

DIVIDED GOVERNMENT IN THE AMERICAN STATES: A BYPRODUCT OF LEGISLATIVE PROFESSIONALISM?

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Since World War II, divided government has become increasingly common in the American states. A significant component of the increase is the deterioration of Republican fortunes in state legislatures: after the 1990 and 1992 elections, for example, only five state legislatures were controlled by the Republicans. I shall examine the hypothesis that the professionalization of state legislatures makes legislative service more attractive to Democratic candidates and less attractive to Republican candidates, because full-time legislative service is incompatible with another career, and Democrats, on average, have less lucrative career opportunities than Republicans. Statistical analysis of post-World War II legislative elections outside the South is consistent with the argument: other things being equal, every ten-thousand-dollar increase in real biennial legislative compensation is associated with approximately a 1% increase in Democratic legislators.

Bill Clinton's election brought an end to an unprecedented 12 consecutive years of divided national government. But few observers are confident that Clinton's plurality victory has banished divided government from the scene, especially with the Democrats defending two-thirds of the Senate seats to be contested in 1994. Given the frequency and duration of split control of national institutions in recent decades, some have labeled the contemporary period a "new era of coalition government" (Sundquist 1988), while others, continuing to adhere to the electoral realignment-party system interpretation of American electoral history, view the contemporary period as a "sixth party system" (Aldrich and Niemi n.d.; see also Shafer 1991).

Students of elections have increasingly begun to focus on the electoral causes of divided government (Campbell n.d. [a]; Ginsberg and Shefter 1990; Jacobson 1990). The research question typically has taken one of two forms: (1) Given their continuing advantage in party identification, why have the Democrats had so much difficulty constructing presidential majorities? and (2) Given their sweeping presidential victories, why have the Republicans been unable to convert their presidential support into congressional—especially House—majorities? Commentaries adopting the first question as a starting point typically focus on a combination of divisive social issues and disappointing economic and foreign policy performance, perhaps exacerbated by an open nominating process that highlights the divisions within the Democratic party. Commentaries starting with the second question typically focus on Democratic gerrymandering and incumbency, though academic research casts doubt on such explanations (Jacobson 1990; Mann 1987). These two starting points obviously are not mutually exclusive: the Democrats may fall short of their potential in the presidential voting while the Republicans simultaneously fall short in the congressional voting. There is reason to believe that divided national government is a complex rather than

simple phenomenon, with multiple causes that may be logically and empirically independent.

Recent research further complicates the discussion. I have noted elsewhere that American state governments have also become increasingly divided (Fiorina 1992; see Figure 1). Moreover, the features identified in state patterns of divided control resemble those in the national case. In particular, the Republicans do somewhat better in executive races than state partisanship would predict, but they have steadily lost ground in state legislatures. These developments suggest the operation of factors broader than those typically used to explain the components of divided national government, for if developments in Ohio, California, and other states resemble those in the nation at large, the existence of common or related causes should be considered, at least as a starting point.

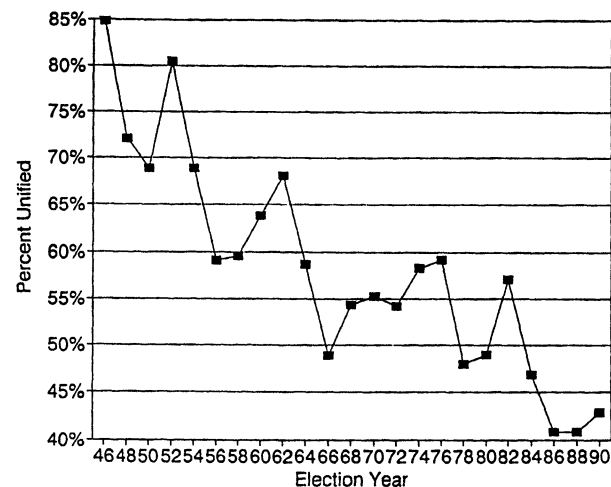
I shall focus on *one* aspect of the growth of divided government in the American states—the decline of Republican fortunes in legislative elections—and *one* contributing factor to this decline, namely, the development of legislative professionalism, or (as some might prefer to call it) careerism. Briefly, the analyses that follow are consistent with the argument that all other things being equal, professionalized legislatures are relatively more attractive to Democrats than to Republicans. Thus, postwar good government reforms that encouraged the professionalization of state legislatures had the unintended consequence of undercutting the Republican party in that arena.¹ Moreover, given that state legislatures are the traditional "farm teams" for Congress, the decline in Republican state legislative fortunes should naturally lead to some decline in their congressional fortunes as well.

PARTY FORTUNES IN STATE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

The decline in unified state government largely reflects a decline in unified *Republican* state govern-

FIGURE 1

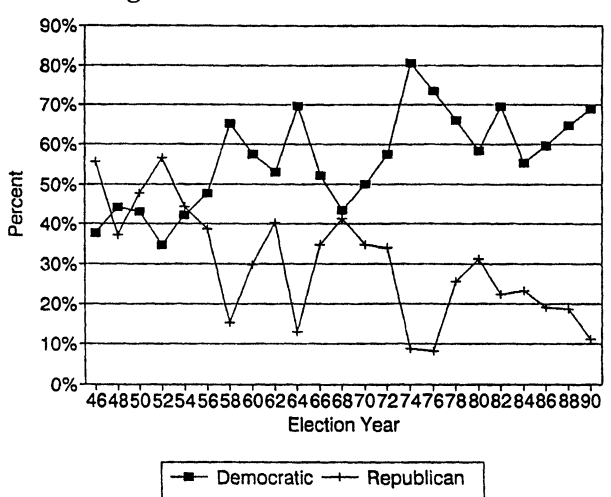
Unified State Government



ment, which in turn largely reflects a decline in Republican legislatures (Fiorina 1992, chap. 3). Since World War II, there has been considerable variability but no partisan trend in gubernatorial elections. Legislative elections are another matter, however. Even while spotting the Democrats a 15-state lead in the southern and border states, in 1946 and 1952, the Republicans captured an absolute majority of state legislatures (Figure 2). Their fortunes have slipped dramatically, however, and following the 1990 and 1992 elections, only five states had Republican legislatures. The impact of adverse national circumstances is clear (the 1958 and 1974 recessions, the Goldwater debacle), but it is also clear that such adverse shocks are embedded within a long-term secular decline. Note that the Republican collapse in state legislatures had taken place by the mid-1970s (Figure 2). Over the

FIGURE 2

Unified Legislatures



more recent period spanned by the State Legislative Elections Project (1968–86), there is little variation in the number of Democratic state legislators.

Interestingly, although there are several excellent studies of state legislative elections, none of them have addressed the Republican decline. Analyzing elections in 41 states between 1944 and 1984 Campbell (1986) finds that popular presidential candidates help state legislative candidates of their parties and that the longer the presidential coattails, the larger the subsequent off-year loss. Because Campbell's dependent variable is *change* in legislative seats, however, the steady decline in Republican strength does not stand out. Chubb (1988) examines Democratic lower-house success in nonsouthern legislatures over the period 1940–82, finding that state election results are significantly influenced by the coattails of candidates for higher offices, by national economic conditions, and by turnout surge and decline. He does not comment on the declining percentage of Republican legislators, though the decline is statistically incorporated in a lagged variable measuring the percentage of lower-house Democrats in the preceding legislature. Similarly, Simon, Ostrom, and Marra (1991) find that control of legislative chambers between 1950 and 1988 depends on such short-term factors as the president's standing in the polls and dramatic political events and such longer-term factors as the national party balance and the departure of the state outcome from its long-run equilibrium. Again, these authors do not comment on the Republican decline, though it is incorporated in the long-run equilibrium. Thus comprehensive statistical analyses establish that legislative outcomes in the states reflect both long-term party competition and short-term political events and conditions, but these analyses incorporate the Republican legislative decline statistically without calling attention to it or providing any substantive explanation for it. The analyses reported herein build on these earlier efforts but keep the Republican decline front and center.

As a starting point, let us take a closer look at party control in the state legislatures. As usual, the South is special. The Republicans have *never* won control of a southern or border legislative chamber in the postwar period: all of the action in Figure 2 occurs outside these regions. Thus, I omit the 15 southern and border states from consideration, along with Alaska, Hawaii, Minnesota, and Nebraska.² Controlling for short-term variation in the national political climate (measured by interelection change in Gallup approval ratings appropriately signed for the party of the president), the time trend of Republican control in the remaining 31 nonsouthern states is given in Table 1, column 1.

Since World War II, the Republicans have lost legislatures in the non-South at a rate of almost 2% per election. The passage of time is not an explanation, of course, but a context in which true explanatory variables operate. Elsewhere I have suggested that legislative professionalization works in favor of Democrats (Fiorina 1992). Substituting an extremely

TABLE 1

Correlates of Republican Control of State Legislatures: Non-South, 1946–90

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	MODELS		
	1	2	3
Constant	60.53 (15.25)	55.93 (15.13)	60.55 (15.71)
Presidential approval change	-.59 (.21)	-.58 (.22)	-.59 (.22)
Time trend	-1.74 (.57)	—	-1.69 (1.61)
Annual sessions	—	-.36 (.13)	-.01 (.36)
Republican control ($t - 1$)	.08 (.19)	.17 (.18)	.08 (.20)
Corrected R^2	.55	.52	.52

Note: Figures are ordinary least squares estimates $N = 22$. Time trend: 1946 = 1, 1948 = 2, . . . , 1990 = 23.

crude indicator of professionalization (the simple percentage of states whose legislatures meet annually) for the time trend in Table 1, we get column 2. For every 3% increase in states holding annual legislative sessions, the Republicans lost control of approximately 1% of the state legislatures. The trend in annual sessions tracks the time trend very closely (the simple correlation between the two variables is .95), and when both are included in the equation (column 3), multicollinearity deprives both of significance.

Of course, there are numerous other time series that trend upward (or downward) over this 23-election period. Any of these might perform just as well statistically as the trend in annual legislative sessions. I shall develop the argument that legislative professionalization enhances the electoral prospects of Democratic candidates, then present the evidence.

OPPORTUNITY COSTS AND LEGISLATIVE CAREERS

In the early postwar years, most state legislatures were part-time, minimally supported institutions whose members were poorly compensated. Most were constitutionally limited to sitting every other year. Legislative scholars commonly label such bodies *amateur*, because under these conditions turnover is high, and service is an avocation, not a profession. Some state legislatures still fit this description. The Wyoming legislature, for example, is permitted to meet for 20 days during even years and 40 days during odd years. Members receive \$75-per-day salary with a \$60 per diem, for a total biennial compensation of less than \$7,000. Other perks are minimal. Upper- and lower-chamber turnover rates are similar—about 30% per election in the early 1980s (Niemi and Winsky 1987, tbl. 1).

New York offers a striking contrast. It is a good

example of what legislative scholars refer to as a *professional legislature*. In session annually from January through June and again for a period in the Fall, with almost 20 staff per legislator, each member receives a \$57,500 annual salary and \$75 per diem, as well as travel allowances. Moreover, two-thirds of the assembly and the entire senate receive so-called “lulus,” that is, “in lieu of” payments for holding various party and committee leadership posts (Fowler and McClure 1989, 84–89, 96). Assembly turnover in the early 1980s was about 20% per election, with senate turnover under 15%. *Voluntary* turnover was less than 10% (p. 90).

In the early postwar years, most state legislatures fell on the amateur end of the continuum. But over the years, especially during the 1960s, many legislatures have become more professionalized (Kurtz 1991). In particular, legislative service has increasingly become a full-time occupation. Bazar reports that as of 1986, between 11% and 20% of legislators nationwide were full-time and that in some areas (e.g., the middle Atlantic states), over half were professional legislators (1987, 2). My hypothesis is that this development advantages Democratic candidates relative to Republicans. The hypothesis is a logical implication of several propositions previously noted by students of state politics.

First, legislative service does not make equivalent demands on people from different walks of life. Discussing Arkansas (an amateur legislature), Blair comments: “A realtor or banker or lawyer, the owner of a furniture store or car dealership, may have the time flexibility and financial security to adjust his or her schedule to a regular session of two months or more, increasingly frequent special sessions, and countless committee meetings and constituent obligations in between. The realtor’s or lawyer’s secretary, a bank teller, the furniture and car salespersons who must be at work if they are to receive an income, simply cannot serve” (1988, 164).

Second, if legislative service has an asymmetric impact on people from different occupational and income strata, we should expect *changes* in the conditions of legislative service to change the relative attractiveness of service for different categories of people. That is what Rosenthal reports:

Minnesota is an example of a state in which marked change in the composition of the legislature has taken place. Lawyers, independent business owners, and farmers have left. Their places have been taken by young people, many of whom see the legislature as an entry level position for a career in politics. But as noticeable as anything else, the contemporary Minnesota legislature has more full-time members. . . . The neighboring state of Wisconsin has moved in the same direction, with younger members and fewer who work part time at the job. There is only a single farmer left in the senate. . . . Legislators themselves are not united on the benefits of professionalization: . . . in California the entire fabric of the process has changed. “The way it used to be, we only had men of means, of experience,” a senior senator remarked. “Now we have full-time legislators.” (1981, 58)

Finally, we have the common observation that the two parties are based in different socioeconomic strata. Arguing that the Republicans had an advantage in an era of part-time politicians, Key observed:

Outside the South, the Republican group has . . . a far larger reservoir of persons with leadership skills on which to draw. Well-connected lawyers, businessmen with time and money to devote to politics, and perhaps to a lesser extent, persons with skill in professional politics gravitate in greater degree to the Republican party than to the Democratic. By the secondary network of economic relations within their own group—legal retainers, insurance commissions, real estate transactions, and the like—the business community within the Republican party can sustain a class whose time and energies may be dedicated principally to the practice of politics. . . . The Democratic Party, on the other hand, enjoys the handicaps in recruiting leadership created by its position as a party devoted in principle to mass causes. (1956, 256–57)

Now, as then, the parties have discernibly different socioeconomic bases. As mass surveys monotonously demonstrate, the Republicans have a higher-income, higher-status popular base than the Democrats, especially when the profit sector is distinguished. And elite surveys find that Republican elites come relatively more from the profit sector, Democrats from the public and other nonprofit sectors.³

Consider a simplified model based on the preceding propositions. Within a state, two parties compete for public office. Within each party is a pool consisting of all potential candidates, that is, those possessing the minimal qualifications deemed appropriate for service. The parties' candidate pools differ in their occupational and income characteristics. The Republicans are a higher-income, more private-sector party; their potential candidates are independent professionals, proprietors and farmers, and the independently wealthy (as well as their spouses, given that such families are better able to afford domestic substitutes). The Democrats are a lower-income, more public-sector party. Their potential candidates are union officials, teachers, and other public- and nonprofit-sector employees. Given such differences, variations in the degree of legislative professionalism are likely to affect the decisions of those in the respective candidate pools.

Those in the Republican pool are advantaged where the legislature is on the amateur end of the continuum. They are more likely to have the career and financial flexibility to absent themselves from their principal occupations for one to three months a year. Some of their responsibilities can be moved to evenings and weekends or delegated to associates, relatives, or employees. Indeed, for lawyers in private practice, the contacts made in political life raise the value of their outside hours.⁴ In contrast, salary and wage earners in the Democratic pool forgo their incomes when they take leave for legislative service—if leave is even feasible. Even if ambition levels are comparable, Republican candidates are more able to pursue their ambitions.

With a professional legislature, the logic reverses. 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. In contrast, for potential Democratic candidates, legislative service now becomes an attractive alternative career, probably better compensated and more highly regarded than their present careers. Again, even if ambition levels are equal between the respective candidate pools, Democratic candidates are now in a better position to act on their ambitions.

In sum, in amateur legislative settings the critical question is, "Who has the flexibility to *combine* legislative service and an outside career?" In professional legislative settings, the critical question is, "Who is willing to *sacrifice* an outside career for legislative service?" If the career patterns of Democrats and Republicans are as just posited, then, *ceteris paribus*, the answer to the first question is, "More likely, Republicans," and the answer to the second is, "More likely, Democrats."

Several aspects of the argument deserve additional comment. First, the argument says nothing about net *turnover* in legislatures. There is a substantial literature on that subject, of course. Reformers have supported professionalization partly as a remedy for excessively high turnover, and some research finds that correlates of professionalism (e.g., longer session length and higher compensation) do reduce turnover (Calvert 1979; Rosenthal 1974). The argument made here, however, is that increasing session length and compensation have a differential partisan impact, advantaging Democrats relative to Republicans.

Second, the argument is a *selection* argument. Institutional change (professionalization) has altered the mix of incentives facing legislative candidates so that prospective Republican candidates find legislative service relatively less attractive than in the past, while prospective Democrats find it relatively more attractive.⁵ Increasingly, the former select out, and the latter select in. This logic resembles that of Ehrenhalt (1991), though the two arguments have different principal emphases. Noting that Democrats (including those of the most liberal persuasion) sometimes dominate local councils and state legislatures in seemingly conservative locales, Ehrenhalt hypothesizes a difference in party attitudes toward government. Democrats generally believe in government, like to use government to improve society, and consequently enjoy government service; Republicans, in contrast, are skeptical of government capacity, dislike government, and consequently find service much less rewarding. This too is a selection argument. The two arguments are not at all inconsistent. Indeed, they are quite complementary, and Ehrenhalt takes note of the greater career commitment evidenced by Democrats. But I have said nothing about psychological or ideological benefits and costs, only the more tangible costs and benefits of legislative service. Full-time service imposes higher

opportunity costs on Republicans, and generous compensation raises the direct benefits of service for Democrats. If the logic of my argument is operative, party fortunes will respond to measures of *tangible* benefits and costs. Ehrenhalt's argument, in contrast, could be valid even in the absence of such relationships.⁶

A third point is that my argument is easy to caricature. I am not claiming that candidates for office look at nothing but the prospective wages and hours, with Republicans being discouraged by longer hours, and Democrats encouraged by higher wages. I am suggesting merely that such considerations affect career choices. On the margins, some qualified Democrats—however public-spirited—will find the sacrifices of service in an amateur legislature too great to bear. Similarly, some qualified Republicans—however public-spirited—will find the sacrifices of service in a professional legislature too great to bear. Such marginal decisions affect the respective candidate pools and, indirectly, the composition of the legislature.

One objection to the foregoing argument is that correlations between occupation, income, and partisanship, while significant, are far from perfect. The objection is well taken, but the empirical question is not the absolute strength of the correlations but whether they are strong enough to contribute to the explanation for the Republican legislative decline. That question can only be answered by looking at the evidence. From past research, we know that candidates' decisions vary systematically with measureable characteristics of the offices they hold, the offices they seek, their attitudes toward risk, and such features of the electoral context as party competitiveness and national forces (Black 1972; Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Rohde 1979; Schlesinger 1966, esp. chaps. 2, 3). This research simply expands the list of factors known to affect candidate decisions.⁷

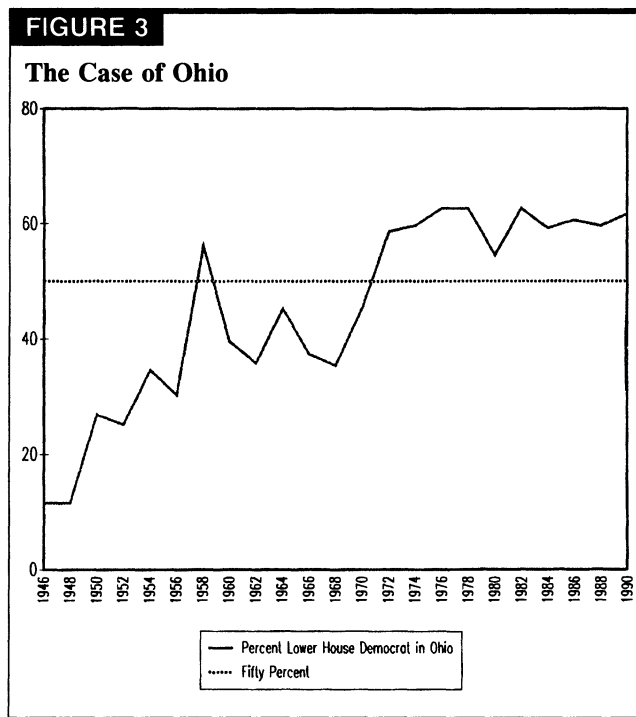
ANALYSIS

There is a wide-ranging literature on legislative professionalism.⁸ Much of it addresses legislative organization and resources (the power of the leadership and the autonomy of committees, the size of legislative staffs, etc.) For purposes of the present research, however, I limit my attention to the two aspects of professionalization that should most immediately affect the individual career decisions of candidates: the length of time that the legislature sits and the compensation for legislative service. Other aspects of professionalism (e.g., size of legislative staffs and autonomy of legislative standing committees) are important for the operation of legislatures and apparently affect incumbent reelection chances (Holbrook and Tidmarch 1991; King 1991; Weber, Tucker, and Brace 1991). My principal attention, however, is on the consequences of candidates opting in and out of the arena, and for that decision, time commitment and compensation would seem to be of greatest

relevance. Price (1975) and Ehrenhalt (1991) refer to these aspects of legislative professionalization as simply "professionalism."

The analysis that follows examines party fortunes in the lower houses of 31 nonsouthern state legislatures over the 23 elections between 1946 and 1990. Three variables were selected to represent the career attractiveness of a legislature. First, analogous to the aggregate analysis already reported, I coded a dummy variable (ANNUAL) as 0 for the years in which a state legislature was restricted to biennial sessions and 1 after the change to annual sessions. In the immediate postwar period, only 16% of the legislatures in the analysis had annual sessions. That number more than doubled in the 1950s, more than doubled again by 1972, and stands at 87% today (see Appendix). Despite this sharp trend, I did not expect this gross measure to produce significant relationships in the disaggregated analysis. In the first place, a few states already had annual sessions in 1946—so for them, the variable is a constant for the period of this study. And in the second place, some states that adopted annual sessions experienced only small increases in actual legislative service. For example, in 1974, Wyoming began meeting for 20-day sessions in the even years—hardly the kind of increase that would lead many potential candidates to recalculate the benefits and costs of legislative service. Thus, I expected any effects of annual sessions to be incorporated in a second, more sensitive measure, DAYS.⁹ Calculated from successive editions of *Book of the States*, this is simply the total days that the legislature was in session during the election year and the year preceding (see Appendix). While exact session dates are available, this measure nonetheless understates the demands of legislative service, since it does not include committee meetings and constituency service conducted when the legislature is not in session. Given the argument I developed, I expected Republican electoral fortunes to wane as states moved to annual sessions and days in session rose.

Third, again using *The Book of the States*, I calculated the total biennial compensation for legislators, expressed in 1982 dollars. This measure includes legislator base salaries, plus their per diems and other daily allowances multiplied by days in session. Again, the measure is only approximate. It does not capture payments for legislative service (such as committee hearings) while the legislature is not in session. Additionally, "lulus" are not included, although they have come to be increasingly important. Such "in lieu of" payments are hard to factor in since only some legislators receive them. At any rate, since more experienced legislators are usually the beneficiaries, "lulus" probably do not dominate the decisions of new candidates.¹⁰ As explained earlier, we expected Democratic fortunes to wax as real compensation rose. In the early postwar years, average compensation was less than per capita state income, but in the 1950s and 1960s, legislative compensation rose at a much faster rate (see Appendix). State



legislators suffered in the inflationary 1970s and prospered in the 1980s.

To illustrate the variation in the three indicators of professionalism, consider the experiences of two states. Figure 3 shows Ohio's interesting postwar history. Prior to 1972, the Republicans won the lower house in every year except 1958. But in the 1972 elections, with *George McGovern heading the ticket*, the Democratic percentage jumped 13 points, and they have been continuously in the majority since then. Did anything obvious happen around the time of this sharp change in partisan fortunes? Yes: at least two developments may be relevant. First, the 1970s reapportionment was carried out by a reapportionment board that had a three-to-two Democratic majority. Perhaps they were extraordinarily clever and produced a massive, lasting Democratic gerrymander.¹¹ Alternatively, Ohio voters approved a constitutional amendment providing for annual sessions. From a total of 315 days in the 1967 biennial session, the Ohio legislature moved to 717 in the 1971-72 annual sessions.¹² Coincidentally, between the 1968 and 1972 elections, the Democrats scored a 23% seat gain.¹³ Simple regressions analogous to those reported earlier in Table 1 indicate that the increased session lengths account for more than half of the Democratic gain.

California (Figure 4) provides a different illustration. Republican hegemony came to an end earlier than in Ohio—in the election of 1958. Since then, Republicans have attained majority status only in 1968. Since California has had annual sessions throughout the postwar period, that variable has no explanatory relevance. While days-in-session has been trending steadily upward, a simple regression

analysis analogous to those in Table 1 shows little indication that length of session is related to the improvement in Democratic fortunes. But the third professionalism variable—real compensation—bears a significant relationship to Democratic success. Each \$10,000 (biennial) increase in real legislative compensation is associated with a 1% increase in Democratic legislators. Thus, the observed \$80,000 increase in real compensation in postwar California directly contributes to a 9% improvement in Democratic fortunes.¹⁴

While suggestive, individual state analyses are untrustworthy, given the paucity of observations underlying them. By pooling the data, we can carry out a more efficient analysis. The pooled time-series cross section is a rectangular array of 713 observations, somewhat denser in space (31 states) than in time (23 elections). Analysis of such pooled data often runs afoul of ordinary least squares assumptions, namely the homoskedasticity and independence of the residuals. Various correctives have been proposed, but all have their weaknesses. Fortunately, in practice, they seem to produce estimates that are very similar (Stimson 1985). Inclusion of a dummy variable for each state and a lagged variable for the percentage of Democratic representatives in the preceding legislative session should take account of the most obvious sources of difficulty.¹⁵ Based on previous research, we also need to include variables representing national economic conditions, the coattails of candidates for higher offices, and the on-year-off-year cycle.

Table 2 reports the estimates for several related specifications of a dummy variable least squares model. In these specifications, each state has its own intercept (the constant is omitted). In effect, each state is allowed to have a different average level of

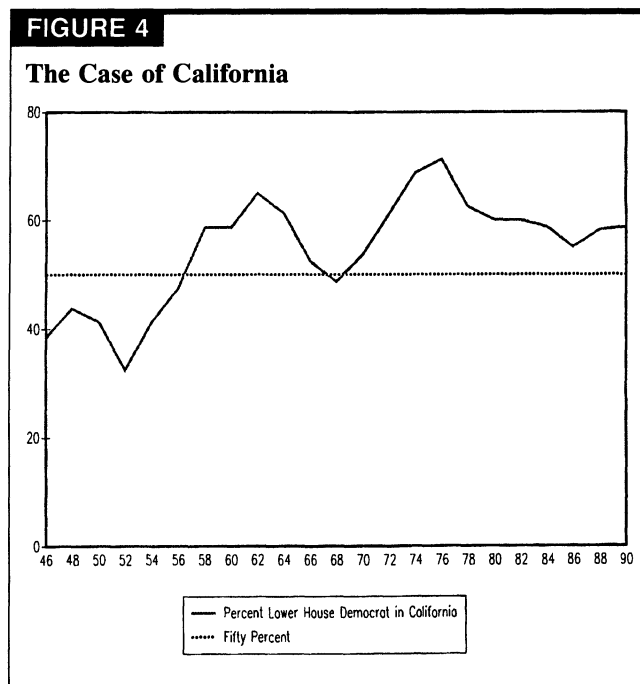


TABLE 2

Democratic Seat Share in Non-southern Lower Houses, 1946-90

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	MODELS			
	1	2	3	4
Year	.004 (.047)	—	—	—
Democratic Reps. ($t - 1$)	.505 (.029)	.505 (.028)	.512 (.027)	.515 (.027)
Annual	1.05 (1.19)	1.11 (1.04)	—	—
Days-in-session	.002 .004	.002 (.0038)	—	—
Compensation Real	.0071 (.0042)	.0073 (.0039)	.0099 .0030	—
Relative	—	—	—	1.21 (.363)
Presidential Year	-27.70 (2.81)	-27.68 (2.80)	-27.29 (2.78)	-27.14 (2.78)
Vote	.5199 (.0610)	.5191 (.0604)	.5086 (.0598)	.5026 (.0597)
Gubernatorial Year	-20.13 (2.78)	-20.18 (2.74)	-20.14 (2.74)	-20.08 (2.74)
Vote	.3986 (.0529)	.3993 (.0523)	.3981 (.0522)	.3968 (.0522)
Off-year	-9.76 (1.06)	-9.78 (1.03)	-9.98 (1.02)	-10.11 (1.01)
GNP growth	.1731 (.0628)	.1732 (.0628)	.1670 (.0625)	.1501 (.0622)
SEE	9.02	9.01	9.01	9.01

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. $N = 712$. Corrected $R^2 = .735$.

Democratic representation, although a common *dynamic* is presumed. (However, the 31 state intercepts are not reported.) Column 1 includes all the variables discussed so far.¹⁶ The time trend (YEAR) is effectively zero, suggesting that the substantive variables in the analysis capture all the temporal variation in the data.¹⁷ Democratic strength in the preceding session (DEMOCRATS ($t - 1$)) is of major importance. The coefficient of .5 might suggest less dependence on past history than one might have anticipated, but coefficients of such lagged terms are generally biased downward in this sort of analysis. National economic conditions, measured here as the rate of growth of gross national product in the election year are significant, consistent with the findings of Chubb (1988).¹⁸ On average, every 1% gain in gross national product during a Democratic (Republican) administration adds (subtracts) about a sixth of a percentage point to (from) Democratic state legislative strength. The coattail specifications follow Chubb: presidential and gubernatorial coattails are each represented by (1) a dummy variable equal to 1 for the election year and

(2) a variable for the actual vote in the state. This specification differentiates between years in which there is no election (vote = 0) from years in which the Democratic presidential or gubernatorial candidates perform poorly. Thus, presidential coattails are estimated as 0 in nonelection years, and $-27.70 + .520$ (PRESIDENTIAL VOTE) in election years. Solving, Democratic state legislators are collectively better off running in a presidential election year than in an off-year, so long as their presidential candidate wins more than 53.3% of the statewide vote. For gubernatorial candidates, the figure is 50.5% of the vote. Given the performance of Democratic candidates other than Lyndon Johnson in the postwar period, it appears that they have not been of much help to their state legislative compatriots. Republican presidents, however, have been quite helpful: the coefficient of OFFYEAR (-9.75) indicates that on average, Democrats win almost 10% percent more state legislative seats in midterms when a Republican is president than when Democrats hold the White House. This result is consistent with either a "presidential penalty" model (Alesina and Rosenthal 1989; Erikson 1988) or a "surge-and-decline" model (Campbell n.d. [6]).

Of most interest are the three indicators of professionalism. Annual sessions and days-in-session have the expected sign, but their coefficients are smaller than their standard errors. Real compensation, however, is just significant at the .05 level (one-tailed test). The coefficient indicates that each \$10,000 increase in real biennial compensation results in .7% more Democrats.

Column 2 omits the insignificant time trend. The coefficients change little but their standard errors become a bit more precise as multicollinearity lessens. Annual sessions and days in session continue to fall far short of significance, but the case for real compensation becomes slightly stronger. Column 3 omits "DAYS" and "ANNUAL."¹⁹ Absent their interference, the coefficient of real compensation rises to almost 1% more Democrats for every \$10,000 and the estimate is more than three times its standard error. Finally, if potential candidates define their career alternatives within state boundaries, the more appropriate measure might be legislative compensation relative to some state norm. Column 4 reports estimates of an equation that includes real legislative compensation relative to real per capita state income. The coefficient is again three times as large as its standard error. Thus, whether we measure it in absolute or relative terms, legislative compensation clearly matters. To illustrate, real biennial compensation in California has increased from approximately \$10,000 to more than \$90,000 in the postwar period. Applying the national coefficients from column 3, this gain in compensation should have led directly to a Democratic legislative gain of $8 + \%$. Alternatively, real legislative compensation relative to real per capita disposable income in California was five times higher in 1990 than in the early postwar years. According to column 4, the predicted Democratic gain is about 11%.

OBJECTIONS

Increasing legislative compensation and increasing Democratic representation are apparently related. Could the relationship be spurious? The most obvious possibility is that both variables could be correlated with some omitted third variable. For example, some commentators have hypothesized a pro-Democratic trend in political sentiments in nonsouthern state elections. It is difficult to test such a possibility directly: registration or other measures of partisanship are incomplete both by state and by year. At any rate, once substantive variables are taken into account, there is no trend in Democratic state legislative fortunes (column 1). Thus, proponents of a "trend" hypothesis would have to argue that some unobserved drift in partisan sentiments happens to bear a close relationship with the observed trend in real legislative compensation. The trend in compensation is a more parsimonious explanation for the trend in Democratic fortunes than is some hypothetical unobserved trend in partisan sentiments.

Alternatively, one might object that legislative compensation is just a reflection of state population, state income, and size of state government. Bigger, richer, more active states pay their legislators more, and such states—the populous, urban, industrial states—tend to be more Democratic. These two propositions are certainly true, but that does not make the relationships reported in Table 2 spurious. In the first place, these propositions were as true in 1952 when the Republicans won 55% of the presidential vote and 26 of 31 nonsouthern legislatures as they were in 1988 when the Republicans won 54% of the presidential vote but only 9 of 31 nonsouthern legislatures. If there were no temporal correlation between rising compensation and *increasing* Democratic strength, we would only find larger intercepts for the urban, industrial states. In the second place, if we add state sociodemographic variables to the analysis, we find that they do not eliminate or even weaken the estimated effect of legislative compensation: in fact, the coefficient of legislative compensation marginally increases when state population, personal income, and state government expenditures are added to the model ($b = 1.06$, $t = 2.38$). Moreover, the coefficients of the additional control variables are smaller than their standard errors, and expenditure has the "wrong" sign. Thus, the state intercepts and the variables previously included in the analysis fully take into account interstate differences in socioeconomic development.

Finally, what of the fact that the upsurge in Democratic legislators ceases in the early 1970s? Part of the answer may be that real legislative compensation also stopped rising after 1972 (see Appendix), although it resumed its increase after 1982. Another possibility is that the effect of compensation is nonlinear, being stronger up to the level where legislative service becomes competitive with alternative Democratic career opportunities, but weakening thereafter. Taking the log of real compensation, however, resulted in a

TABLE 3

Democratic Vote Share in Nonsouthern Gubernatorial Races, 1946–90

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	MODELS		
	1	2	3
Year	.023 (.032)	—	—
Democratic vote ($t - 1$)	.324 (.047)	.334 (.045)	.340 (.045)
Compensation Real	.0022 (.0027)	.0026 (.0026)	—
Relative	—	—	.1028 (.1717)
Presidential Year	−8.43 (3.15)	−8.46 (3.15)	−8.49 (3.15)
Vote	.144 (.067)	.138 (.067)	.135 (.067)
Off-Year	−4.83 (1.02)	−5.13 (.929)	−5.29 (.942)
GNP Growth	.0786 (.0635)	.0078 (.0635)	.0742 (.0648)
Corrected R^2	.228	.229	.228

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses; $n = 465$; SEE = 7.63.

poorer specification than the linear one. And several interactive specifications yielded no significant results. Why the Democratic gains ceased after the early 1970s must remain a question for future research.

CONTRAST WITH GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

Why have Republican fortunes plunged in legislative elections but fluctuated without trend in executive elections? The office of governor is and always has been full-time, prestigious, and respectably compensated.²⁰ Thus, unless party competition is so unbalanced (e.g. as in the South) that every aspiring politician must seek a career within the dominant party, we would expect that the gubernatorial candidate pools are and have been more evenly balanced than the legislative pools. In particular, compensation levels were not so low early on as to disadvantage Democrats nor later on so low relative to the private sector as to discourage Republicans. Thus, real compensation should *not* have any impact on partisan fortunes in gubernatorial elections.

Gubernatorial elections have been much studied and are known to reflect state party strength, the national economy, and national party fortunes (Campbell 1986; Chubb 1988; Simon 1989; Simon, Ostrom, and Marra 1991). To variables of this sort I add real gubernatorial compensation (Table 3). The resulting

estimates are consistent with earlier, more elaborate studies in finding that presidential coattails, the off-year penalty, and previous support levels are important.²¹ As anticipated, however, the effect of real compensation, whether measured absolutely or relative to state income, has only a weak and insignificant effect.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONGRESS

I do not think that a simple extension of the present argument can help to explain the persistence of Democratic majorities in the modern U.S. House. The New Deal realignment and resulting distribution of party identification would seem to be a sufficient explanation for Democratic House majorities between 1952 and the mid-1960s. The more interesting question is why Republican House candidates have not fared better during the more recent elections when their presidential candidates were faring so well. Possibly, falling congressional salaries (in real terms) and rising executive and professional compensation discouraged some potential Republican candidacies, but given the prestige of the office and the absolute level of compensation, the argument seems somewhat strained.²²

Still, professionalism may have contributed *indirectly* to the stability of the Democratic House majorities. State legislatures have long been considered "farm teams" for Congress. State legislatures provide the opportunity for inexperienced politicians to learn how to nurture a constituency and solidify an electoral base. The more talented and ambitious of these eventually have opportunities to move up to the national legislature. Despite suggestions that service in some state legislatures may now be preferable to service in Congress (Fowler and McClure 1989), state legislatures remain the principal springboard to Congress. Indeed, Canon (1990) reports that state legislatures have become an even more important source of congressional recruits in recent years. Thus, the decline in Republican fortunes at the state level has probably contributed to their chronic difficulties at the congressional level. Jacobson attributes the lack of Republican congressional success in the 1980s to their failure to run "good" candidates, where "good" is defined as previous electoral success (1990, chap. 4). By the 1970s, the Republicans had fewer state legislators in general and fewer in positions of legislative leadership in particular. Their lack of good candidates in the 1980s may well have been a by-product of their declining fortunes in state legislatures during the preceding two decades.

CONCLUSION

While the work reported herein is preliminary, the relationships uncovered seem robust enough to merit further investigation and the argument plausible

enough to merit further development. Several lines of research are prime candidates for further work.

First, the empirical research reported here is an indirect test of the general argument. The outcomes of state elections are consistent with the implications of the argument, but focused research in the states could shed additional light on the hypothesized mechanisms. If professionalism makes legislative seats more attractive to Democrats and less attractive to Republicans, then, *ceteris paribus*, as professionalism increases, does the number of contested Democratic primaries increase, and Republican, decrease, and does the number of uncontested Democratic races increase, and Republican, decrease? Do retirement rates of Republican incumbents increase relative to Democrats as professionalism increases? Do Democratic candidates look more impressive and Republican candidates less impressive as professionalism increases? Such patterns would constitute more direct evidence that candidate career calculations are indeed the mechanism underlying the patterns reported herein.²³

Second, was there any partisan political impetus for professionalization of state legislatures? I have taken professionalization as exogenous in this study—a result of socioeconomic development and a nonpartisan reform impulse. But partisan politicians can be expected to see the partisan implications of nonpartisan reforms: Did they, in the case of professionalism? Were Democrats more likely to support and Republicans to oppose the move toward full-time, reasonably compensated legislative service? Analysis of the data reported herein finds that both session lengths (significantly) and real compensation (not significantly) are positively related to the proportion of Democrats in the previous legislature (controlling for the previous values of session lengths and compensation as well as the socioeconomic characteristics of the state). If further research supports this finding, we might conclude that Democrats tend to encourage professionalism, but whether either party consciously anticipated a partisan impact is a different question. Democrats may well have done what they could to make public office a full-time position without suspecting that it would give them an advantage relative to Republicans. Again, however, this is an indirect way to look at the question. There are records of legislative deliberations and constitutional amendment campaigns: Who supported and who opposed what? Were partisan divisions present in roll calls and referenda? Or were the decisions to extend sessions and raise compensation more often regarded as nonpolitical, procedural matters?

Third, I reiterate the neutrality of my findings. Higher levels of legislative compensation appear to have made service in state legislatures relatively more attractive to Democrats and relatively less attractive to Republicans. This dynamic has contributed significantly to the great turnaround in party fortunes in state legislative elections since World War II. Such a general finding would appear to be fraught with political and partisan implications. In particular, frus-

trated Republicans may jump to the conclusion that state legislatures have been captured by greedy Democrats who consider the legislature a good job. No such conclusion follows. Judgments of over- or underrepresentation presume some objective baseline. Perhaps Democrats are overrepresented now, while Republicans were overrepresented earlier. But Democrats might be properly represented now because Republicans were so greatly overrepresented earlier. We cannot tell without some independent measure of the "proper" level of representation. It is tempting to use the vote for some statewide office like auditor or attorney general as a measure of partisan sentiment, but districting arrangements would still muddy the representational picture. The residential concentration of one party's supporters may make it inevitable that it "wastes" more of its votes and wins fewer legislative seats than its level of popular support indicates. Judgments about appropriate levels of representation are exceedingly complex and require more information than anything reported here.

Fourth, to the extent that terms-limitation initiatives also significantly limit days-in-session, legislative compensation, and legislator perks, such initiatives should make the legislatures more amateur and, quite likely, more Republican. But if service limits are imposed on legislatures without changing much else, little partisan impact should be expected: in amateur legislatures term limits would bind few members (Moncrief et al. 1992), and in professionalized legislatures, 8 to 12 years in office should be a sufficiently long lead time that even the most risk-averse Democrat will not be discouraged.

Finally, one of the perennial themes in the literature of political science is that political reforms have unintended consequences. In the professionalization of state legislatures we appear to have another example of a seemingly nonpartisan, "nonpolitical" reform, some of whose consequences may well be highly partisan and highly political.

APPENDIX

Figure A-1 shows the percentage of non-southern states holding annual legislative sessions doubling between World War II and the mid-1960s and doubling again by 1980.

Figure A-2 shows session lengths in non-southern legislatures increasing steadily between World War II and 1980. Currently such legislatures sit for an aver-

age of 350 days during each two-year inter-election period.

Figure A-3 shows that legislative compensation was lower than per capita income in the early post-war period, rose steadily in the 1950s and 1960s, plateaued in the 1970s, and then resumed its increase in the 1980s.

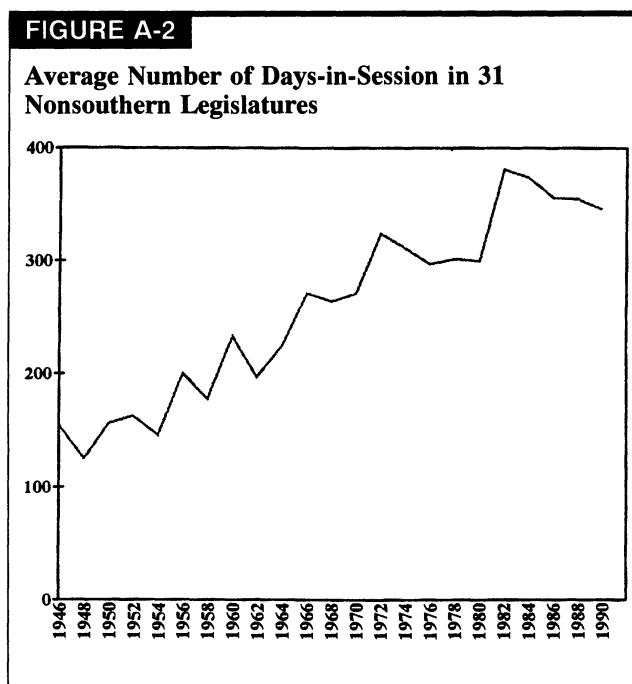
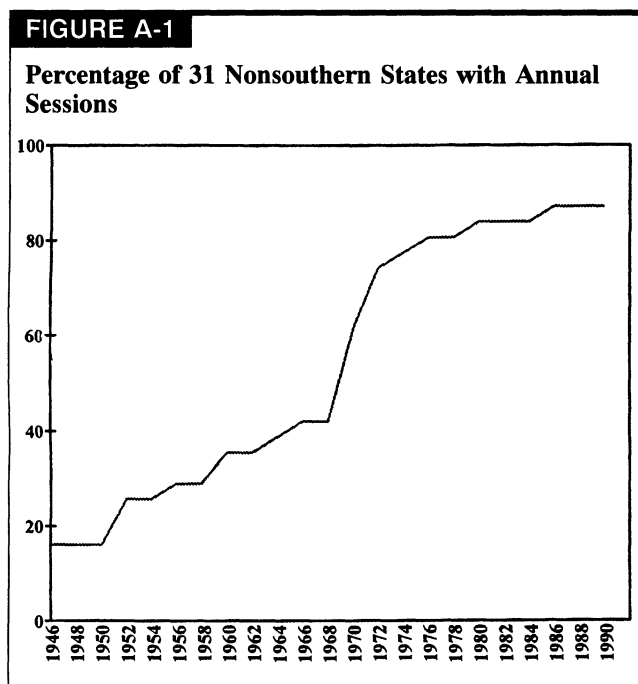
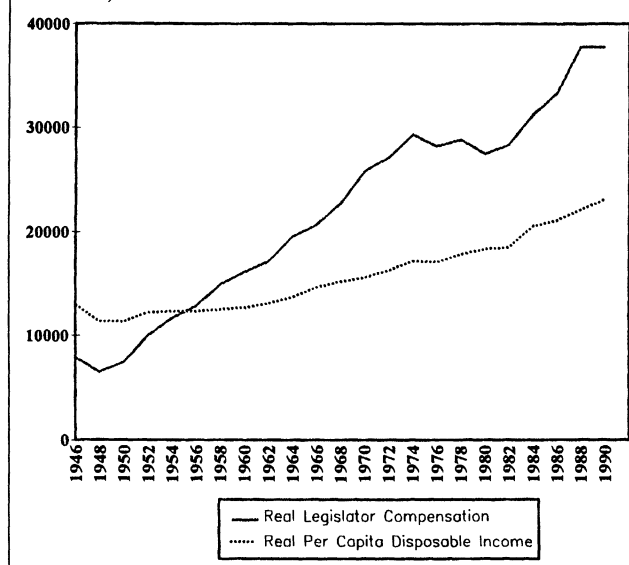


FIGURE A-3

Average Biennial Compensation Versus Per Capita Disposable Income in 31 Nonsouthern States (1980 Dollars)



Notes

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1. Karl Kurtz (personal communication) has suggested that I differentiate *professionalization* from a *Professionalization* reform movement. The former refers to ongoing developments (however caused) that make state legislatures more like the Congress, whereas the latter refers specifically to good-government reform efforts, especially those of the 1960s.

2. Nebraska has nonpartisan legislative elections, Minnesota was nonpartisan before 1972, and Alaska and Hawaii had their first elections as states (1958 and 1959, respectively) after a significant part of the action in Figure 1 had already occurred.

3. On the well-known socioeconomic differences in the mass bases of the parties, see Miller and Traugott (1989, tbls. 2.4, 2.8, 2.18). On differences in party elites (convention delegates) see, e.g., Stanley and Niemi 1990, tbl. 4-10). More recently, Black and Black report that 45% of the delegates to the 1992 Democratic convention were employed by government in some capacity (1992, 5). (Unfortunately, they do not report a figure for Republicans, but it is undoubtedly lower.) I have been somewhat surprised by the scarcity of comprehensive data on occupational characteristics of party elites. In one case, for example, excellent data exist but are not reported separately by party (Bazar 1987).

4. Keefe and Ogul observe that for lawyers, "political involvement may well bring an unearned increment by attracting, through publicity and social visibility, new clients and higher fees" (1993, 140). Interestingly, Bazar reports a sharp drop in the number of lawyer legislators between 1976 and 1986, citing "the time requirements of legislative office," stringent disclosure laws, and the legalization of advertising as contributing factors (1987, 3).

5. There is nothing novel about this argument. Classic references include Aristotle, who took note of the claim that the Athenian law courts deteriorated after pay for service attracted a more "common" kind of men (Fritz 1964, 97-98),

and J. S. Mill, who opposed parliamentary compensation on grounds that it would discourage successful professionals and attract "adventurers of a low class" (Acton 1972, 311). Indeed, the standard argument in favor of decent legislative compensation is that in its absence, legislative service is the privilege of the rich, who presumably are not representative of the entire polity.

6. There is an obvious synthesis of the two arguments: desiring full-time careers in government, Democrats work to professionalize state and local offices. Although that argument is beyond my scope here, I shall offer some brief remarks.

7. Francis (1993) has shown that representatives in high-paying state legislatures are significantly more likely than those in low-paying legislatures to wait for open seats rather than challenge incumbent senators. This finding suggests too that career decisions do depend on mundane wages and hours considerations.

8. The Citizens Council on State Legislatures has published numerous reports advocating the professionalization of state legislatures. The seminal articles relating professionalization to public policy are by Grumm (1970, 1971). Hedlund (1984) provides an exhaustive review of studies that relate professionalization to legislative organization and policymaking.

9. Obviously, legislatures that meet annually spend more days in session, but the correlation is far from perfect.

10. A third possible omission is allowances for travel, postage, and so forth which are usually expressed as formulas rather than payments actually made. If such allowances are reasonable and members are honest in claiming them, no understatement of compensation will arise from this source. If not, an additional income source will be overlooked.

11. The aggregate statewide vote for lower House Democrats jumped from 46% in 1968 to 54% in 1970 and fell slightly to 53% in 1972. The 1972 gain in seats with no gain in votes over 1970 is consistent with the gerrymandering hypothesis. The 7% jump in votes between 1968 and 1972 (even while McGovern was drawing little more than a third of the statewide vote) is consistent with an improvement (decline) in the quality of Democratic (Republican) candidates.

12. As far as I can determine, the legislature had been "fudging" somewhat by recessing at the end of the odd-year session and meeting for a time in the even years. In the intervening 1969-70 legislature, they sat for 414 days by extending the session into the even year.

13. Interestingly, a contemporary observer (Asher 1978) speculated that these developments would have unintended consequences. Asher cautioned that professionalization in Ohio would lead to insulation of incumbents, as was apparently occurring in the U.S. House of Representatives.

14. Lest some prejudiced readers dismiss this finding as a reflection of the stereotypical materialism of Californians, I point out that the analogous regression estimated for Wisconsin, purported to be one of our more altruistic states, yields a coefficient (.022) precisely *twice* as strong as California's.

15. According to Stimson, "Where unit effects are present and concern for estimator efficiency is not paramount (e.g. when estimating from very large samples) Least Squares Dummy Variables is a reasonable choice" (1985, 945). Neal Beck has examined the variables used in this data set for classroom purposes and reports that they are suitable for "garden variety analysis" (personal communication).

16. There are five intercorrelated right hand side variables: time, lagged Democrats, days-in-session, annual sessions, and real income.

17. In addition to a linear time trend, I also checked for a pro-Democratic shift coincident with the "reapportionment revolution." No such shift was found. Previous studies reported only small Democratic seat gains in the wake of *Baker v. Carr* (e.g., Erikson 1971). My analysis suggests that even such small gains may have been attributable not to reapportionment but to the rapid professionalization that took place in the late 1960s (see Appendix). That development was not apparent to scholars at the time.

18. Simon, Ostrom and Marra, (1991) found no direct effect of economic variables with presidential approval included in their equations. Before 1950, Gallup did not ask the approval item during the campaign, but if we reestimate the equation for column 1 for 1950 onwards and include Gallup approval, gross national product growth is not significant—consistent with the findings of Simon, Ostrom, and Marra.

19. Neither DAYS nor ANNUAL approaches significance, with real compensation in the equation. With real income omitted their coefficients are greater than twice their standard errors. Numerous estimations leave little doubt that compensation is the most important of the three (though compensation, of course, is partly a function of days in session).

20. Comparing the three postwar elections with the three most recent elections, average real legislative compensation has increased 500%, whereas average real gubernatorial compensation has increased only 25%.

21. National economic conditions are not, however, in contrast to Chubb's findings. Apparently, the OFFYEAR variable included in this analysis captures the decline in economic prosperity that often occurs in midterm years.

22. By the mid-1970s, congressional salaries fell to a level of six or seven times per capita income, lower than at any time since 1920 (*Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 1989). In real terms, congressional salaries declined between 1972 and 1984.

23. A confounding factor in such tests is the increasing importance of incumbency in state legislative elections (Jewell and Breaux 1988). For example, rising compensation might generate more "potential" Democratic candidates, but if incumbency effects grow stronger at the same time, the number of primary challengers for Democratic incumbents and general election challengers of Republican incumbents might actually decrease overall. Research clearly would have to control for incumbency as well as other obvious factors like majority status.

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