretically appropriate for our model, explaining time on the legislative job, including them both creates a potential problem as population is highly correlated with compensation (as the largest states tend to have the highest salaries) and moderately correlated with house:senate relative size. We shall see how this plays out below.

Individual-Level Legislator Characteristics

First, we expect that legislators who hold leadership positions are likely to spend more time on legislative work because they have more institutional responsibilities than rank-and-file members. To test this hypothesis, we include in our model separate variables for *party leader* (e.g., floor leader or presiding officer), *committee chair*, and *committee vice-chair*. Gender may also have an effect on time devoted to the job. While the evidence is mixed, several studies find that women legislators spend more time on constituency service than their male colleagues (Thomas 1992; Richardson and Freeman 1995; Epstein, Niemi, and Powell 2005; but also see Ellickson and Whistler 2001). A legislator's race may also have an effect on time devoted to legislature work. We hypothesize that nonwhite legislators may spend more time on the job because, as Jewell noted (1982, 145–6), racial or ethnic minority legislators “often represent districts that are below average in socioeconomic levels and most of them devote considerable time to constituent services. These legislators often find that members of their minority group living in other parts of the city . . . bring their requests to the minority legislators.” We include dummy variables in our model for a legislator's ethnicity or *race* (1=nonwhite, 0=white) and *gender* (1=female, 0=male).

The number of hours in a day being fixed, time devoted to an outside occupation must reduce the time available for legislative work (Maddox 2004a, 2004b). We test for this effect by coding a question from our survey—“Do you currently work for pay outside politics?”—as a simple dichotomous variable of *outside employment* (yes=2, no=1).

Legislators who plan to run for re-election are driven to spend more time on the job than those planning to retire. Retiring legislators may devote more time to finding a new career, or they may be exiting because of failing health, lack of interest, or other factors, all of which will likely limit the amount of time they choose to devote to their legislative duties. To test this hypothesis, our survey asked legislators, "Do you plan to run for reelection to your current chamber when your term expires?" These responses were coded on a four-point scale from 1 (definitely will run for re-election) to 4 (definitely will not run for re-election, including because of term limits). We include these responses in our model as the variable *plan to run again*.

Finally, we test the influence of a legislators' political party affiliation on his or her time devoted to legislative activities. Fiorina (1994, 307) argues, "if legislative service is a full-time occupation, legislators must sacrifice outside careers for legislative office. Those who have lucrative private-sector careers will tend to exit legislative service—or never enter rather than abandon those careers." He suggests that the long-time Democratic hegemony in state legislatures resulted in part from the professionalization of these bodies that made them relatively less attractive career choices for Republicans, who arguably had more lucrative job prospects than Democrats. By the same logic, Republicans may devote less time to the legislature. To test this hypothesis, we include a dummy variable for Republican *party* affiliation.

Results of the Multivariate Model

The results of our model for predicting time on the job for individual legislators are shown in Table 2.⁵ The test of our expectations regarding the effects of the institutional variables are mixed. Compensation has the expected strong positive effect. Moving from a value one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above (with all other variables at their mean or modal value) increases the predicted percentage of time spent on the job by nearly 11 percentage points, to approximately 72 percent of a full-time job rather than 61 percent. Staff, on the other hand, has a positive, but not statistically significant, effect. Days in session appears to have no effect on reported time on the job, perhaps reflecting the continuous nature of much legislative work, as noted above.

House:Senate relative size has, as expected, a positive (albeit modest) relationship with time on the job. Moving from a value one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above is predicted to increase the percent of time spent on the job by about two percentage points. We can also examine the chamber effect in a typical state. New York is the median state in terms of the size discrepancy between the house and the senate (a

Table 2. Random-Effects Model of Time on the Job as a Function of Institutional and Individual-Level Characteristics

Independent Variables	b	sd
Constant	50.55**	11.48
Institutional		
Compensation	0.22**	0.08
Staff size	1.41	2.10
Days in session	0.01	0.01
House:Senate relative size	0.72**	0.44
Log of district population	1.92	1.20
Individual		
Party leadership (yes)	4.15**	1.60
Committee chair (yes)	1.89**	0.85
Committee vice-chair (yes)	-0.04	0.92
Gender (female)	6.99*	0.79
Race (nonwhite)	2.21*	1.16
Party (Republican)	-2.20**	1.22
Plan to run again	-0.88**	0.33
Outside employment (yes)	-9.02**	0.73
State variance	44.44**	10.88

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$ (one-tailed)

N=2,691

Note: The dependent variable is self-reported time on the job, coded in five categories.

ratio of 2.42); there we would expect senators to work only an additional 1 percent of a full-time job as compared to members of the lower chamber. District population has a positive, although only marginally statistically significant, effect ($p = .055$, one-tailed). The estimated coefficient indicates that the predicted effect of moving from one standard deviation below the mean of the log of the population to one standard deviation above it is four percentage points.

As we noted above, state population is correlated with compensation and house:senate relative size. Therefore, in a population of 50 states and 99 chambers, it is impossible to convincingly distinguish the precise effects of these interrelated variables. Nevertheless, all three variables are related to time on the job to a statistically significant degree (or nearly so) when included in our model. For each, there is a strong theoretical argument underlying such an effect, so we are reluctant to exclude any of them. Setting aside the difficulty of sorting out their relative effects, the three variables together are clearly a strong and statistically significant predictor of time on the job.

Shifting now to variables measured at the level of the individual legislator, we expect individuals with more institutional responsibility to spend more

time on the job, with the extra work being greatest for leaders, less for chairs, and still less for vice-chairs. Indeed, we find that time on the job is predicted to be 4 percent higher for leaders than members who do not occupy any of these positions, 2 percent higher for committee chairs, and is essentially no different for committee vice-chairs.

The estimated effects of gender and race are both positive, as expected, and statistically significant. Women are predicted to devote an additional 7 percent of a full-time job to their legislative work compared with men, and minorities are predicted to devote an additional 2 percent as compared with whites. In addition, those who had outside employment are predicted to devote 9 percent less time to their legislative work than those without outside employment.

Consistent with our expectations, there is a strong last-term effect. Those legislators who definitely do not intend or who cannot legally run for reelection are predicted to spend 3 percent less time on the job than those who definitely intend to run again. Finally, as expected, Republicans also are predicted to devote slightly less time to the job—2 percent less—compared with Democrats.

HOW TIME ON THE JOB IS ALLOCATED

Congressional research in the 1970s highlighted the fact that lawmaking is but one aspect of the job as legislators see it, and much of the non-lawmaking activity has important electoral consequences (Mayhew 1974; Fiorina 1977; Fenno 1978). Eulau and Karpis (1978) and Jewell (1982) generalized these findings by focusing on the concept of representation. Specifically, they discuss representation as responsiveness (Pitkin 1967) along different dimensions: policy responsiveness (lawmaking), service responsiveness (casework), allocation responsiveness (obtaining collective benefits for the district), and symbolic responsiveness (communicating and giving the appearance of representation).

By making use of additional questions asked of the legislators in our survey, we can look at the activities to which legislators choose to devote their time. Specifically, we asked the respondents to indicate “how much time do you actually spend on” each of eight activities, where the responses were on a five-point scale (1=hardly ever to 5= a great deal). Four of these activities (studying legislation, developing new legislation, building coalitions within one’s own party, and building coalitions with members across party lines) are tasks associated with the policymaking function of representation. Three of the activities are associated with the other forms of responsiveness. Thus,

the activities of keeping in touch with constituents, helping constituents with problems, and making sure the district gets its fair share of funding and projects correspond to the symbolic, service, and allocation modes of responsiveness, respectively. The final activity we asked our respondents about was an electoral one, involving the amount of time they devoted to campaigning and fundraising.

Each of these activities is positively correlated with overall time on the job as shown in Table 3, although the correlations for the policy-related items are smaller than those for the constituency-oriented activities. To gain a better understanding of the role of these components, we estimate a model of overall time on the job with these eight activities as predictors. Because we emphasize that these eight items are best thought of as how time on the job is allocated rather than as additional factors that explain varying amounts of time on the job, we cannot simply include them in the model in Table 2.

We find that only one of the three policymaking variables (developing legislation) is related to time on the job to a statistically significant degree (Table 4). In contrast, all the other activities are statistically significant factors in determining time on the job. The estimated effects of casework (helping constituents), symbolic (keeping in touch with constituents), and allocation responsiveness (district projects) all attain statistical significance, as does the estimated effect of electoral activity (campaigning/fundraising). Thus, both bivariate correlations and multiple regression demonstrate the dominance of constituency-oriented activities in determining the amount of time a legislator devotes to the job.

All eight types of activities are positively correlated with each other, most at a relatively low level (less than .3), but some of the constituency activities

Table 3. Correlations between Time on the Job and Time Spent on Various Legislative Activities

Legislative Activities	r
Policy Activities	
Studying legislation	.10
Developing new legislation	.17
Building intraparty coalitions	.12
Building interparty coalitions	.11
Constituency Activities	
Keeping in touch with constituents	.30
Helping constituents	.30
District projects	.24
Campaigning/fundraising	.22

All correlations: $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 4. Overall Time on the Job as a Function of Individual Legislative Activities

Independent Variables	b	se
Constant	25.00	2.430
Policy Activities		
Studying legislation	0.23	.446
Developing new legislation	1.98**	.421
Building intraparty coalitions	-0.04	.463
Building interparty coalitions	0.31	.430
Constituency Activities		
Keeping in touch with constituents	2.70**	.585
Helping constituents	3.42**	.572
District projects	0.92*	.406
Campaigning/fundraising	2.35**	.396

**p≤.01; *p≤.05 (one-tailed)

N=2,653

Adjusted R²=.13

Note: The dependent variable is self-reported time on the job, coded in five categories.

are correlated as high as .68 in our dataset. Thus, we may be able to gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between policymaking and constituency activity and time on the job by combining similar items. Factor analysis of the eight activity items shows that they form two factors, one each for the policy and constituency factors. We then use these two factors to predict time on the job (Table 5).⁶ Comparing the predicted time on the job for a legislator one standard deviation below the mean on each factor with that of a legislator one standard deviation above the mean on that factor shows that the higher level of constituency activity is predicted to lead to 14 percent more time on the job, as compared with only 3.1 percent more time for greater activity on the policy factor.

Table 5. Time on the Job as a Function of Aggregate Legislative Activities

Independent Variables	b	sd
Constant	67.00**	.39
Policy factor	1.56**	.41
Constituency factor	7.04**	.41

**p≤.01 (one-tailed)

N=2,653

Adjusted R²=.13

Note: The dependent variable is self-reported time on the job, coded in five categories. The coefficients are estimated with ordinary least squares.

Thus, the overall picture that emerges is that while policymaking and institutional responsiveness is associated with how much time a legislator spends on the job, variations in his or her constituency activity play a much greater role in explaining his or her time allocation choice. Constituency activity is a constant demand on members, although some members clearly devote more time to it than others. As we noted earlier, constituency activities—especially communication and casework—can consume significant time even when the legislature is not in session.

Finally, we note that campaigning and fundraising activity takes up an important part of a legislator's time; electioneering is simply a time-consuming activity. We may not think of it necessarily as part of the job of a legislator, but the reality is that a legislator cannot do the job without being elected. And, even more so than the other activities, the campaigning and fundraising activity occurs largely outside of the legislative session in most states, oftentimes by law.

CONCLUSION

For comparative state legislative research, the standard measure of a legislator's time commitment to the job has long been the official session length. While there is clearly value in this measure, it fails to reveal how much time legislators actually work, and it fails to capture within-state differences in legislators' investment in legislative work.

Roughly one-fifth of the legislators in our sample believe that legislative work takes up nearly as much time as a full-time job. At the other extreme, only a few (one in 20) report that being a legislator takes up less than 30 percent of their working hours. Evidence from the survey, along with anecdotal evidence from legislators' memoirs and the like, indicates that constituency work is a primary component of that heavy investment of time. Campaigning and fundraising also contribute a great deal to the legislators' workloads. For better or worse, policymaking activities account for somewhat less of the variation in legislators' workloads and, presumably, for less of the overall demands legislators have placed on them.

Moreover, it appears that the non-policymaking activities of state legislators are becoming a larger part of their job, much as they are at the national level. In a survey of veteran state legislators, Moncrief, Thompson, and Kurtz (1996) found that increased casework and the pressures of campaigning were viewed as two of the biggest ways in which the job of legislator had changed in recent decades.

Using legislators' own perceptions of the time they actually spend on the

job also leads to insights about both across-state and within-state variation in workloads. Across-state variation was to be expected, although the lack of effect of both staff size and days in session raises questions about these measures as valid components of legislative professionalization indices and further highlights the importance of non-policymaking aspects of the legislative job. We find that even in the most highly professionalized legislatures, a few members work at a rate that is less than half of a full-time job. More significant, however, is that in most states substantial proportions of legislators are found in at least three of the five response categories. Moreover, legislators' work efforts vary systematically with a variety of individual-level characteristics, including holding a leadership position, gender, race, and whether the member holds another job. A small amount of shirking is also in evidence, as legislators who do not intend to or who could not run for re-election worked at a somewhat lesser rate.

Legislators in full-time professional state legislatures have more time and staff resources to do the job, and generally, they are paid at a substantially higher rate than legislators in part-time citizen legislatures. Nevertheless, "full-time" and "part-time" are relative terms. Even legislators in part-time institutions generally spend more time on the job than we might anticipate. Moreover, within a particular state legislature, the time devoted to the job varies substantially by individual. Legislators are a varied lot, both within and across state lines. The amount of time they devote to their legislative roles reflects this variation, even beyond the cross-state differences in the institutional demands of the job.

ENDNOTES

1. This survey was conducted as part of the Joint Project on Term Limits, a multi-year research project involving the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of State Governments, the State Legislative Leaders' Foundation, and a number of political scientists. Part of the project was supported by National Science Foundation grant SES-0212310.

2. Although all four of these states fall above the median in Squire's (2000) professionalization index, their scores on that index are well below those of the legislatures generally considered to be fully professional.

3. In order to have measures on these variables as close to the time of our survey as possible, we use the Hamm and Moncrief (2004) estimates of compensation, the 2004 National Conference of State Legislatures data for staff, and the Carey et al. (2006) measures of days in session.

4. Population is a state-level variable, but strictly speaking, it is not an institutional variable (although it depends, in part, on the size of a legislative chamber).

5. We used a random-effects model in order to account for the correlation between state-level observations. The state variable in this model explains 15 percent of the variance in the dependent variable after accounting for other state-level institutional characteristics ($p < .001$). A Hausman test comparing the results from fixed- and random-effects models yielded a χ^2 of 3.66 with 9 df ($p = .93$), thus failing to reject the null hypothesis and, thereby, supporting our choice of the random-effects model.

6. We use ordinary least squares estimates for the model in Table 5. As only individual-level independent variables were included in the model, we do not expect any significant clustering of responses by state.

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