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## Institutional influences of state legislators' voting behavior

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**INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES OF  
STATE LEGISLATORS' VOTING BEHAVIOR**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Political Science

by  
Jessica J. Self  
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## **Dedication**

To my husband, Jared, who has been so patient and understanding over the past two years, and especially during the past few months. Thank you for your emotional, mental, and financial support. You mean the world to me, and I love you more than I could ever express.

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## **Abstract**

Representation of citizens by elected officials is a core principle of American democracy (Eulau et al. 1959; Key 1961). Assuming the delegate approach to representation (Pitkin 1967), state legislative districts give voters the opportunity to elect representatives that will act in accordance with their wishes in the state policy arena. The extent to which a legislator's policy votes reflect his constituents' preferences is often referred to as "policy responsiveness" (Eulau and Karps 1977).

While the make-up of the constituency shapes legislators' positions in policy areas, legislative voting behavior also is indirectly influenced by personal and institutional factors. Previous research has found mixed effects of professionalism, term limits, and progressive ambition in shaping legislators' behaviors. The main focus of this analysis is the effects, direct and indirect, of institutional variables on policy responsiveness.

Through OLS regression and the use of National Federation of Independent Businesses' legislator scores as a measure of conservatism in roll call voting, I find that responsiveness is influenced by institutional characteristics. An interaction model indicates positive and significant effects of professionalism on responsiveness, while district competition and the ambition of the legislature have strong negative effects. These effects differ for members of either party. Both Republicans and Democrats are influenced similarly by the effects of district competition and in the same direction by professionalism and progressive ambition. The effect of term limits, however, has differing effects on the partisan groups. The effect of the political context of a presidential election year is also tested, but this variable is found to have no significant effect on legislators' responsiveness. The findings of these analyses indicate several institutional influences that condition the extent to which legislators reflect their constituents' preferences.

## **Introduction**

Much of democratic theory centers on the election of representatives who enact the wishes of their constituents. Policy responsiveness is the extent to which legislators reflect their constituents' wishes, and this responsiveness is influenced by a variety of other variables. While constituency preferences do influence legislators' voting, institutional variables may also play a part in shaping responsiveness. Which institutional characteristics influence legislators' responsiveness to their constituents, and to what extent do they impact legislators' voting? Are Republican and Democrat legislators influenced by different variables? Does the surge of political interest and activity in presidential election years alter legislators' responsiveness? Focusing on legislative professionalism, the presence of term limits, and progressive ambition, I test institutional characteristics' effects on policy responsiveness, and then test institutional effects on legislators from either party and in the context of a presidential election year.

## **Literature Review**

A hallmark of democratic systems is institutionalized representation. Public officials are elected to represent their constituents as either a delegate, who acts solely in concordance with his constituents' wishes, or as a trustee, who acts on his personal evaluation of what is in the best interest of his constituents (Pitkin 1967). The delegate view of representation involves accountability to constituents before and after policy voting. Constituents' preferences are indicative of how the legislator should vote. McCrone and Kuklinski (1979) add that not only must a representative see himself as a delegate, but his constituency must organize and express their preferences so the representative may reasonably estimate their opinion (280). The capacity to have public opinion accounted for in decision making is a central theme in democratic theory, adding legitimacy and authority to policies (Eulau et al. 1959; Key 1961).

Miller and Stokes (1963) find that "the Representative's roll call behavior is strongly influenced by his own policy preferences and by his perception of preferences held by the constituency. However, they go on to say that, "the Representative has very imperfect information about the issue preferences of his constituency, and the constituency's awareness of the policy stands of the Representative ordinarily is slight" (56). Essentially, while the constituency's preferences play a role in legislators' roll call voting, limited information about the constituents' preferences and low levels of constituency interest may result in more of a trustee role than delegate role. In their analysis, Cooper and Richardson (2006) find that representation is often driven by institutional arrangements, and legislators tend to prefer and consider themselves more aligned with the Burkean trustee view of representation (189).

While there is some support for the trustee view of representation, the present analysis focuses on the delegate view. The delegate approach holds that a legislator should estimate his



constituents' preferences, and then vote accordingly. A degree of constituency control over policy making is fundamental in democratic systems. Miller and Stokes (1963) call the American system a "mixture" of the delegate and trustee approaches, and that the type of representation will likely depend on institutional circumstances and issues at hand (56). Additionally, an element of electoral accountability is involved in representation. Pitkin (1967) concludes that the representative "must not be found persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented without good reason in terms of their interest" (209); through elections, constituents will replace legislators whom they feel are not sufficiently expressing the constituency's preferences.

### **Responsiveness**

Eulau and Karps (1977) add another dimension to the study of representation. While representation is often associated with policy-making, these authors note that lawmaking is only one component of representation. Legislators may also be responsive through service and casework (Fiorina 1989; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Johannes and McAdams 1981), obtaining and allocating benefits for his constituents (Fiorina 1977; Stein and Bickers 1994), and symbolically acting to promote trust and a relationship between the legislator and his constituents. Eulau and Karps (1977) call this "policy responsiveness," which Ardoin and Garand (2003) define as "the degree to which legislators reflect in their roll-call behavior the policy views of their constituents" (1165). "Responsiveness" is viewed as a proactive assessment of constituents' preferences, followed by action in the legislative setting, while a "response" is the reactive action taken after a stimulus (Eulau and Karps 1977: 249). Therefore, policy responsiveness is high when a legislator's estimation of his constituents' preferences is congruent with his roll-call voting behavior.

Representation through voting on policies is a very direct form of representation, in which legislators' actions should be congruent with constituents' wishes. Much work has been done linking constituency policy preferences and national legislators' voting behaviors (Erikson 1978; Glazer and Robbins 1985; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979), as well as behaviors across different constituency types (Glazer and Robbins 1985; Jackson and King 1989; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979), and in different issue areas (Page et al. 1984; Burstein 2003). A large majority of the literature revolving around policy responsiveness has dealt with Congressional districts; this analysis, however, uses the state legislative district as the unit of analysis.

On the state legislative level, the connection between legislators and their constituents has been less studied, and state representation theories often coincide well with theories from the national level. Hogan (2004) suggests that the proximity of state legislators to their constituents may increase policy responsiveness. In looking at subconstituencies, which are subsets of a constituency that are most likely to support a candidate, Bishin (2000) finds that constituents' preferences do play a large role in legislators' decisions and voting behaviors, and different levels of support and participation from voters also effect legislator voting differently. Difficulty in state-level analyses stems from the availability of data on constituency preferences. Berry et al. (1998) obtain reliable data on the state level, but direct measures of constituency preferences lower than the state level are nearly impossible to obtain, due to the number of constituencies and then cases needed from each constituency to construct a representative sample of the voters.

Another aspect in the literature surrounding representation is the ability of representatives to accurately assess their constituents' wishes. Uslander and Weber (1979) find that legislators actually represent the views they perceive to be their constituents' opinion, rather than the true preferences of their constituents. Support is found for these authors' "poorly informed elite"

theory, in which legislators build their assumptions of constituency preferences on incorrect or inadequate information (566). However, in the defense of state legislators, data and information on state legislative districts' policy preferences may be difficult and expensive to obtain.

Therefore, past research has utilized a variety of techniques to estimate policy responsiveness of U.S. House members and to measure constituency ideological and issue preferences. The techniques most successful in measuring constituency preferences have used small-sample estimates of public opinion (Miller and Stokes 1963), demographic variables (Erikson 1978; Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Page et al. 1984), presidential election returns (Glazer and Robbins 1985; LeoGrande and Jeydel 1997), referenda voting (Erikson et al. 1975; Kuklinski 1977; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979), and 'bottom-up' simulations, where estimates are developed by extending individual-level models to the aggregate district level (Erikson 1978; Sullivan and Uslander 1978; Uslander and Weber 1979). Essentially, the "bottom-up" approach takes note of individuals' demographic characteristics, which then are related to commonly linked with ideological positions. The individual-level estimates are then substituted with district demographics to achieve a district-level ideology estimate (Ardoin and Garand 2003).

### **District-level Characteristics**

The social diversity of a constituency has been previously found to be a reliable indicator of partisanship, which can easily be correlated with ideology and issue preferences. Sullivan (1973) is the foundational work in this area. The "Sullivan index" is a measure of absolute constituency diversity using social, economic, and religious characteristics. Koetzle (1998) finds that while Sullivan (1973) measures the absolute diversity in a district, it is necessary to recognize the political diversity of a district and the competitive partisan impact that is the result of political heterogeneity. With the premise that certain demographic characteristics favor either

of the political parties, Koetzle (1998) constructs a measure of political diversity and finds that more heterogeneous districts are more politically diverse, and that increased political diversity is significantly related to more competitive House elections (571). Aistrup (2004) finds further support for the Koetzle approach by applying the measure of political diversity on the state and county level. Here also, there is a strong positive relationship between political diversity and partisan competition (279).

Mayhew's 1974 book, Congress: The Electoral Connection, has become a foundational work in the field of political behavior. Mayhew's theories are grounded in the assumption that elected officials behave strategically and rationally, with the continual pursuit of reelection. Reelection goals drive officials' allocation of time and resources, policy positions, and the creation of coalitions, according to Mayhew (1974). The goal of maintaining office promotes electoral accountability because officials must please their constituents to keep their support. To win an election, an official will appeal to the largest number of voters, likely taking a moderate ideological position. This "median voter theorem" has been a widely researched and used theory in legislative politics. Diversity within districts increases competition because different social groups hope to elect a representative who will favor their interests. However, candidates must appeal to several social groups in order to reach the necessary percentage of votes to win. Increased diversity, therefore, increases competition among candidates, who in turn, take moderate policy positions to earn the support of voters.

The struggle then comes when candidates are unable to assess the median voter's preferences. Fiorina (1974) finds that the more competitive the district, the less closely a candidate can mirror the preferences of the median voter. An inaccurate assessment of voters' preferences can be attributed to the multiple and mixed messages groups send to candidates.

Candidates' interpretation of their constituents' wishes may not be accurate, due to the various signals received. Still, candidates will strive to represent the median voter, with hopes of future terms or offices. Responsiveness, therefore, is related to competition through legislators' strategic goals of pleasing constituents.

### **Legislator Characteristics**

Past research has found that legislators' voting behaviors are influenced by a host of other factors besides constituency preferences. A legislator's personal characteristics may also contribute to his voting behavior. Female legislators traditionally tend to favor liberal ideological views, but they are responsive to constituency preferences and demands (Poggione 2004; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2004). Jenkins (2006) finds that while ideology does influence a legislator's voting, partisanship is a more powerful influence.

In the political arena, Stratham (2000) finds that the longer a legislator holds his office, the less likely he/she will vote along party lines. This indicates that more senior members' votes may be influenced by factors other than partisanship. Additionally, Glazer and Robbins (1985) find that seniority has a strong positive effect on ideological responsiveness (271), while McAdams and Johannes (1985) note that junior legislators are more attentive to their constituents and devote more time to service and casework responsiveness (1111). The mixed past findings on the effect of seniority on responsiveness leads to an examination of a possible "freshman effect." Seniority is often intertwined with leadership responsibilities for the legislator. Some past studies have found that with increased party or committee leadership responsibilities, legislators become less involved with their constituents, decreasing responsiveness (Johannes 1984; Bond 1983). While these legislator characteristics are not the

focus of this analysis, they serve as important control variables that may play a part in a legislator's responsiveness.

### **Institutional Characteristics**

Another group of variables that may influence policy responsiveness are those related to the characteristics of the legislature. Different institutional characteristics may affect the extent to which a legislator's voting behavior reflects his constituency's interests. This analysis focuses on three chamber characteristics: professionalism, the presence of term limits, and progressive ambition.

#### Professionalism

Mooney (1995) defines professionalism as "the extent to which a legislature can command the full attention of its members, provide them with adequate resources to do their jobs..., and set up organizations and procedures that facilitate lawmaking" (1995: 48-49; Hogan 2004: 546). In recent years, there has been much research on the effects of legislative professionalism. Squire (1992a; 2007) uses the U.S. Congress as a "baseline against which to compare those same attributes of other legislative bodies (2007: 212). He compares state legislators' salary and benefits, average days in session, and average staff per member to those characteristics of U.S. Congressmen; these components have been used in other professionalism measures (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 2000; Thompson and Moncrief 1992). Squire (1992a; 2007) then composes an index where higher (closer to 1.00) scores indicate a strong resemblance to Congress and higher professionalism. Kurtz (1992) also constructs a classification of state legislatures into professional, hybrid, and citizen groups according to average salary, session

duration, and total staff (Hamm and Moncrief 1999). A comparison of these two measures of professionalism indicates a substantial amount of consistency among the states.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of professionalism stretch into many areas of legislative and electoral politics. A higher level of professionalism is related to greater incentives to serve and longer tenures, more opportunities to influence policymaking, and more time and effort devoted to legislative service (Squire 2007: 213). Professionalism has also been found to increase contestation, or the number of candidates running for an office (Hogan 2004: 557). Greater resources in professional legislatures may also increase service to the constituency. For example, Squire (1993) finds that professionalism is positively related to legislators' contacts with constituents. Incumbents' access to resources for travel, time for campaigning (Carey, Niemi, and Powell (2000), and casework (King 1991) also results in more successful re-election attempts.

The relationship between professionalism and policy responsiveness has a history of mixed findings. Maestas (2000) notes that proponents of professionalism suggest that increased staff and office resources are helpful to legislators in identifying and serving the needs of constituents, resulting in more capable legislatures and legislators (663). Maestas (2000) finds that more professionalized legislatures do, in fact, produce policy that is more congruent with statewide preferences (675). Critics of professionalism argue that members of professionalized legislatures are insulated from the preferences of their constituents (Hickok 1992), and that professionalism is positively related to partisan bias, fewer strong challengers, and higher incumbent vote margins (Chubb 1988; Moncrief et al. 1992; Weber 1999). Some studies show no significant effect, or indirect effects seen only through complex interactions (Carmines 1974;

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<sup>1</sup>Seven states (Virginia, Louisiana, Kansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama) are considered hybrid states by Kurtz (1992), while Squire (2007) finds these states to have lower index scores. In other words, these seven states, considered hybrid legislatures by Kurtz, are mixed among the citizen legislatures when Kurtz's categories are transposed onto Squire's index. The Squire index and Kurtz's categories of professionalism have a correlation coefficient of .80.

Karnig and Sigelman 1975). It is a goal of the present analysis to examine the interactive effect of professionalism and constituency preferences on legislators' policy responsiveness.

### Term Limits

Term limits are a relatively new regulative addition to state legislatures. To date, only fifteen state legislatures operate with their members being restricted to serving a specified number of years. Several opposing viewpoints deal with the effects of term limits on legislators and voters. Proponents of term limits usually follow one of two rhetorical arguments: the responsiveness argument or the public interest argument. The responsiveness argument is couched in the delegate theory of representation, and holds that "limiting terms will foster better representation by legislators who are more 'in touch' with their constituents" (Boeckelman 1993: 191). Long-term legislators may become insulated and distanced from the needs and preferences of their constituents. The public interest argument is developed from the trustee view of representation, which emphasizes legislators' abilities to make informed decisions in the best interest of their constituents. Proponents of term limits, under the public interest view, believe that legislators facing term limits would be less focused on reelection and more on their current term, that political parties will become stronger and more organized, lessening the power of incumbency advantage, and that seniority will have less of an effect in slowing and stalling needed changes within political systems (Boeckelman 1993: 193).

Other research pertaining to the effects of term limits suggest that with fewer experienced members in the legislature, power will flow elsewhere, possibly resulting in a more powerful executive (Boeckelman 1993: 204) or more strength among interest groups (Moncrief and Thompson 2001). Moncrief and Thompson (2001) also find that term limits can be linked to decreased legislator knowledge and increased reliance on staff, giving interest groups more



influence. Boeckelman (1993) and Kurfirst (1996) note that while term limits restrict opportunities for career politicians, amateur legislators may be more attentive and in tune with their constituents' values and preferences. Kousser (2005) finds that term limited legislatures experienced a surge in legislative creativity and progress on pending policies from more senior members, but this progress decreases as term limits replace incumbents with new members. Carey, Niemi, and Powell (1998) find that term limited legislatures' composition (legislators' backgrounds, educations, incomes, ideologies) does not differ systematically from legislatures without term limits; however, these authors find that term limits decrease legislators' efforts in securing benefits and allocations for their districts, and give higher priority to the state as a whole (295).

The relationship between term limits and policy responsiveness has been considered in recent literature. In a 2006 article, Carey, Niemi, Powell, and Moncrief (2006) find that term limited legislators "pay less attention to their constituents- whether one judges attention by constituency service or by pork barreling- and are more inclined to favor their own conscience and the interests of the state over those over those of the district" (123). In the same vein, Cooper and Richardson (2006) also find that term limited legislators are more likely to behave as trustees, acting in the best interest of their constituents rather than reflecting their constituents' preferences. Will (1992) suggests that the pressure for continued reelection results in term limited legislators being more focused on career goals rather than on representing constituents. However, Carey (1996) finds that term limited legislators might vote contrary to constituents' preferences if they did not have to face the threat of electoral defeat; therefore, the prospect of reelection serves as a source of electoral accountability. In a more recent analysis of roll-call voting in 99 state legislative chambers, Wright (2007) finds that "legislators serving under term

limits show no less correspondence with the general ideological preferences of their districts than legislators serving in chambers without term limits” (271). Wright (2007) does find an interactive relationship between term limits and legislative professionalism on legislative behavior. He finds that term limit states with greater professionalism saw lower levels of roll-call participation in comparison to less professionalized states. Wright (2007) attributes this finding to greater time constraints and demands due to the professionalism of the legislature, and less time relating to the constituency (271). Therefore, the mixed effects or absence of any significant effects indicates that the effects of term limits on policy responsiveness are a relationship worthy of further analysis.

### Political Ambition

The availability of higher political opportunities or offices may also affect legislators’ electoral and voting behaviors. Hibbing (1986) adds that ambition is best thought of as a psychological predisposition to work and strive for career advancement within the political arena. Schlesinger (1966) suggests that potential candidates think strategically about public offices and possible political career opportunities. He goes on to state: “a politician’s behavior is a response to his office goals...our ambitious politician must act today in terms of the electorate he hopes to win tomorrow” (6). His three “directions” of ambition (discrete, static, and progressive) led to a body of literature which revolves around how legislators’ hopes for future offices affect his behavior in his current office. Barber (1965) finds that differences that the activity levels and activities performed by state legislators partially depend on goals of future offices, while Van der Slik and Pernaciarrio (1979) conclude that senators with party or leadership ambitions act differently than those who are content with their current position, or have static ambition. Herrick and Moore (1993) find similar effects, as congressmen who have

hopes of leadership positions (“intrainstitutional” ambition) are more active in introducing legislation and on the floor, although they are less successful in passing legislation (772). Progressively ambitious legislators have also been found to strategically prepare for higher offices. For example, Francis and Kenny (1996) find that representatives may begin shifting their policy positions to better align with state party positions up to thirteen years before running for the Senate, and that their more moderate ideologies become more extreme over this preparatory stage (783).

In the question of policy responsiveness, past literature has supported the theory that more professionalized legislatures, with greater resources, facilitate greater responsiveness in progressively ambitious legislators. This finding shows that legislators with career incentives will use resources to be more attentive to their constituency base (Maestas 2003). Rather than classifying individual legislators’ political ambition, Squire (1988a) groups legislatures into categories of legislatures according to the likelihood and ability of members to seek higher offices. Squire (1988a) classifies twenty-five states into three categories: dead-end, career, and springboard. These three groups take into account the mean age of legislators in a chamber, legislators’ pay and benefits, and tenure length in grouping legislatures according to the opportunities for political career advancement. Maestas (2000) further develops Squire’s (1988a) three categories into four categories, dividing springboard states by high- and low-salary. Maestas (2000) finds that professionalism, particularly salary and resources, increases the responsiveness of legislators in spring-board legislatures. The author does note that this increased responsiveness may be the result of higher salaries allowing legislators to commit to their political career full-time, devoting more time and energy to their constituents (679).

Nevertheless, legislators who strive for higher offices or a career in politics are likely to be responsive to maintain and gain the support of their current and possible future constituents.

## Theory

A hallmark of democratic systems is institutionalized representation. The capacity to have public opinion accounted for in decision-making is a central theme in democratic theory, adding legitimacy and authority to policies (Eulau et al. 1959; Key 1961). I assume Pitkin's view of representatives as delegates: "the representative as a 'mere' agent, a servant, a delegate, a subordinate substitute for those who sent him... the purpose which sent him must have been the constituents' purpose and not his own" (Pitkin 1967: 146). As McCrone and Kuklinki (1979) note, the delegate perspective requires that the representative views himself as a delegate, and the constituencies must provide clues of their preferences to representatives (298). The representative, under the delegate theory, should take note of his constituents' preferences and needs, and then act accordingly in the legislative arena.

The extent to which policies reflect constituents' wishes is conditioned by a host of factors that stem from the district, the legislator, and the legislative chamber. It can be expected that a representative's personal beliefs, career goals, and the environment into which he was elected could influence his level of responsiveness and the resulting policies. An even deeper issue is legislator's motivation to mirror constituents' interests, which may include ethical concerns, hopes to increase constituent support, or because the legislator's own interests are similar to those of his constituents. The object of this analysis is to discover which characteristics increase legislator's policy responsiveness. Several characteristics of the legislator will be used as controls, isolating effects of the district and chamber on legislators' voting behavior.

Fenno (1978) comments: "[A congressman] cannot represent any people unless he knows, or makes an effort to know, who they are, what they think, and what they want" (233). A

legislator's knowledge of his constituents is the first challenge in responsiveness. While national polls achieve overviews of national trends in public opinion and voting habits, information from the state legislative districts is less available. In general, state legislative districts cover a smaller geographic area with fewer constituents than congressional districts. Relatively smaller staffs, limited resources and funding, and occupational commitments (even in professional legislatures) restrict the efforts of legislators in assessing public opinion. It seems likely that state legislators would use the social make-up of their constituency as cues to their preferences. Due to the lack of polling and survey efforts in state legislative districts, legislators must use shortcut indications of the constituency's preferences. Using demographic characteristics as preference indicators, legislators are able to reasonably estimate their constituency's wishes. While preferences do not always follow social and geographic expectations of opinion, a constituency's demographic characteristics may still be used as a rough indicator of preferences.

Some demographic characteristics are consistently associated with an ideological direction. For instance, African American voters historically prefer more liberal ideologies, and often vote with the Democratic Party (Tate 1993). Per capita income is also an indicator of preference; areas of lower income prefer liberal ideologies, while higher income per capita suggests a more conservative ideology. The percentage of voters living in urban or rural areas can also indicate ideological preferences; while rural voters prefer a more conservative position, urban voters are more liberal (Barone et al. 1998). While demographic characteristics serve as indicators of preferences, constituents' opinions are also shaped by other factors, such as partisanship (Jenkins 2006), issue saliency (Page and Shapiro 1983), and media influence (Niemi, Powell, and Bicknell 1986).

A legislator's estimate of his constituency's preferences should directly affect how he votes on policies. Maintaining the delegate approach to representation, the legislator should respond to constituency cues by voting to enact legislation that coincides with his constituents' wishes. A legislator's personal beliefs and circumstances surrounding his term may have an indirect effect on his responsiveness. Controlling for the indirect effects of a legislator's personal ideology and partisanship, length of time in office, leadership responsibilities, and public interest during presidential election years will allow his true level of responsiveness to his constituents to be estimated.

Apart from constituency influences and indirect legislator characteristics, a legislator's voting behavior may also be affected by institutional characteristics within the chamber. While chamber characteristics are not expected to directly influence responsiveness, they may indirectly play a role. Three factors that could be expected to condition a legislator's policy responsiveness are professionalism, the presence of term limits, and progressive ambition, or the proclivity of state legislatures to act as springboard positions to pursue higher offices. The effects of other factors may be magnified or diminished when an indirect chamber effect is involved. While there are other institutional factors that could influence responsiveness, the presence of professionalism, term limits, and progressive ambition may promote greater policy responsiveness.

A characteristic that is highly predictive of legislators' responsiveness is legislative professionalism. Theoretically, legislators with more available resources and time should be more equipped to monitor constituents' preferences and vote accordingly. Greater professionalism in the chamber should encourage greater policy responsiveness by legislators. Past literature on the impact of term limits on responsiveness has produced mixed findings.

While term limits alone may not have much of an effect on responsiveness, this chamber characteristic may have a conditioning effect when interacted with other chamber characteristics or with constituency characteristics. Progressive ambition can be simply defined as the motivation to achieve higher political offices. Increased incentives and resources in ambitious chambers are strongly related to responsiveness; legislators represent their constituents well in hopes of continued support in other races.

A legislator's responsiveness to his constituents is a foundational aspect of representation. While he is accountable to his constituents' preferences, he must also consider his own beliefs and goals. Additionally, the chamber to which he is elected has institutional features that may increase his responsiveness to his constituents. Professionalism, term limits, and progressive ambition are three chamber characteristics that should promote better policy responsiveness. The extent of responsiveness to constituency characteristics may be conditioned by the presence of these institutional variables. By first simulating constituency ideological preferences and then integrating chamber characteristics through interaction variables, I expect to find relationships that may explain influences of the voting behavior of state legislators.



## **Assumptions and Hypotheses**

Several assumptions are made throughout this analysis. Each of these assumptions is rooted in theory and past research. I assume Pitkin's (1967) delegate view of representation, in which legislators and their constituents view the role of a legislator as a conveyor of the wishes of his constituents, and votes accordingly. I also assume that legislators have reasons for voting along their constituents' preferences. These reasons may be due to personal progressive ambition, a commitment to political service, or to simply please constituents. I assume further that constituents are informed, even to a small extent, of the legislator's behavior and will hold legislators electorally accountable for their voting behavior. Constituents displeased with the legislator's voting behavior or performance as a representative should consider not voting the legislator back into office. Finally, I assume that constituents are, in some way, communicating their preferences to the legislator. The legislator is able to interpret this communication and vote consistent with the preferences of the constituency. Signals sent by constituents may be simple demographic groupings, written or verbal correspondence, participation in groups or group activities, or interest in particular issues or policies.

District diversity and the variety of preference messages that the legislator receives may influence his ability to represent his constituents. Or, legislators may not be able to estimate the preferences of voters and non-voters in the constituency; it could be expected that legislators may cater to the preferences of voters to aid the legislator's future reelection attempts. I hypothesize that in highly competitive districts, legislators will be less able to accurately assess the preferences of their constituents, and will therefore be less responsive in their conservative voting behavior.

While a variety of district and legislator variables are included in this analysis, the indirect effects of the institutional characteristics are the main focus. I expect legislative professionalism to have a positive relationship with policy responsiveness. As legislators have more resources and staff available, more active monitoring and communication of constituents' preferences should result in better responsiveness. Additionally, the salary and benefits legislators enjoy in professionalized legislators are an incentive to retain their office. Term limits, on the other hand, are hypothesized to have a negative, relationship with responsiveness. A limited number of terms may reduce responsiveness, as legislators' incentive of re-election decreases. Progressive ambition is hypothesized to have a positive effect on policy responsiveness. Legislators planning to develop a political career with higher offices can be expected to serve their local constituents well, while also working to gain the support of a possible future constituency. Therefore, I hypothesize that while professionalism and ambition will increase policy responsiveness, term limits may have a negative effect.

When considering different partisan groups or year contexts, the effects of institutional characteristics on responsiveness may vary. Separating Democrat and Republican legislators may reveal that legislators' responsiveness, regardless of partisanship, are influenced by similar factors. Or, each partisan group may vary in their influences. The year context may also alter responsiveness. I hypothesize that, in comparison to non-presidential election years, the surge in public attention and participation in presidential election years will encourage legislator responsiveness to constituent preferences.

## **Data and Methods**

Gathering data on the state legislative level is an obstacle that has hindered the growth of this area in political science. While some demographic information is available through the United State Census, public opinion and preferences on the constituency level is more difficult to obtain due to the lack of polling and surveys in state legislative districts. Barone, Lilley, and DeFranco (1998) have compiled State Legislative Elections: Voting Patterns and Demographics, which reports demographic characteristics and trends in constituents' political activities and behaviors. Data from the lower houses of twenty-eight states between the years of 1995 and 2000 are used in this analysis.<sup>2</sup> These states vary on a number of dimensions: region, culture, legislative professionalism, and the presence of and variance of term limit regulations. Also, each of these states uses the single-member district systems, which specify only one representative per legislative district.

The measurement of the chamber variables is taken from previous literature: professionalized legislatures as dichotomized by Kurtz (1999), and classification of progressively ambitious legislatures as grouped by Squire (1988a) and Maestas (2000). Term limits is simply any presence of term limitations of legislators, regardless of the restrictiveness of the policy or length of served time allowed.

A series of OLS regressions are used to find relationships between legislators' voting behaviors and possible variables that may play a part in influencing their vote. I first estimate constituency preferences by using demographic characteristics as indicators of constituents' policy preferences. I then create three interaction variables, in which three chamber characteristics (professionalism, term limits, and progressive ambition) are interacted with the

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<sup>2</sup> The states included in this analysis are: Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

estimation of constituency preferences. Legislator characteristics are included and serve as controls for individual characteristics that may influence his/her voting behavior. The focus of this analysis is to find the effect that institutional characteristics have on legislators' voting.

In the first model, I regress a score of legislator conservatism in voting against estimated constituency preferences. This will indicate how well legislators' conservative voting is directly related to constituency preferences. The second model regresses legislators' conservative voting against constituency, legislator, and institutional variables. Here I include a series of interaction variables, which will show the magnitude of any indirect effects that chamber characteristics have on legislator responsiveness. A third model will separate Republican and Democrat legislators, to indicate any differences between the two parties' levels of policy responsiveness and the factors that influence legislators' voting behavior. Finally, a fourth model analyzes the contextual effects of Presidential election years. The greater attention and participation in Presidential election years could also encourage responsiveness by legislators.

**Dependent Variable: Calibrated NFIB Score**

For the dependent variable in each of the four models, calibrated NFIB scores are used as an indicator of legislators' level of conservatism, as seen in their voting behavior on business and economic issues. The National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) rates legislators based on the percentage of times the legislator sides with the group's pro-business agenda on roll call votes. As Hogan (2004) notes, party affiliation and district characteristics are highly correlated with a legislator's NFIB rating, and NFIB scores are also highly correlated with similar groups' measurements, such as the AFL-CIO and Chamber of Commerce legislator scores (1288-89). I use a calibrated NFIB score, which is the difference of the raw NFIB score and the NFIB mean, divided by the NFIB standard deviation. This score allows for

standardization across state policies, which vary in number and conservatism. The calibrated NFIB score serves as an indicator of conservatism where higher values indicate legislators' greater support for conservative economic and regulatory policies.

## **Independent Variables**

### Constituency Conservatism Score

The lack of polling and surveys at the state legislative district level as led to estimation techniques that attempt to capture the direction of constituency preferences. Hogan (2003) modified the Koetzle (1998) measure of political diversity to indicate values of demographic characteristics that favor Democratic candidates. Similar to Hogan's (2003) measure of a Democratic Advantage score, I create a "Constituency Conservatism" score, using demographic characteristics to estimate constituency preferences for conservative voting. The demographic characteristics that contribute to the score are grouped according to their established ideological tendency. The demographic groups that historically favor liberalism are: college graduates<sup>3</sup>, those living in urban areas, African American or Hispanic, and those receiving Social Security. The demographic groups with established tendencies for conservative preferences are: population living in rural or suburban areas, white, and higher average annual income voters.

The national median percentage for each variable in state legislative districts is used to find the direction and extent to which a district varies from the national median. For demographic variables that favor more liberal policies, I subtract the district percentage from the national median percentage and then divide by the national standard deviation.

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<sup>3</sup>Previous literature has found mixed findings as to the ideological tendencies of college graduates. Some literature has found that college graduates may prefer more conservative policies. This may be due partially to the high correlation between income and a college degree. I did estimate the constituency conservatism score and each of the models with college graduates favoring conservative policies. However, the findings for each of the models were consistent, regardless of the ideological direction of the college graduate population.

- *Liberal Demographic Variables: National Median Percentage – District Percentage / National Standard Deviation*

For the group of demographic variables favoring more conservative policies, I subtract the national median percentage from the district percentage, and then divide by the national standard deviation.

- *Conservative Demographic Variables: District Percentage – National Median Percentage / National Standard Deviation*

By dividing by the standard deviation, I standardize these scores, producing Z-scores that account for variances across states and districts. Similar to the method used in Hogan (2003), I then add the percentage point differences between district and national demographic characteristics and divide by the number of characteristics (in this measure, there are nine demographic variables included). If the difference between the district and national percentages favors liberalism, the difference will have a negative value; if the difference favors more conservative voting, the difference will have a positive value. The result is a measure of “constituency conservatism,” which could be seen as an indicator of state legislative districts’ constituency preferences for conservatism. This constituency conservatism score is used as an indicator of constituency preferences and will be interacted with chamber characteristics to estimate the conditioning effect of chamber characteristics on legislators’ policy responsiveness to their constituents.

The impact on competitiveness could also be reasonably expected to influence responsiveness. Therefore, I include a dichotomous variable that accounts for competitiveness within a district. Using the past percent of the Republican two-party vote received in the most recent general election, I estimate the level of partisan competition within the district. Districts

where the winner received over 60% of the votes are considered uncompetitive, while districts where the winner received less than 60% of the votes is considered competitive. Social diversity within a district is positively associated with the number of candidates running and competitiveness as various demographic groups vie for political influence. While social diversity increases competition, it also increases the difficulty of accurately assessing constituency preferences. Incorrect estimation of constituent preferences may lead to poor policy responsiveness.

Five variables are included to account for personal characteristics that may influence a legislator's voting. A legislator's partisanship may play a part in ideological voting; voting with the party line often coincides with the respective ideological position. Gender is included to control for variations in voting due to different tendencies in men and women. Variances between junior and more senior members are included in a variable indicating the number of years in office. Also included is a dichotomous variable for newly-elected freshmen legislators; freshmen legislators may behave differently and vary in responsiveness from more experienced legislators. Differences between members in party or committee leadership also are controlled. The final variable accounts for the interest and conditions surrounding the election year. These variables may influence how a legislator votes, but they serve as control variables, rather than the main independent variables in this analysis.

The object of this analysis is estimation of the influences of institutional variables on legislators' policy responsiveness to their constituency. Three chamber characteristics are included: professionalism, the presence of term limits, and progressive ambition of the legislature. These institutional variables account for three characteristics of legislatures that may influence legislators' responsiveness to their constituents.

State legislatures' professionalism is dichotomized by Kurtz (1999) into citizen (low professionalism) and professional (highly professionalized). This measure of professionalism is used for consistency and simplicity across the institutional variables, which are each coded as dichotomous (dummy) variables. As mentioned earlier, the Kurtz professionalism variable is highly correlated with the commonly used Squire index of professionalism. Six states (California, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) in my sample are coded as having highly professionalized legislatures.

The presence of term limits is another institutional variable that may influence legislators' responsiveness to constituency preferences. This measure is dichotomized for clarity of findings and ease of interpretation. Eight states (Maine, California, Colorado, Michigan, Florida, Ohio, Missouri, and Oklahoma) in my sample have some type of term limitation policy. Each of these states has differing years of policy enactment, term length, and year of impact, in which the first legislator was termed out of office. For this reason, states are classified by the presence of term limit policies, rather than the time of impact.

Maestas (2000) groups state legislatures into four categories, according to their level of progressive opportunities and salary. Both salary groupings of Maestas' (2000) "springboard" states are found to have high levels of progressive opportunity; therefore, states from both springboard categories are coded to have progressive ambition. Twelve state legislatures in this analysis are coded as fostering legislators' progressive ambition: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Colorado, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.



## **Findings**

### **Direct Effects Model**

The first stage, indicated in Table 1, involves a regression of the calibrated NFIB score, which is the dependent variable indicating legislators' conservative voting, and the constituency conservatism score, which is a measure of conservative preferences as indicated by demographic groups within the constituency. This model includes legislator characteristics, which are used as control variables. Finally, the three institutional variables are included to find any direct effects of chamber characteristics on legislators' conservative voting behavior.

In Table 1, the variables included account for over 53% ( $R^2$  of 0.5359) of the variance in legislators' voting behavior. The estimated constituency conservatism score is highly significant and positively related to legislators' conservative voting. A one-unit change in constituency conservatism results in an increase of .024 in a legislator's calibrated NFIB score. Also significant is district competition, which too has a significant and positive relationship with legislators' conservative voting.

Some of the institutional characteristics also have significant effects on conservative voting. Professionalism has a positive effect, indicating increased conservative voting in more highly professionalized legislatures. While term limits is found to have no significant relationship with conservative voting, progressive ambition has a negative effect. In progressively ambitious legislatures, there is a decrease in legislators' conservative voting.

### **Interaction Effects Model**

In Table 2, I test the indirect effects of institutional variables on legislators' policy responsiveness. The inclusion of district, legislator, and institutional variables slightly increases the adjusted  $R^2$  value to .537. Therefore, nearly 54% of the variance in legislators' voting is

explained by the variables included in this indirect effects model. The district variables included are the constituency conservatism score and electoral competition within the district. The legislator's personal characteristics included are: gender, leadership position (either in the party or in committee), partisanship, number of years served in the legislature, and freshman legislator. Three institutional variables are included: professionalism, term limits, and progressive ambition.

**Table 1- OLS Regression Model of Direct Effects of Variables on Legislators' Conservative Voting Behavior**

<b>Direct Effects</b>		
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Coef.</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>District</b>		
Constituency Conservatism (CC)	.0241 (.0025)	9.38***
Competition	.0593 (.0187)	3.18***
<b>Legislator (controls)</b>		
Gender	-.1278 (.0185)	-6.91***
Partisanship	1.374 (.01716)	80.09***
Party leadership	-.0274 (.0429)	-.064
Committee leadership	.0205 (.0196)	1.05
Years served	.0003 (.0015)	-0.17
Freshman	-.0417 (.0222)	-1.87*
<b>Institution</b>		
Professionalism	.0421 (.0234)	1.80*
Term Limits	.0117 (.0168)	0.70
Progressive Ambition	-.0924 (.0168)	-4.56***
<i>Constant</i>	-.6366 (.0199)	-32.03

*Standard errors in parentheses; \* p < .05 level, \*\* p < .01 level, \*\*\* p < .001 level*  
Adjusted R-squared 0.5359, Number of Cases 7866

In order to accurately account for legislators' responsiveness, an element of constituency preferences must be interacted with the explanatory variables. I interact district competition, professionalism, term limits, and progressive ambition with the constituency conservatism score to estimate these variables' effects on responsiveness. The first column of Table 2 indicates effects of district competition on legislators' policy responsiveness. District competition is found to have a negative and highly significant effect on responsiveness.

**Table 2- OLS Regression Model of Interaction Effects of Variables on Legislators' Policy Responsiveness**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Competition</b>		<b>Institutional Characteristics</b>	
	<b>Coef.</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Coef.</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>District</b>				
Constituency Conservatism (CC)	.0292 (.0028)	10.36***	.0289 (.0035)	8.19***
Competition	.0732 (.0189)	3.87***	.0575 (.0186)	3.09***
<b>Legislator</b>				
Gender	-.1260 (.0185)	-6.82***	-.1252 (.0185)	-6.78***
Partisanship	1.365 (.0172)	79.17***	1.371 (.0171)	80.00***
Party leadership	-.0253 (.0429)	-0.59	-.0197 (.0428)	-0.46
Committee leadership	.0200 (.0195)	1.03	.0246 (.0196)	1.26
Years served	-.0003 (.0015)	-0.21	-.0002 (.0015)	-0.11
Freshman	-.0409 (.0222)	-1.84*	-.0386 (.0222)	-1.74*
<b>Institution</b>				
Professionalism	.0431 (.0234)	1.85*	.0559 (.0235)	2.39**
Term Limits	.0094 (.0167)	0.56	.0079 (.0167)	0.47
Progressive Ambition	-.0903 (.0202)	-4.60***	-.0948 (.0202)	-4.69
<b>Interactions</b>				
CC x Competition	-.0276 (.0063)	-4.39***	-----	-----

(Table continued)

CC x Professionalism	-----	-----		.0379 (.0063)	6.05***
CC x Term Limits	-----	-----		.0459 (.0350)	1.31
CC x Progressive Ambition	-----	-----		-.2340 (.0376)	-6.23***
<i>Constant</i>	-.6296 (.0199)	-31.62		-.6381 (.0199)	-32.10

*Standard errors in parentheses; \* p < .05 level, \*\* p < .01 level, \*\*\* p < .001 level*

Competition

Adjusted R-Square 0.5370, Number of cases 7866

Institutional Characteristics

Adjusted R-Square 0.5365, Number of cases 7866

As indicated in the second column of Table 2, two of the institutional variables are found to have significant effects on legislators' policy responsiveness. Professionalism is found to be significantly and positively related to responsiveness. In professional legislatures (compared to non-professional legislature), the effects of policy responsiveness variable is increased by .037, controlling for the effects of the other variables included in the model. Term limits, however, does not reach significance, while progressive ambition has a negative effect on responsiveness. Two of these findings are consistent with my hypotheses; professionalism has a strong positive effect, and progressive ambition has a significant negative effect. However, no support was found for the hypothesis concerning term limits, which I had hypothesized to have a negative effect on responsiveness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In an earlier model not included in this study, the variable indicating number of years served was significant, but after the inclusion of a variable for freshman, the number of years served variable lost significance. To some extent, there seems to be an individual-specific freshman effect. It could be expected that the presence of term limits could influence legislators differently, depending on how many years the legislator has already served. Freshmen could be expected to be more responsive, in hopes of increasing their re-election success, whereas more experience legislators may be less responsive because of term limitations. This hypothesis was tested in a triple interaction of constituency conservatism, term limits, and freshmen. However, in none of the models did this interaction reach statistical significance.

## **Divided Party Model**

The strength of partisanship's influence in the second and third models leads to another question: Is the responsiveness of Republican and Democrat legislators influenced by differing factors? Jacobson (1989) found that Democratic candidates are responsive to national indicators (economy and presidential popularity), but Republican candidates are unaffected. Romero (1993) finds further support that legislators from different parties respond to and are affected differently by different stimuli.

Separating Democrat and Republican legislators may reveal party-specific influences for policy responsiveness. Table 3 exhibits the influences of Democrats' and Republicans' responsiveness. Similar to Table 2, in this divided party model, I regress legislators' calibrated NFIB scores against a variety of district, legislator, and institutional variables. However, in Table 3, members of the Democrat and Republican parties are divided and tested separately in order to compare different influences between the parties.

In the columns for the Democrats, the interactive effects of competition, term limits, and ambition are all significant and negative effects. District competition's negative relationship with responsiveness may be due to either the legislators' efforts to moderate their voting behavior to appeal to the median voter, or legislators' inability to accurately estimate their diverse district's preferences. Term limits have a significant and negative effect on Democratic legislators' responsiveness, indicating that Democrats' responsiveness decreases in the presence of term limits. Consistent with the interaction model and Table 2 results, Democrats are negatively and significantly responsive to their constituents' preferences when the legislator is a member of an ambitious legislature.

**Table 3- OLS Regression Model of Interaction Effects of Variables on Democrat and Republican Legislators' Policy Responsiveness**

Variables	Democrats		Republicans	
	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.
<b>District</b>				
Constituency	.0332*** (.0039)	.0404*** (.0049)	.0191*** (.0045)	.0153** (.0054)
Conservatism (CC)				
Competition	.0563* (.0285)	.0580* (.0284)	.0389 (.0256)	.0220 (.0236)
<b>Legislator</b>				
Gender	-.2220*** (.0268)	-.2194*** (.0268)	.0037 (.0242)	.0061 (.0243)
Partisanship	1.473*** (.0833)	1.523*** .0838	-----	-----
Party leadership	-.1011 (.0639)	-.1051* (.0639)	.0904* (.0532)	.0870* (.0532)
Committee leadership	.0892** (.0295)	.0972*** (.0296)	-.0516* (.0249)	-.0541* (.0249)
Years served	-.0010 (.0021)	.0011 (.0020)	-.0083*** (.0021)	-.0084*** (.0021)
Freshman	-.0867** (.0341)	-.0876** (.0341)	-.0135 (.0273)	-.0139 (.0273)
<b>Institution</b>				
Professionalism	-.2024*** (.0261)	-.1868*** (.0420)	.2883*** (.0284)	.2978*** (.0326)
Term Limits	-.0630** (.0258)	.0776** (.0273)	.0703*** (.0209)	.0473* (.0236)
Progressive Ambition	-.0773** (.0314)	.0470*** (.0343)	-.2189*** (.0246)	-.2009*** (.0277)
<b>Interactions</b>				
CC x Competition	-.0329*** (.0095)	-----	-.0140* (.0084)	-----
CC x Professionalism	-----	.0101 (.0096)	-----	.0076 (.0113)
CC x Term Limits	-----	-.1214** (.0518)	-----	.1149* (.0541)
CC x Progressive Ambition	-----	-.1597** (.0583)	-----	-.0611 (.0561)
Constant	-.5972 (.0268)	-.5998 (.0268)	.7501 (.0231)	.7564 (.0237)

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < .05$  level, \*\*  $p < .01$  level, \*\*\*  $p < .001$  level

In the Republican model, partisanship was dropped due to multicollinearity.

**Democrats**

Competition

Adjusted R-Square 0.5370, Number of cases 4025

(Table continued)

Institutional Characteristics

Adjusted R-Square 0.5387, Number of cases 4025

**Republicans**

Competition

Adjusted R-Square 0.5370, Number of cases 3923

Institutional Characteristics

Adjusted R-Square 0.5387, Number of cases 3923

Similar to the findings for Democratic legislators, Republican members are also influenced by constituency preferences, district competition, and institutional characteristics. Similar to the findings for Democratic legislators, Republicans' responsiveness is also influenced negatively and significantly by competition. Variance between the partisan groups is obvious in the institutional interaction variables. Republicans, like Democrats, are significantly influenced by term limits; however, Republicans are positively affected while Democrats are negatively affected by term limits. This counteracting effect explains the insignificant finding for term limits in Table 2. Term limits affect partisan groups differently, effectively cancelling out the significant effects of term limits when all legislators are tested together. Fiorina (1994) suggests a differential effect, in which parties respond to different stimuli and influences, and this theory is supported by the partisan differences in the effects of term limits.

Unlike Democratic legislators, Republicans are not significantly influenced by progressive ambition. This finding could be a career effect. If Democratic legislators are more attracted to career offices and service positions, they may moderate their policy positions in hopes of earning a greater voter support base. Neither partisan group's responsiveness is significantly influenced by professionalism.

## **Year Context Model**

Finally, political circumstances and year context may play a role in responsiveness. The “surge” of political interest and participation in presidential election years has been found to benefit the advantaged party (Campbell 1987), while voters’ midterm evaluations of legislator service may result in electoral losses (Campbell 1991). Legislators who were elected in presidential election years, cognizant of voters’ increased attention and evaluations, may be more representative in hopes of maintaining electoral support. Similar to the models including the direct and indirect effects on responsiveness, this model includes a dichotomous variable for presidential election years. My data set includes the presidential election years of 1996 and 2000, and the data is taken from the legislative terms leading up to the presidential election (1995-1996, 1999-2000). Hypothetically, voters’ increased interest and involvement during a presidential campaign and election may encourage more responsiveness and hold legislators more accountable for their voting behavior.

The findings noted in Table 4 indicate that the “surge” of interest and activity in presidential election years does not significantly affect legislators’ responsiveness. The dichotomous independent variable for presidential election year is found to be a negative and significant influencer of conservative voting in both the competition and institutional variables models. This suggests that legislators will vote less conservatively in presidential election years. To estimate a presidential election year’s influence on responsiveness, I create a fifth interaction variable by multiplying the effects of a presidential election year and the constituency conservatism score. In the competition model, this presidential year interaction variable does not reach statistical significance.



**Table 4- OLS Regression Model of Interaction Effects of Variables on Legislators' Policy Responsiveness, including Presidential Election Year Context Variable**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Competition</b>	<b>Institutional Characteristics</b>
	<b>Coef.</b>	<b>Coef.</b>
<b>District</b>		
Constituency Conservatism (CC)	.0249*** (.0040)	.0253*** (.0045)
Competition	.0729*** (.01891)	.0571** (.0186)
<b>Legislator</b>		
Gender	-.1258*** (.0185)	-.1250*** (.0184)
Partisanship	1.366*** (.0172)	1.372*** (.0171)
Party leadership	-.0254 (.0429)	-.0198 (.0428)
Committee leadership	.0206 (.0195)	.0251 (.0196)
Years served	-.0003 (.00150)	-.0001 (.0015)
Freshman	-.0394* (.0222)	-.0372* (.0222)
<b>Institution</b>		
Professionalism	.0439* (.0233)	.0565** (.0234)
Term Limits	.0116 (.0167)	.0100 (.0167)
Progressive Ambition	-.0939*** (.0202)	-.0957*** (.0202)
<b>Interactions</b>		
CC x Competition	-.0279*** (.0063)	-----
CC x Professionalism	-----	.0377*** (.0062)
CC x Term Limits	-----	.0425 (.0351)
CC x Progressive Ambition	-----	-.2329*** (.0376)
<b>Year Context</b>		
Presidential Election Year	-.0328* (.0158)	-.0307* (.0158)
CC x Presidential Election Year	.0070 (.0047)	.0060 (.0047)

(Table continued)

Constant	-0.6104 (.0219)	-0.6202 (.0219)
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*Standard errors in parentheses; \* p < .05 level, \*\* p < .01 level, \*\*\* p < .001 level*

Competition

Adjusted R-Square 0.5373, Number of cases 7866

Institutional Characteristics

Adjusted R-Square 0.5389, Number of cases 7866

When the effects of presidential election years are included in the institutional effects model, the variables' values only slightly differ from the original interaction model in Table 2. The institutional interaction variables' values are similar to those of earlier models; professionalism is a positive and significant influence on responsiveness, term limits has no significant effect, and progressive ambition is significant and negatively related to responsiveness. The dichotomous indicator for presidential election year is again negative and significantly related to conservative voting, and the presidential election year interaction fails to reach significance again. This indicates that the political interest of a presidential election year does not have an effect in increasing or decreasing legislators' policy responsiveness to their constituents.

## **Discussion**

The findings presented in these analyses suggest that some institutional characteristics do play a part in shaping legislators' responsiveness. My hypotheses were that while professionalism and progressive ambition would have positive effects on responsiveness, term limits would have a negative effect. These hypotheses are partially supported by the findings.

As hypothesized, district-level competition is consistently found to be a significant negative influencer of policy responsiveness in each of the models. A possible explanation for this effect is aligned with Fiorina's (1974) arguments. Greater competition may be the product of greater social diversity within the constituency. Greater social diversity can mean that social groups are sending a variety of preferences messages, making an accurate estimation of preferences difficult for the legislators. Another possible reason for this effect could be that in competitive districts, it may be unclear what groups are represented and participate through voting, so legislators are responsive and less accountable because it is unclear which constituents and which preferences they should represent.

Professionalism behaves in the hypothesized way, increasing responsiveness in both the interaction effect model (Table 2) and the year context model (Table 4). This effect may be attributed to the availability of resources to legislators. For example, increased salaries decrease legislators' need for additional jobs or supplemental income, which in turn increases the time they have to spend monitoring constituents' preferences. The positive and significant effect of professionalism on responsiveness found here gives further support for Maestas' (2000) findings. In the divided party model, however, professionalism does not reach significance, due to the separation of Democrat and Republican legislators.

My hypothesis of the negative effects of term limits on responsiveness did not find support. The effects of term limits are mixed in this study, as it is in much of the previous research. However, separating Democrat and Republican legislators sheds light on why the effects of term limits are so elusive. When all legislators are considered together, term limits does not have a significant effect on responsiveness. The partisan separation of legislators indicates that while Democrats' responsiveness is negatively influenced by term limits, Republicans' responsiveness is positively influenced. The effects of term limits are mitigated when both parties are considered together, resulting in the 'no significant effect' finding seen in the interaction and year context models. This finding could also be linked to legislators' ambition and career plans; if Democrats are attracted to legislative careers or service positions, they may be less responsive in the presence of term limits, because electoral accountability is of little threat when there are few opportunities for other offices. As previously mentioned, the effects of term limits may vary by individual legislator and the restrictiveness of individual states' term limit policies.

In this same vein, there is a steady finding for the negative relationship between responsiveness and progressive ambition. I had hypothesized that the drive for higher offices would promote responsiveness through the need to develop and build a voter support base. However, the negative effects indicate that other relationships are active here. First, the negative finding indicates that the legislator is less responsive of his immediate or current constituency. It is possible that the legislator may be voting to gain the support of a larger or future constituency though. If, for example, a state legislator has hopes of running for a U.S. House seat, he may vote in accordance to the preferences of his future constituents to establish rapport and their gain support in the future election. Secondly, the opportunities for higher offices may be small,

reducing the level of accountability for responsiveness. Perhaps New Hampshire is the most obvious state with this situation. With 400 members in the state House of Representatives, there are only around thirty 'higher' state and federal offices to be vied for. Therefore, a fewer number of higher offices and a large number of legislators can be expected to reduce electoral accountability and responsiveness.

A comparison of the influencing variables for Democratic and Republican legislators reveals that the two partisan groups' responsiveness are influenced by mostly the same factors. While both parties' legislators indicate similar reactions to district competition and professionalism, the two legislator groups' responsiveness is influenced differently by term limits – term limits increase the responsiveness of Republicans but decrease the responsiveness of Democrats. The responsiveness of both parties is negatively influenced by progressive ambition, while the relationship is only significant for Democratic legislators. In this model (Table 3), the only variable differing in direction is term limits. This effect may be due Democrats' greater attraction to political or service careers, which results in less responsiveness and accountability in term limited situations. If Democratic legislators place great importance on a career of political service, they are likely to moderate their voting behavior in order to appeal to a larger number of voters. However, in term limited situations, a political career stops after a number of terms served. Without the incentive of a longer political career, Democratic legislators may become less responsive and less accountable to their constituents.

In the year context model, the presidential election year variable was found to be negatively related to conservative voting, while the interaction variable indicated that presidential election years had no effect on responsiveness. This finding can be interpreted in several ways. Legislators' responsiveness may not be influenced by the political interest surge in

presidential election years. It is also possible though that voters do not hold their state legislators accountable or see state legislators as a part of the national political arena. While there is no effect on state legislators' responsiveness, there may be an effect for U.S. House or Senate members, who are more involved on the national scale. Additionally, this finding could be isolated to the 1996 and 2000 presidential campaign seasons; an extended time-series analysis may show other variations and trends in responsiveness and election cycles.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

Policy responsiveness is key to the delegate view of representation. However, institutional factors may condition or alter the extent to which legislators are responsive to their constituents' preferences. In this paper, I find that chamber characteristics do play a significant role in shaping responsiveness. Professionalism has strong and positive effects on legislators' policy responsiveness, while the level of progressive ambition in the legislature has a negative effect on representatives' responsiveness to their immediate constituencies. Term limits have varying effects, depending on if the legislators are divided into partisan groups. A partisan-grouped model shows that Democrats and Republicans' responsiveness is oppositely influenced by term limits, while the aggregated model indicates that these effects counteract each other, creating no effect when legislators are not divided by party. Other than the effects of term limits, representatives from either party are largely influenced by similar factors. The context of a presidential election year is found to not have a significant role in shaping responsiveness.

The opportunities for future research in the area of influences on representation are many. Future research could consider policy and issue salience, media congruence and information dispersion, term limit enactment and timing of impact, and the role of interest groups and political activity within constituencies. Further development in the question of the effects of term limits could also be couched in individual- and legislator-specific analyses, which could focus on legislators' priorities and efforts given to their office at different points in their political careers. While the concept of responsiveness originates from delegate representation, the strong influences and possible manipulation of institutional characteristics can promote or undermine true policy responsiveness.

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## **Appendix: Variable Measurements**

### **Calibrated NFIB score**

Economic/business interest group's scores for state legislators' voting records on economic and regulatory policies; higher values indicates conservative voting

### **Constituency Conservatism**

Uses district demographic characteristics to estimate ideological preferences; 5 liberal: college, Black, Hispanic, urban, receiving Social Security; 4 conservative: rural, suburban, income, white. Using the national medians and standard deviations, I create a standardized score: liberal demographics: national median-district/national standard deviation; conservative demographics: district- national median/national standard deviation. Individual demographic variables' scores are then added and divided by the number of variables.

### **Competition**

Uses the past percent of the Republican two-party vote received in the most recent general election; 100- winner's percentage of votes, then dichotomized: if winner won with over 60% of votes, coded 0 for not competitive; if winner won with 50-60% of votes, coded 1 for highly competitive

### **Partisanship**

Legislator coded 1 for Republican, 0 for Democrat

### **Gender**

Legislator coded 1 for female, 0 for male

### **Length of service**

Number of years served

### **Freshman**

Legislator coded 1 if newly-elected freshman, 0 for incumbent

### **Leadership**

Legislator coded 1 if he was a chamber party leader or a committee chair

### **Presidential election year**

Coded 1 during 1995-1996 and 1999-2000 (Presidential election years), coded 0 for 1997-1998 (Non-Presidential election year)

### **Professionalism**

Used Kurtz's dichotomous categorization: 1 for highly professionalized, 0 for citizen; takes into account average salary, average session length, and total staff; Kurtz is highly correlated (.80) with Squire's index

### **Term Limits**

Used dichotomous variable for if state has term limits policy; 1 if state does have term limits, 0 if not; no difference between length/restrictiveness of policy

**Progressive Ambition**

Uses Maestas' categorization of legislatures (4 categories); grouped two 'springboard' groups into having progressive ambition (coded 1)

## **Vita**

Jessica Jordan Self grew up in West Monroe, Louisiana, and graduated from West Monroe High School in 2002. She attended Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, Louisiana, from August 2002 to February 2006. At Louisiana Tech University, Jessica majored in political science with a minor in English and a concentration in pre-law studies. She then attended Louisiana State University to pursue a master's degree in political science, specializing in American politics. Jessica plans to graduate in May 2008 from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Her interests include state legislative politics, demographic trends, gender studies, and voting behavior. She is married to Jared Self, a deputy sheriff with the Ouachita Parish Sheriff's Office, and will be living in Monroe, Louisiana, after graduation.