

THE EFFECTS OF UNCONTESTED ELECTIONS ON LEGISLATOR PERFORMANCE

David M. Konisky
Georgetown University

Michiko Ueda
Waseda University

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ABSTRACT

Political competition lies at the core of representative democracy. Yet, uncompetitive elections and uncontested races are widespread in the United States, particularly at the state level. In this article, we analyze the consequences of uncontested elections on lawmaking activity. Our primary hypothesis is that legislators who run unopposed are less active lawmakers than those who were selected through competitive elections. Studying roll call vote participation and bill introduction and enactment for most of the U.S. states for 1999-2000, we find that state legislators elected in unopposed elections perform more poorly compared to their colleagues elected in competitive contests.

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INTRODUCTION

More than a half century ago, Joseph Schumpeter commented that representative democracy is an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter 1950, p.269). Competition among candidates and parties is thought to increase voter turnout, improve the quality of representation, and, more generally, serve as a mechanism for holding elected officials accountable to the citizens they represent (McDonald and Samples 2006). Many suggest that uncompetitive elections weaken this accountability mechanism. As Warren (2003, p.35) notes: “[v]oting for representatives in uncontested elections or plebiscites is not an indication of democracy, because the vote contributes nothing to the enforcement of accountability.”

Yet, uncompetitive elections and even uncontested races are widespread in the United States. For example, less than ten percent of the elections to the U.S. House in 2004 were competitive and about one in eight U.S. House candidates did not face a major party opponent (Jacobson 2006). There is even less competition for state legislative seats, where high percentages of winning candidates face no meaningful challengers. In ten states across the country holding state legislative elections in 2004, at least half of the seats were determined in uncontested races.¹ In the cases of Arkansas and Florida, approximately 75 percent of state legislative seats were uncontested in the 2004 general election.

Although there is a considerable body of research examining the frequency and determinants of uncontested state legislative elections, the large number of such elections also raises important questions about legislator behavior. One potential consequence of weak political competition is that poorly performing legislators remain in office, including those that

get elected primarily because of district partisan compositions. Without competition, the public lacks the opportunity to vote out of office corrupt or unrepresentative politicians. In addition, the fact that many state legislators do not face a serious major party opponent when running for reelection may influence their behavior during the legislative session. The lack of competition may generate more opportunities for shirking or otherwise slacking off from lawmaking responsibilities.

In this article, we take advantage of data recently made available on state legislative general election returns (State Legislative Election Returns, 1967-2003) and roll call votes (Wright 2004) for the two-year period of 1999-2000, combined with new data we compiled for the same period on legislator bill introduction and enactment. To summarize our principal results, we find that state legislators having won office in uncontested elections tend to have higher rates of roll call vote absenteeism and tend to introduce fewer bills in the legislature. These results are largely consistent across measures of uncontested elections, lower and upper chambers, and states with varying institutional arrangement such as term limits and legislative professionalism. Collectively, our empirical findings suggest that state legislators facing lax political competition are less active in lawmaking compared to their counterparts that endure competitive elections, and suggest an additional reason why competitive elections can serve to increase the quality of representation.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we discuss the incidence and causes of uncontested state legislative elections. We then develop our hypothesis that state legislators elected in uncontested races are less active lawmakers once in office. In the subsequent sections, we describe the data and methods we use to test our hypothesis. Next, we report the results for

our models, testing the robustness of the findings with several specifications. We conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the study, and the areas that future research should address.

THE PREVALENCE OF UNCONTESTED STATE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

Uncompetitive elections have been defined as electoral contests in which the winner received at least 60 percent of the two-party vote (Niemi et al. 2006). In this article, we are particularly interested in uncontested elections, by which we mean electoral contests where the winning candidate did not face a serious challenger. The most straightforward definition of an uncontested election is one where the winning legislator failed to face any major party opponent in the general election. This definition, however, classifies an election as contested even if the winning candidate had received all but a single vote. To distinguish “pure” uncontested races from “functionally” uncontested races, we define an uncontested election as one in which the winning candidate received 90% or more of the two-party vote. As we discuss later, our findings are not sensitive to this definition.²

There is a sizeable literature studying uncompetitive elections, both for the U.S. Congress (Jacobson 1990; Squire 1989; and Wrighton and Squire 1997) and for state legislatures (Jewell and Breaux 1988; Cox and Morgenstern 1993; Hogan 2003, 2004; Niemi et al. 2006; Squire 2000; Tidmarch et al. 1986; Van Dunk and Weber 1997; Weber et al. 1991). Uncontested state legislative elections are important to study if for no other reason than their prevalence. Figure 1 shows the percentage of uncontested contests in general elections across the country from 1970 to 2002. There are a few noteworthy features of these data. First, uncontested elections are common. Over this 30-year period, the average percentage of uncontested races in state lower and upper house elections was 37% and 33%, respectively. Second, the percentage of uncontested elections has not changed much over this period. Although there is a hint of an

increase from the earliest years in the time series, overall the percentage of uncontested races has remained relatively flat. Last, the data show that, except for 1972, the percentage of uncontested contests in lower house races has exceeded that of upper house races.

[Figure 1 about here]

Potentially disguised in these aggregate data, however, are differences across chambers within states. In Figure 2, we examine the percentage of uncontested races at the state level for 1998 – the year of the general election for most of the legislators we examine in this article. As shown in these data, the degree of electoral competition was generally consistent across chambers within states, as reflected in the generally linear pattern, and most of the deviation away from the 45-degree line is with respect to lower houses. In addition, there is some modest clustering of uncontested races around legislative professionalism levels. Three of the four states exhibiting the most competition – California, Michigan, and Ohio – are among the states with the most professionalized legislatures. In addition, many of the states considered to have low levels of legislative professionalism, particularly those in the South, are characterized by high levels of uncontested races in both chambers (e.g., Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee).

[Figure 2 about here]

What explains the incidence of uncontested state legislative elections? Several studies have considered institutional features of state legislatures, finding for example a positive association between member salary and other measures of professionalized legislatures and the incidence or proportion of uncontested state legislative races (Carey et al. 2000; Chubb 1988; Cox and Morgenstern 1993; Van Dunk and Weber 1997). Professional legislatures provide incumbents with perquisites that enable them to increase their popularity among constituents and to scare off potential challengers. For this reason, incumbency has also been shown to increase

the likelihood that state legislative elections will be uncontested (Jewell and Breaux 1988; Weber et al. 1991).

Squire (2000) and Hogan (2003, 2004), by contrast, argue that there might be more competition for seats in professionalized legislatures because these seats have comparatively more value to candidates. By the same logic, seats in upper chambers are thought to be more desirable than those in lower chambers, since they are viewed by most candidates as higher on the political ladder. The marginality of party control in the state legislature is also thought to be a source of uncontested elections (Squire 2000; Van Dunk and Weber 1997). When party control of a legislative chamber is in question, there is reason to expect that both parties will invest resources to field high quality candidates in as many seats as possible.

In addition to institutional features, other studies have found relationships between uncontested elections and district-level factors and incumbent attributes.³ Hogan (2003, 2004) finds that district characteristics such as social and political diversity, population, and urbanization are important predictors of the competitiveness of elections. Previous work has also shown that incumbent's length of service, power in the chamber as indicated by their service in party leadership or committee positions, and strength of policy congruence with constituents are all negatively related to the likelihood that a candidate faces a challenger in the next election (Pritchard 1992; Hogan 2004).

The underlying cause(s) of uncontested elections has important implications. If uncontested elections are due to individual factors such as past good performance, incumbency advantages of name recognition and fundraising, ability (legislative or campaigning skills), or overall effectiveness, we may not observe challengers simply because there is little reason for

anyone to contest high quality incumbents. In this case, there may be less of a concern about negative consequences for representation.

In contrast, if legislators are unchallenged for institutional reasons, there may be several undesirable effects. First, absent the selection mechanism of competitive elections, low performing or unrepresentative legislators may remain in office. Once a candidate gets elected, perhaps in a safe district, s/he may continue to hold office even if s/he turns out to be less than ideal for the district. A related concern is that uncontested elections might lead to more ideological extremism. Candidates who face no opponent in a general election only need to win the support of primary voters. Given that primary voters tend to be more ideologically extreme than average voters, it is plausible that unopposed legislators, without the mechanism of competitive general elections, will stake out positions well beyond the median voter of the district electorate. Last, legislators that are uncontested for institutional reasons have little incentive to perform at a high level in their job because no candidates from the opposition party pose a serious threat. We focus on this final possible implication in this article.

UNCONTESTED ELECTIONS AND LEGISLATOR BEHAVIOR

Little is known about the consequences of unopposed elections on legislator behavior in the chamber. Specifically, does the fact that a legislator did not face a serious challenger in the previous election help explain his or her performance during the subsequent legislative session? For example, do unopposed legislators show up to vote less often, since the likelihood of missing a roll call vote is less likely to be punished in an uncontested election? Similarly, do candidates that feel safe electorally introduce fewer bills and work less diligently to move these bills through the legislature to ratification? The primary reason we might expect a negative relationship between uncontested elections and legislator performance is that legislators, freed

from concerns about re-election, may feel less obligated to participate in lawmaking.⁴ In essence, they may be less active lawmakers, as concerns about shirking will be diminished absent the mechanism of competitive elections to hold them accountable as engaged legislators.

There is some reason to cast doubt on a connection between legislative activity and competitive elections. Wawro (2000) suggests two forms of this argument. First, constituents may be unaware of the legislative efforts of their representatives. Although Wawro makes this case with respect to members of the U.S. Congress, this might particularly be true at the state level given the lower salience of most state legislative issues. Second, building on the work of Fenno (1978), Fiorina (1989), and others, Wawro argues that legislators may engage in *less* legislative activity when facing a competitive election, since time spent on lawmaking is time not spent on constituency service. That is, legislators having faced a competitive election may confront a tradeoff between attending to constituent matters and participating actively in the legislative process in the chamber, and to the extent that they believe that constituency service has greater electoral returns, legislative activity may be less important.

This tradeoff is less evident for state legislators. First, there is some evidence that legislators' constituency service is not associated with previous elections outcomes. A survey of state legislators conducted by Freeman and Richardson (1986) did not find a relationship between electoral marginality in the last election and the amount of time legislators spent on casework. In addition, while there may be some political opportunity costs to participating in legislation (i.e., voting, introducing bills, etc.), few state legislatures are in session year around. Therefore, legislators have more time than do members of Congress to perform constituency service between elections. Because this is less true for highly-professionalized legislature with longer sessions, we consider the effects of uncontested elections separately for these states.

Another potential reason to question the link between legislative activity and competitive elections has to do with the political ambition of individual legislators. Dating back to Schlesinger (1966), ambition theory has maintained that legislators with long-term political aspirations behave differently than those who are less politically ambitious. Of particular relevance here is the possibility that ambitious state legislators may be less likely to slack off in their lawmaking activities, regardless of their electoral security, because they intend to run for higher office (Maestas 2000, 2003). Past work has shown that state legislatures can serve as a “springboard” to higher office (Squire 1988a, 1988b), and, moreover, that political ambition does influence legislator behavior in the chamber including bill introductions and floor activity (Herrick and Moore 1993). We consider this possibility in our analysis below.

The empirical literature is largely silent on the relationship between competitive elections and legislator behavior, but there are some studies addressing similar questions. Several studies on political shirking have found that legislators are less likely to participate in legislative activities while serving their last term. Rothenberg and Sanders (2000) refer to this type of behavior as participatory shirking.⁵ For example, retiring members of Congress are shown to have significantly higher rates of roll call absenteeism (Figlio 1995; Herrick et al. 1994; Lott 1987, 1990; Rothenberg and Sanders 2000). The logic is simple. No longer concerned that absenteeism might deleteriously affect their electoral fortunes, politicians are more likely to skip votes. Empirical work has also found that retiring members of Congress are less active legislators – introducing fewer bills and amendments and making fewer speeches during their final term (Herrick et al. 1994).

At the state-level, Carey et al. (1998) and Carey et al. (2006) found that legislators serving in states with term limits feel less constrained by their constituents and adopt more

statewide orientations. Wright (2007) similarly leveraged the last term effect, by directly examining the influence of term limits on roll call vote participation. He found that term limits themselves were positively associated with vote participation rates (counter to expectations), but that the positive effect of professionalized legislatures on participation was conditional on term limits. Specifically, Wright shows that participation rates in term limited chambers decrease with levels of professionalism.

While these past studies are suggestive, they do not provide direct evidence of the consequences of the lack of political competition on legislator behavior. Retiring and term-limited officials face no prospective electoral threat, but what about the effects of past competition? Our goal in this article is to empirically analyze whether legislators who faced no serious competition in past elections participate less in lawmaking once they are in office. We conduct two sets of analysis. First, we study the relationship between uncontested elections and legislative vote participation. Specifically, we consider whether legislators who ran unopposed in their previous election – and, separately those with long histories of facing no political competition in general elections – participate less in roll call voting. We hypothesize that legislators who feel safe electorally will be less active in the lawmaking process, once we control for other factors related to vote participation. Second, we measure legislators' effort level by bill introduction and enactment activities and test if the level of lawmaking activities is associated with past levels of political competition. Our conjecture is that these lawmakers will be less active and less successful lawmakers. The next section describes the data and methods we use to test these propositions.

DATA AND METHODS

To study the effects of uncontested elections on legislator behavior, we combine information from several existing datasets with original data collection. For our dependent variables we develop several measures of lawmaking activities. First, we derive a measure of vote participation, using roll call data compiled by Wright (2004). These data include all competitive votes cast in the fifty state legislatures during the 1999-2000 session.⁶ Using these data we construct a measure of vote absenteeism, which is simply the percentage of competitive roll calls for which the legislator missed a vote. Wright (2007) uses a similar measure to examine the effects of term limits on legislator vote participation. The mean level of roll call absenteeism among the legislators included in the sample is 0.08 (s.d.=0.12), indicating that across both chambers legislators missed, on average, about 8 percent of competitive roll call votes. There is little difference between the upper and lower houses, and, for each, roll call absenteeism ranged from no votes to 100 percent of the votes. Descriptive statistics for roll call participation and other data examined are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Second, we compiled data on the lawmaking activity of legislators serving during the 1999-2000 legislative session for 32 states. Several studies in the literature utilize these measures of lawmaking to characterize legislative activity for both Congress (Herrick and Moore 1993; Herrick et al. 1994; Wawro 2000) and for state legislatures (Gray and Lowery 1995). States were selected based on the accessibility of data, but they are geographically diverse and include states from across the spectrum in terms of legislative professionalism. Table A.1 in the Supplemental Online Appendix lists the states included in the analysis, and the source of data for each. Specifically, we counted the number of bills introduced by each legislator, and the number

of these bills that were eventually enacted into law.⁷ Data on bill enactment was less accessible and/or more difficult to compile, so we were able to collect these data for only a subset (16) of states.⁸ Because the states are not representative across important legislative features, the data analysis for bill enactment should be interpreted cautiously.

Included in the counts of bill introductions and enactments are all legislative bills considered in regular (not special) sessions for which the legislator was the primary author or sponsor, excluding resolutions. We collected these data from state legislature websites and legislative journals. Bill introduction and enactment data are complimentary measures of a legislator's lawmaking activity, although introducing legislation requires substantially less effort than marshalling support for a bill to be enacted into law. For this reason, we expect a stronger relationship between uncontested elections and the number of bills introduced than the number enacted, since the latter is dependent on many factors beyond the control of an individual legislator.

For the legislative session of our study (1999-2000), the average number of bills introduced by members of state lower houses was 25 (s.d.=33), compared to 45 (s.d.=64) for state senators (the overall average was 31 with a standard deviation of 45). As the standard deviations indicate, there is considerable variation in the number of bills that legislators introduce. The minimum for both chambers was 0, while the maximum number of bills introduced by a legislator was 527 for the house and 661 for the senate.⁹ The number of bills that ultimately get enacted into law is obviously much smaller. In the analysis to follow we consider the proportion of the bills a legislator introduces that are enacted as our outcome variable of interest. The average proportion of bills enacted for members of state lower houses was 0.26 (s.d.=0.23), compared to 0.30 (s.d.=0.22) for state senators.¹⁰ The large standard

deviations suggest that there is substantial variation among state legislatures in the proportion of bills that get enacted.

We define uncontested elections in several ways, using the state legislative election returns dataset compiled by Carsey and his colleagues (State Legislative Election Returns, 1967-2003). First, we consider whether the legislator faced a serious, major party opponent in the previous general election, using the 90% threshold previously discussed. Because of the complexity in defining an uncontested election in multi-member districts, we only include single-member districts in the analysis. This definition focuses solely on the general election race that immediately preceded the 1999-2000 legislative session in which we are evaluating legislator performance.¹¹ The manner in which a legislator performs may also be influenced by his/her general perceptions of electoral safety, which should increase over time if the legislator repeatedly wins in uncontested races. For this reason, we also construct two additional measures based on the level of political competition the legislator faced over time. Specifically, we consider the frequency of uncontested elections (number of uncontested elections/total elections) for those elections in which the legislator participated during the decade of the 1990s, and for the duration of time since the legislator first won election to office.

Although we are especially interested in the effects of uncontested elections, we also consider the degree of political competition more generally by estimating models that examine the effects of the margin of victory on legislator behavior. Specifically, we measure vote margin as the percentage difference of the two-party vote between the winning and losing candidate. In each of the models considered below, we replace the measure of uncontested elections with this more general measure of political competition.

In our analyses, we also control for several other factors that should help predict a legislator's lawmaking activity.¹² First, we compiled biographical information about state legislators for almost all of the contiguous states for legislators serving during the 1999-2000 session to match the roll call and bill introduction and enactment data. Others have used similar data for select states such as California (Cain et al. 2006) and North Carolina (Padro I Miquel and Snyder 2006; Weissert 1991).¹³ The information was taken from state "blue books," legislative manuals, and state government websites. Availability of data varies by state (see Table A.2 in the Supplemental Online Appendix), and for some we were able to compile only basic information such as occupation.

Biographical information provides a useful indicator of legislator skill. In the roll call vote participation models, we include two measures collected from these data: whether the individual is an attorney and whether the individual is a full-time legislator. Padro I Miquel and Snyder (2006) and Weissert (1991) each find that attorneys are more effective legislators, likely due to their comparatively higher level of comfort with legal jargon and the lawmaking process. Similarly, we expect full-time legislators – defined as those listing their primary occupation as legislator, retired, housewife, or not listed – to miss fewer roll call votes, given that they are less likely to be away from the legislature compared to those that maintain other jobs while serving. In the bill introduction and bill enactment models, we also control for whether the legislator served previously in the other chamber of the state legislature (typically, state senators with experience in the lower house). We expect these legislators to be more adept in lawmaking, and, therefore, more likely to introduce legislation and to see that legislation through enactment.

We also compiled data on legislature and committee leadership to control for the fact that legislators serving in important positions, all else equal, are likely to be more active lawmakers.

Specifically, we created several variables using data from the Council of State Governments (various years). In each model, we include a dummy variable coded one if the legislator held a leadership position in their chamber, such as the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate.¹⁴ In the bill introduction and enactment models, we also included dummy variables for legislators of the same party as that in control of the chamber, and for legislators serving as chair of a committee. In addition, we included a measure of the legislator's tenure (coded as the number of terms served in the chamber), derived from the data collected by Carsey and his colleagues. We expect majority party status, chairmanship, and tenure to be positively associated with bill introduction and enactment.

Last, state legislatures are organized in a variety of ways, with different levels of professionalism, formal procedures, and informal practices and norms that might structure the opportunities that individual legislators have to participate in lawmaking. For example, many states have limits to the number of bills that a legislator can introduce in a given session. In addition, there are institutional features of state legislatures that influence the proportion of bills that get voted on and enacted. These factors may account for some of the cross-sectional differences in our measures of legislator behavior. In addition, state-specific factors such as the margin of party control might influence lawmaking activities, particularly roll call voting, since the rate at which legislators vote may depend on the likelihood that their vote will be pivotal to the outcome. To control for this unobserved variation, we include a state fixed effect in each of our models.

ESTIMATION RESULTS

The models we estimate differ for each dependent variable due to differences in features of the data themselves, as well as potentially confounding factors that may also explain legislator

behavior. Because we were unable to obtain legislator biographical data for all states, we present model estimates when both controlling and not controlling for these individual-level attributes.

Roll Call Participation

The roll call participation models are estimated with OLS regression. The dependent variable is measured as the percentage of competitive roll call votes missed by the legislator during the 1999-2000 legislative session,¹⁵ formally: $\% \text{ Absent} = 1 - [(\text{Yea or Nay Votes}) / (\text{Total \# of Roll Calls})]$. Table 2 presents the model estimates for the state upper chambers. In these models, we consistently find a positive, statistically significant relationship between the measures of uncontested races and vote absenteeism. Legislators unopposed in their prior general election contest missed more votes than legislators who faced a serious, major party challenger. The coefficients of around 0.012 suggest that, on average, they missed about 1.2 percent more votes. (Note that legislators missed about 7.8 percent of the roll call votes on average (Table 1)). The average number of competitive votes cast for both chambers was 435 (s.d.=383), and the minimum was 34 and the maximum was 2,215. We find a similar relationship when measuring uncontested races as the frequency of unopposed races in the 1990s and for the duration of the legislator's career, and when using the legislator's margin of victory. These results hold regardless of controlling for whether the legislator is an attorney and/or a full-time legislator. Legislators serving in chamber leadership positions were less likely to skip roll call votes, although the relationship is not statistically significant when adding in the full set of control variables.

[Table 2 about here]

The results presented in Table 3 for state house members are generally similar. The coefficients in the first two columns suggest that, when we define an unopposed legislator by

looking at the election that immediately preceded the term of office of the voting, the lack of competition had no effect on the legislators' absenteeism rates. However, a different picture emerges when we consider the frequency of unopposed elections and vote margin. State house members on average skipped a higher percentage of roll call votes when they were frequently unopposed in previous elections, a result that holds both when measuring the frequency of uncontested elections in the 1990s and for the duration of the legislator's career. Legislators who have never faced a major party opponent missed about 2 percentage point more compared to legislators who have always had electoral competition. Across the models, the coefficients on the control variables do not indicate any systematic relationships.

[Table 3 about here]

We also analyzed whether legislators who lack serious electoral competition selectively skip roll calls that are not very important or controversial. For example, legislators may skip roll call votes that are likely to be one-sided. If this is the case, their lack of participation may not have any substantive consequences. In order to check this possibility, we split the sample into "close votes" and "not close votes," and then repeated the above analysis for each group, where "close votes" are defined as bills that received greater than 40 percent, but less than 60 percent of the votes. We found that the closeness of the vote does not affect the behavior of legislators; uncontested legislators still have higher rates of absenteeism when the roll call votes on the floor are close.

Bill Introduction and Enactment

The next set of results test the hypotheses that legislators facing no electoral competition introduce fewer bills, and of the bills they introduce, a smaller percentage ultimately is enacted into law. We estimate a negative binomial regression model for the bill introduction models,

because the data are counts (i.e., discrete, nonnegative), and an OLS regression model would be problematic since it may estimate negative predicted values (Long 1997). In addition, negative binomial regression is preferable to a Poisson model because of overdispersion in the data (i.e., variance is greater than the mean).¹⁶ Our measure of enacted bills is the number of bills that became law divided by the number of bills introduced, which can be thought of as an enactment rate.¹⁷ We estimate the enactment models with OLS regression.

Table 4 presents the estimation results for bill introduction activities for legislators serving in the upper chamber. When either considering just the previous election or the frequency of uncontested elections over a period of time, the model estimates suggest a strong negative relationship between the lack of competition and lawmaking activity. The results imply that state senators who did not face serious opponents introduced fewer bills compared to their colleagues who were elected through a competitive election process. The coefficients across the models imply that unopposed legislators introduced about ten percent fewer bills over the course of the session.¹⁸ The negative relationship also holds when considering the legislator's margin of victory, which suggests that lack of political competition in general is associated with less lawmaking activity.

[Table 4 about here]

The model estimates for state representatives are much the same. As shown in Table 5, similar to the results reported above for roll call participation rates, there is little evidence that legislators unopposed in their prior general election introduced fewer bills than legislators that did face competition. However, the coefficients in models that consider the frequency of uncontested races are consistently negative and statistically significant, and again suggest that

legislators always having won in unopposed contests introduced about 10 percent fewer legislative bills.

[Table 5 about here]

Several of the control variables in the bill introduction models demonstrate anticipated relationships. Legislators that are members of the majority party introduced more bills, as did committee chairs in both state lower and upper houses. Individuals with legal backgrounds introduced more bills in both chambers, as did state senators that previously served in the state house. Collectively, these findings suggest that background and experience are important correlates of legislative lawmaking activity.

The estimates for bill enactment are presented in Table 6 for models with the full set of individual-level controls (we have biographical data for all the states for which we were able to compile enactment information). Across the models, we do not find a systematic relationship between uncontested elections and the percentage of a legislator's bills that is enacted, regardless of how uncontested elections are measured. Several of the variables do help explain variation in bill enactment. Legislators of the same party in control of the chamber, not surprisingly, had more of their bills enacted into law. In addition, legislator tenure and chairmanship of a committee were also positive predictors, although only in upper houses.

[Table 6 about here]

These results suggest that legislators that did not face competition in preceding general elections fare no differently when it comes to getting the bills they introduce ratified by the legislature and signed into law by the governor. A likely reason is that, no matter the competition level faced by legislators, moving legislation from bill to law is contingent on many factors beyond the control of primary sponsor of the bill. In this regard, bill enactment is

difficult for all legislators, and failure reflects more than just a legislator slacking off from his/her lawmaking responsibilities.

Robustness Checks

The results discussed to this point provide evidence that the lack of competition in state legislative elections does affect the behavior of legislators, at least when it comes to rates of roll call absenteeism and the number of bills introduced. There is a clear negative effect of lack of electoral competition on a legislator's lawmaking activities, which is consistent with the idea that state legislators not facing serious opponents for election are less active in lawmaking. The relationships are most consistent for legislators that persistently do not face major party challengers, and for legislators serving in state upper houses. As a check on the robustness of these findings, we estimated several additional specifications to examine the sensitivity of the results to alternative definitions of an uncontested election, the role of competition in primary rather than general elections, and the possibility that the results are being driven by the underlying partisanship of state legislative districts.¹⁹

Recall that we defined an election as uncontested if the winning candidate received 90 percent or more of the two-party vote. This definition is consistent with that used by Hogan (2003, 2004) in his studies examining the predictors of uncontested races. Tidmarch et al. (1986) used a threshold of 95%, and one could also define an uncontested race strictly as cases where the winning candidate faced no competition at all. We re-estimated each of the models previously reported using these alternative definitions of an uncontested election and found the same pattern of results.

Second, the degree of political competition in primary elections may also be important. In legislative districts in which the partisanship of the electorate heavily tilts toward one political

party, competition might come from within the party at the primary stage. Consequently, observing an uncontested general election may overstate the degree of a legislator's electoral safety if s/he faces a challenger during the primary. To analyze this possibility, we collected primary election returns for 41 states, using data from state government websites and other sources of official state election results.²⁰ Of particular interest to us is the effect of primary competition on legislator behavior in cases where the legislator ran unopposed in the general election.²¹ To examine this possible effect, we restricted the sample to legislators unopposed in the general election, and then included a dummy variable coded one if s/he was also uncontested in the primary election (using the same 90% threshold), and zero otherwise. For these legislators, the degree of primary competition was generally not associated with their legislator behavior; legislators that did not face a serious challenger in the primary did not miss more votes or introduce fewer bills than those that did face a challenger. The one exception to these findings was that legislators in state lower chambers that were uncontested in both the general and primary election introduced more bills.

Third, a possible worry with the regressions we have estimated is that we are not controlling for the underlying partisan composition of state legislative districts. In this sense, our measure of an unopposed election might simply be capturing the fact that some legislative districts lean heavily towards one party, perhaps due to gerrymandering or demographic patterns. Measures of partisanship are typically derived from election returns – that is, the same data we use to determine if the legislator ran unopposed, and thus are not helpful in this particular case. In addition, it is also not possible to create the so-called “normal vote” using election returns for other offices for state legislative districts. An alternative way to measure a district's underlying partisanship is voter registration data. Although these data are not widely-available for state

legislative districts, we were able to obtain them for four states: Arizona, California, Florida, and New York. We re-estimated our models for these states, including a variable measuring the percentage of registered voters affiliated with the Democratic Party. Our core results remain the same. The measures of uncontested elections retain their statistical significance in the expected directions, which reassures us that unopposed status has an independent effect on legislator performance, even if we control for the partisan compositions of districts.

Institutional Variation

The research design we employed pooled states together into a single analysis, and used a state fixed effect to control for heterogeneity in the features of state legislatures. This design gives us confidence that unobserved state-specific phenomena that might affect legislators' lawmaking activities are not biasing our estimates. However, there may be some interesting differences in the effects of uncontested elections on legislator behavior that are disguised with this approach. Three institutional features are particularly important to consider: term limits, legislative professionalism, and opportunities for political ambition.

Regarding term limits, 13 states had term limits in place at the time of the 1999-2000 legislative session. Although the effects would be uneven across legislators, it is possible that the impact of uncontested elections is different for legislators serving in term limit states. Term limits might deter significant challengers from running for office until their preferred seat opens, since it would be easier for them to win an open seat election than to defeat an incumbent (Cain et al. 2006). In this case, legislators might be more likely to slack off in their lawmaking because they know they are unlikely to face a serious challenger. Under the same logic, legislators serving in states without term limits might be more likely to face a serious major party challenger since the seat is unlikely to open unless the legislator retires or runs for higher office.

To examine the possible effects of term limits, we split our sample into states with and without term limits in place for legislators serving during the 1999-2000 session.²² For legislators serving in term limit states, we find that uncontested elections are positively associated with roll call absenteeism, although this relationship only exists in the lower house. The coefficients for the upper house are in the expected direction, but are not statistically significant (perhaps, due to the small sample size). We also find a negative relationship between our measures of uncontested elections and the number of bills introduced for both state lower and upper houses. The model estimates are much the same for legislators with seats in states without term limits, although the results vary somewhat by chamber and dependent variable. Overall, however, the evidence supports the hypothesis that legislators having not been challenged in their prior general election or with a history of lack of competition are less active lawmakers, regardless of whether they serve in a state that has imposed term limits.

A second institutional arrangement that might condition the effect of an uncontested election on legislator behavior is legislative professionalism. We examine possible differences by dividing the sample of states into different categories by their level of legislative professionalism. Specifically, using data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), we created three groups of states: citizen legislatures (the lowest two NCSL categories), hybrid legislatures (the middle NCSL category), and professional legislatures (the top two NCSL categories),²³ and then re-estimated each of our models for each group. By and large the results are again similar to our baseline models – across legislative professionalism levels, legislators with immediate and longer histories of not facing electoral competition, skip more roll call votes and introduce fewer bills.²⁴

Finally, we consider whether the political ambition of legislators matters for the relationship between electoral security and legislative activity. If state legislators intend to seek higher office, they may be less likely to skip roll call votes and be less active bill sponsors, since voters in future elections, may punish this behavior. Political ambition operates at the individual level, but previous work from Squire (1988a, 1988b) and Maestas (2000) has shown that institutional differences has led to a clustering of legislators with similar ambition levels within certain types of state legislatures.

To examine this possibility, we re-estimated the models after splitting state legislatures into the three career ambition types identified by Squire and Moncrief (2010): springboard, career, and dead-end. Consistent with what ambition theory would predict, we find the strongest effects of uncontested elections on legislative behavior for careerist legislatures. Moreover, the relationship between uncontested elections and lawmaking activity does not emerge for legislators serving in springboard legislatures. This is consistent with an ambition story in that these legislators are less likely to slack off because they have to worry about the consequences for future elections for another office.²⁵ The results for dead-end legislators are generally consistent with the original analysis, although slightly less robust across the various model specifications. To better test the effects of political ambition one would like to have an individual-level measure, but these findings do suggest that ambition may have a role in explaining which legislators are most likely to participate less in lawmaking when less electorally vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

Studying several measures of lawmaking, we find that legislators not facing competition in their past election, as well as those with a history of not facing major party competitors, show

up to vote less often and introduce fewer bills. These results generally hold for legislators in either upper or lower legislative chambers. Collectively, our results indicate that state legislators lacking serious political competition are less active in lawmaking. Although there is considerable literature studying the factors explaining the incidence of uncontested state legislative elections (and, uncompetitive contests, more generally), our results are among the first to show that uncontested elections also negatively affect legislator behavior.

There are a couple of limitations to this study which are important to mention. First, we are limited in our inferences given the cross-sectional research design. Unlike the U.S. Congress, data on state legislatures are sparse and difficult to compile, which required us to focus on a single legislative session. It is possible that the results found here do not hold for other legislative sessions, although there is nothing particular to the 1999-2000 legislative session that would suggest that this is a problem. A similar analysis conducted over time would not only address this concern, but would enable one to control for unobserved characteristics of districts and legislators which would allow sharper empirical tests. A second limitation of the analysis is that the lawmaking activities analyzed in this study comprise just one aspect of legislator performance that could be affected by levels of electoral competition. Uncontested elections could also result in legislators slacking off from other parts of their job such as constituency service, or adopting positions out of step with their constituents' preferences (Ladewig 2010; Rosenthal and Sanders 2000).

Another area for future research is to analyze the consequences of uncontested or uncompetitive elections at the Congressional level. Although there are fewer uncontested elections for Congress than for state legislative seats, uncompetitive elections are still common

(Jacobson 2006). And, because data for Congress are more plentiful, this type of analysis will also be able to account for temporal dynamics.

Competitive elections are central to representative democracy, providing citizens with the opportunity to vote for candidates that best share their preferences. In addition, competitive elections serve as a mechanism to hold politicians accountable to their constituents once they get into office. Without this accountability mechanism in place, politicians may shirk or otherwise slack off as we have found here for state legislators not facing a serious major party opponent in preceding elections. Given the prevalence of uncontested elections – in some states surpassing 75 percent in some years – the lower quality of representation resulting from lack of political competition may result in more poorly functioning legislatures that are less responsive and less reflective of the citizens they serve.

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NOTES

¹ These states include North Carolina (52%), Illinois (52%), Arizona (54%), Wyoming (58%), Georgia (59%), Texas (61%), New Mexico (62%), South Carolina (70%), Florida (73%), and Arkansas (75%) (Ballot Access News 2004).

² This definition is consistent with that employed in the existing literature. Hogan (2003, 2004) also classifies an election as uncontested if one of the major party candidates failed to receive at least ten percent of the two-party vote, while Tidmarch et al. (1986) use a five percent threshold.

³ Another possible reason for the high incidence of uncompetitive elections in the United States, both at the state and national level, is the lack of strong party organizations. In European and other parliamentary systems, party organizations help assure that there is electoral competition system-wide (Caramani 2003; Sharman 2003).

⁴ An alternative explanation for any observed negative relationship between lack of electoral competition and reduced lawmaking activity is that legislators are limiting their position-taking so as to avoid adopting a position that might alienate their constituents (Jones 2003).

⁵ Rothenberg and Sanders (2000) draw a distinction between “participatory shirking” and “ideological shirking,” the latter of which refers to deviations in legislators’ voting from constituents’ preferences. Although it is certainly possible that ideological shirking is also more prevalent among legislators that did not face a competitive election, we do not examine it here.

⁶ Wright defined a competitive vote as one in which the losing side received at least five percent of the vote. In a couple of states, the data are for single years or for different years due to data availability.

⁷ We are making the assumption in this analysis that more bills equate to more lawmaking activity. Short of a bill-by-bill analysis, there is no simple way to code each piece of proposed legislation in terms of quality or importance.

⁸ In many states, the only way to determine if a bill was enacted is to cull through each bill, one-by-one, an enormously time-intensive process. The data considered here are from states that provided an easier way to compile this information.

⁹ The maximum of 661 bills (introduced by a member of the New York State Senate) is an outlier. However, according to the data we compiled, 31 state legislators introduced 300 or more legislative bills during the 1999-2000 session, all but one of whom served in either the New York or West Virginia legislature.

¹⁰ This average rate of enactment is higher than might be expected, but may reflect the sample of states for which we were able to obtain bill enactment data, which included more citizen than professional legislatures.

¹¹ For most states, we use the November 1998 general election. For several states, however, the relevant election was different because of 4-year terms, staggered terms, or odd-year elections. For these states, we used the appropriate election immediately preceding the measures of legislator performance in 1999-2000 session when constructing the uncontested variable.

¹² One could also control for district demographics, but we did not to include them in our final models because there are not strong theoretical reasons to think that district demographics directly affect a legislator's lawmaking. When variables such as percent minority, household income, and percent social security recipients are included, the coefficients rarely were statistically significant, except for percent minority which often had a positive sign.

¹³ We do not include biographical data for California legislators in this study; the available information is open-ended and self-reported by legislators, and thus inconsistent across legislators.

¹⁴ We coded eight positions as leadership roles: Speaker of the House, Speaker Pro Tempore of the House, House Majority Leader, House Minority Leader, President of the Senate, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Senate Majority Leader, and Senate Minority Leader.

¹⁵ Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia each had elections in 1999, so the members serving in 1999 differ from those serving in 2000. We include both sets of legislators in the analysis, including those legislators that won re-election in 1999.

¹⁶ Likelihood ratio tests of the alpha parameters also indicate overdispersion.

¹⁷ We also considered the simple count of the number of bills introduced by each legislator that were enacted. The estimates from these negative binomial regressions were substantively similar.

¹⁸ This estimate is based on incident-rate ratios that ranged from 0.88 to 0.93.

¹⁹ Model estimates not reported in the text are available from the authors upon request.

²⁰ We did not collect primary election returns for North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Vermont, and West Virginia because of multi-member districts in these states. Louisiana is excluded for its unique primary system.

²¹ We also estimated models for all legislators with similar substantive results, where we included separate dummy variables for going uncontested in the general and primary elections.

²² We conduct the analysis at the institutional level for analytical convenience, and it is certainly possible that differences in the participatory behavior of term-limited legislators might emerge if analyzed at the individual level.

²³ Given data constraints for the bill introduction and biographical data of legislator, the samples for some of the models are quite small, making it difficult to find statistically significant results.

²⁴ There is one anomalous finding worth mentioning – legislators serving in lower chambers of citizen legislators, on average, introduced more bills when they had run unopposed.

²⁵ It is also possible that state legislators aiming for higher office have higher rates of roll call abstention and introduce fewer bills because they are engaged in other activities external to the chamber as part of efforts to position themselves better for higher office.

Author Information

David Konisky is an Assistant Professor in the Georgetown Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University. He earned his PhD in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2006. His research focuses on American politics and public policy, with particular emphasis on regulation, environmental politics and policy, state politics, and public opinion.

David Konisky

573-239-5258

dmk74@georgetown.edu

Michiko Ueda is a visiting scholar at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. She earned her PhD in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2006. Her research interests include representation and electoral systems, legislative elections, state politics, and Japanese politics.

Michiko Ueda

michiko.uedaballmer@gmail.com

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	State Senates				State Houses			
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Roll Call Absenteeism (%)	0.078	0.118	0	1	0.075	0.123	0	1
Bill Introduction (#)	44.95	64.03	0	661	24.71	32.96	0	527
Bill Enactment (%)	0.295	0.219	0	1	0.264	0.234	0	1
Unopposed Dummy	0.361	0.480	0	1	0.473	0.499	0	1
Freq. Unopposed -- 1990s	0.316	0.395	0	1	0.391	0.395	0	1
Freq. Unopposed -- Entire Career	0.307	0.363	0	1	0.384	0.378	0	1
Vote Margins	0.5164	0.384	0.0003	1	0.6102	0.3881	0.0004	1
Chamber Leader	0.071	0.256	0	1	0.303	0.171	0	1
Attorney	0.170	0.376	0	1	0.140	0.347	0	1
Full-time Legislator	0.152	0.359	0	1	0.209	0.407	0	1
Majority Party	0.604	0.489	0	1	0.572	0.495	0	1
Served in Another Chamber	0.425	0.494	0	1	0.023	0.151	0	1
Chair of Fiscal Committee	0.031	0.173	0	1	0.016	0.126	0	1
Committee Chair	0.2843	0.451	0	1	0.1512	0.3583	0	1
No. of Terms Served	2.944	2.223	1	16	3.747	2.842	1	19

Table 2: Effects of Uncontested Elections on Roll Call Absenteeism -- State Senates
 Dependent Variable: % Absent

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Unopposed Dummy	0.012** (0.004)	0.012** (0.004)						
Freq. Unopposed -- Entire Career			0.022*** (0.008)	0.018** (0.008)				
Freq. Unopposed -- 1990s					0.020*** (0.006)	0.017*** (0.006)		
Vote Margins							0.014** (0.006)	0.013* (0.006)
Chamber Leader	-0.012* (0.007)	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.013* (0.007)	-0.011 (0.007)	-0.012* (0.007)	-0.011 (0.007)	-0.012* (0.007)	-0.010 (0.007)
Attorney		0.008 (0.009)		0.008 (0.009)		0.008 (0.009)		0.008 (0.009)
Full-time Legislator		-0.010 (0.007)		-0.011 (0.008)		-0.011 (0.007)		-0.010 (0.008)
Constant	0.075*** (0.002)	0.070*** (0.003)	0.072*** (0.002)	0.068*** (0.003)	0.073*** (0.002)	0.069*** (0.003)	0.071*** (0.003)	0.067*** (0.004)
Observations	1898	1557	1898	1557	1898	1557	1895	1554
R-squared	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.19

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Notes: All columns present OLS coefficient estimates with state fixed-effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 3: Effects of Uncontested Elections on Roll Call Absenteeism -- State Houses
 Dependent Variable: % Absent

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Unopposed Dummy	0.006 (0.004)	0.005 (0.005)						
Freq. Unopposed -- Entire Career			0.024*** (0.006)	0.026*** (0.007)				
Freq. Unopposed -- 1990s					0.020*** (0.005)	0.021*** (0.006)		
Vote Margins							0.013*** (0.005)	0.014** (0.005)
Chamber Leader	0.008 (0.012)	0.010 (0.014)	0.006 (0.012)	0.007 (0.014)	0.006 (0.012)	0.008 (0.014)	0.007 (0.012)	0.009 (0.014)
Attorney		0.003 (0.006)		0.003 (0.006)		0.003 (0.006)		0.003 (0.006)
Full-time Legislator		-0.000 (0.005)		-0.001 (0.005)		-0.001 (0.005)		-0.001 (0.005)
Constant	0.072*** (0.002)	0.074*** (0.003)	0.065*** (0.002)	0.067*** (0.003)	0.067*** (0.002)	0.069*** (0.003)	0.067*** (0.003)	0.069*** (0.004)
Observations	4562	3965	4562	3965	4562	3965	4560	3963
R-squared	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.21	0.20	0.21	0.20	0.21

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Notes: All columns present OLS coefficient estimates with state fixed-effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4: Effects of Uncontested Elections on the Number of Bills Introduced -- State Senates

Dependent variable: Number of bills introduced by legislator

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Unopposed Dummy	-0.106*** (0.037)	-0.088** (0.044)						
Freq. Unopposed -- Entire Career			-0.128** (0.050)	-0.069 (0.059)				
Freq. Unopposed -- 1990s					-0.133*** (0.045)	-0.112** (0.053)		
Vote Margins							-0.159*** (0.047)	-0.142*** (0.055)
Majority Party	0.080** (0.039)	-0.020 (0.046)	0.081** (0.039)	-0.019 (0.046)	0.079** (0.039)	-0.020 (0.046)	0.078** (0.039)	-0.021 (0.046)
Chamber Leader	-0.046 (0.067)	-0.122 (0.084)	-0.048 (0.067)	-0.121 (0.084)	-0.047 (0.067)	-0.120 (0.084)	-0.038 (0.067)	-0.115 (0.084)
No. of Terms Served	-0.006 (0.008)	-0.014 (0.011)	-0.005 (0.009)	-0.014 (0.011)	-0.005 (0.008)	-0.013 (0.011)	-0.005 (0.008)	-0.013 (0.011)
Served in Another Chamber	0.077** (0.034)	0.048 (0.040)	0.080** (0.034)	0.046 (0.040)	0.078** (0.034)	0.047 (0.040)	0.081** (0.034)	0.053 (0.040)
Committee Chair	0.260*** (0.040)	0.340*** (0.047)	0.256*** (0.040)	0.337*** (0.047)	0.258*** (0.040)	0.339*** (0.047)	0.258*** (0.040)	0.340*** (0.047)
Attorney		0.133*** (0.050)		0.130** (0.050)		0.132*** (0.050)		0.133*** (0.050)
Full-time Legislator		-0.001 (0.056)		-0.000 (0.056)		0.001 (0.056)		0.002 (0.056)
Constant	0.818*** (0.053)	0.767*** (0.063)	0.817*** (0.053)	0.760*** (0.064)	0.823*** (0.053)	0.771*** (0.063)	0.859*** (0.056)	0.804*** (0.066)
Observations	1425	1093	1425	1093	1425	1093	1425	1093

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Notes: All columns present estimated coefficients from negative binomial regressions with state fixed-effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5: Effects of Uncontested Elections on the Number of Bills Introduced -- State Houses

Dependent variable: Number of bills introduced by legislator

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Unopposed Dummy	-0.029 (0.024)	-0.022 (0.026)						
Freq. Unopposed -- Entire Career			-0.106*** (0.033)	-0.094** (0.037)				
Freq. Unopposed -- 1990s					-0.090*** (0.031)	-0.075** (0.035)		
Vote Margins							-0.052* (0.030)	-0.053 (0.034)
Majority Party	0.069*** (0.025)	0.054** (0.027)	0.073*** (0.025)	0.056** (0.027)	0.072*** (0.025)	0.056** (0.027)	0.070*** (0.025)	0.054** (0.027)
Chamber Leader	0.117* (0.061)	0.119* (0.069)	0.116* (0.061)	0.119* (0.069)	0.114* (0.061)	0.117* (0.069)	0.119* (0.061)	0.119* (0.069)
No. of Terms Served	0.006 (0.004)	0.003 (0.005)	0.008** (0.004)	0.006 (0.005)	0.008* (0.004)	0.005 (0.005)	0.007 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)
Served in Another Chamber	0.043 (0.075)	0.041 (0.084)	0.040 (0.075)	0.041 (0.084)	0.043 (0.075)	0.043 (0.084)	0.043 (0.075)	0.041 (0.084)
Committee Chair	0.362*** (0.030)	0.352*** (0.033)	0.362*** (0.030)	0.352*** (0.033)	0.362*** (0.030)	0.352*** (0.033)	0.363*** (0.030)	0.353*** (0.033)
Attorney		0.225*** (0.034)		0.227*** (0.034)		0.226*** (0.033)		0.224*** (0.034)
Full-time Legislator		-0.029 (0.033)		-0.031 (0.033)		-0.031 (0.033)		-0.028 (0.033)
Constant	0.748*** (0.035)	0.707*** (0.040)	0.765*** (0.034)	0.723*** (0.040)	0.761*** (0.034)	0.719*** (0.040)	0.763*** (0.037)	0.725*** (0.042)
Observations	3435	2860	3435	2860	3435	2860	3435	2860

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Notes: All columns present estimated coefficients from negative binomial regressions with state fixed-effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

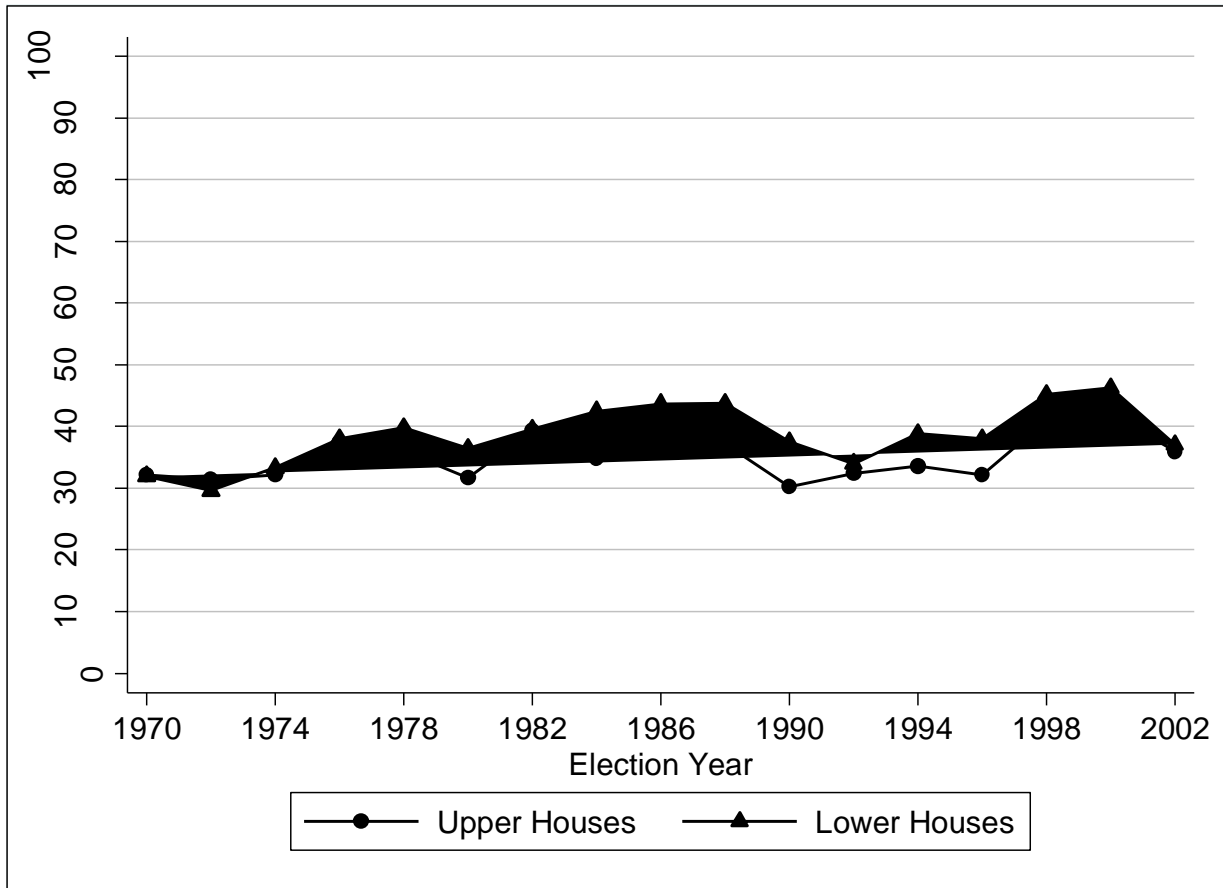
Table 6: Effects of Uncontested Elections on Bill Enactment
 Dependent variable: % of Bills Enacted

	State Senates				State Houses			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Unopposed Dummy	0.006 (0.015)				0.012 (0.012)			
Freq. Unopposed -- Entire Career		-0.002 (0.021)				0.010 (0.016)		
Freq. Unopposed -- 1990s			-0.000 (0.019)				0.012 (0.015)	
Vote Margins				0.011 (0.020)				0.010 (0.015)
Majority Party	0.063** (0.023)	0.063** (0.023)	0.063** (0.023)	0.063** (0.023)	0.060*** (0.020)	0.060*** (0.020)	0.060*** (0.020)	0.061*** (0.020)
Chamber Leader	0.009 (0.026)	0.009 (0.025)	0.009 (0.026)	0.009 (0.026)	0.046 (0.030)	0.045 (0.030)	0.045 (0.030)	0.044 (0.030)
No. of Terms Served	0.008** (0.003)	0.008** (0.003)	0.008** (0.003)	0.008** (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Served in Another Chamber	0.013 (0.013)	0.014 (0.013)	0.013 (0.013)	0.012 (0.013)	-0.044 (0.042)	-0.044 (0.042)	-0.044 (0.042)	-0.043 (0.042)
Committee Chair	0.030** (0.012)	0.030** (0.012)	0.030** (0.012)	0.015 (0.014)	-0.005 (0.010)	-0.005 (0.010)	-0.005 (0.010)	0.039** (0.016)
Attorney	0.013 (0.015)	0.013 (0.015)	0.013 (0.015)	0.030** (0.012)	0.040** (0.016)	0.040** (0.016)	0.040** (0.016)	-0.004 (0.010)
Full-time Legislator	0.009 (0.014)	0.009 (0.015)	0.009 (0.015)	0.009 (0.015)	-0.012 (0.014)	-0.012 (0.014)	-0.012 (0.014)	-0.012 (0.014)
Constant	0.214*** (0.017)	0.216*** (0.017)	0.216*** (0.017)	0.212*** (0.019)	0.213*** (0.015)	0.215*** (0.015)	0.214*** (0.015)	0.213*** (0.016)
Observations	721	721	721	721	1837	1837	1837	1837
R-squared	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.41	0.41	0.41	0.41

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Notes: All columns present OLS coefficient estimates with state fixed-effects. Robust standard errors in

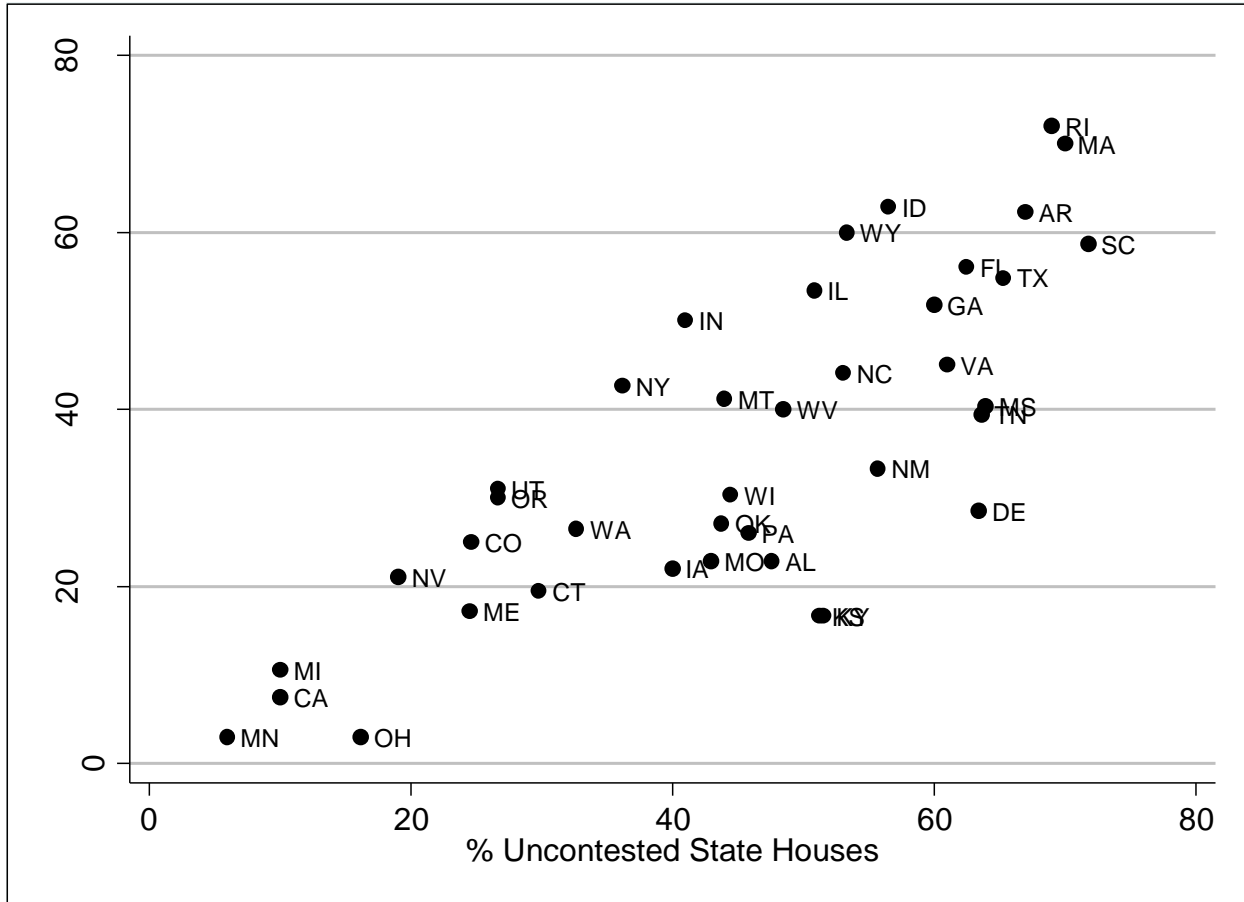
FIGURE 1. UNCONTESTED STATE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, 1970-2002



Source: State Legislative Election Returns, 1967-2003.

Note: Uncontested elections defined here as those in which the winning candidate received 90% or more of the two-party vote.

FIGURE 2. UNCONTESTED STATE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS BY CHAMBER, 1998



Source: State Legislative Election Returns, 1967-2003.

Note: Uncontested elections defined here as those in which the winning candidate received 90% or more of the two-party vote.

SUPPLEMENTAL ONLINE APPENDIX

TABLE A.1 BILL INTRODUCTION AND ENACTMENT DATA SOURCES

State	Bill Intro.	Bill Enact.	Data Source
AL			
AR			
AZ			
CA	X		http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html
CO	X	X	http://www.leg.state.co.us/Clitics/Clitics2009A/csl.nsf/MainBills?openFrameset
CT			
DE			
FL	X		Journal of the House of Representatives; Journal of the Senate
GA	X	X	http://www.legis.state.ga.us/links/Prev.htm
IA	X		http://www.legis.state.ia.us/Legislation.html
ID			
IL	X	X	http://www.ilga.gov/PreviousGA.asp
IN			
KS	X		Journal of the Senate of the State of Kansas; Journal: proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Legislature of the State of Kansas. (1999 and 2000)
KY	X	X	http://www.lrc.ky.gov/legislat/pastses.htm
LA	X	X	http://www.legis.state.la.us/
MA			
MD			
ME			
MI	X	X	http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(kgxdmo551cwa1y45ydf5ny45))/mileg.aspx?page=SponsorSearch
MN	X	X	http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis.asp
MO	X	X	http://www.house.mo.gov/billcentral.aspx?pid=26
MS	X	X	http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/sessions.htm
MT	X	X	http://laws.leg.mt.gov/laws99/law0203w\$.startup
NC	X	X	http://www.ncleg.net/Legislation/billinqury/billInquiry.html
ND	X		Bill Status Report
NH			
NJ	X		http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bills/BillsBySponsor.asp
NM	X		Sponsors
NV	X	X	http://www.leg.state.nv.us/70th/Reports/
NY	X		Index of bills
OH	X		http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/search.cfm
OK	X	X	http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/WebBillStatus/main.html
OR	X		http://www.leg.state.or.us/bills_laws/
PA	X		History of Senate Bills; History of House Bills and Resolutions
RI			
SC	X	X	http://www.scstatehouse.gov/cgi-bin/Multi_Search.exe
SD	X		http://legis.state.sd.us/sessions/1999/mem.htm
TN			
TX	X	X	http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/BillNumber.aspx
UT	X	X	http://le.utah.gov/Documents/legislative.htm
VA	X		http://leg1.state.va.us/
VT			
WA	X	X	http://dlr.leg.wa.gov/billsbysponsor/
WI	X		http://nxt.legis.state.wi.us/
WV	X		http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill_Status/bill_status.cfm
WY			

TABLE A.2 LEGISLATOR BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION DATA SOURCES

State	Biographical Information	Data Source
AL	X	Alabama Blue Book
AR	X	Legislative Directory
AZ	X	Arizona Blue Book
CA		
CO	X	Colorado Joint Legislative Library
CT	X	State of Connecticut Register and Manual
DE	X	Legislative Roster
FL		
GA	X	http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/1999_00/index.htm
IA	X	Iowa Official Register
ID	X	Idaho Blue Book
IL	X	http://www.sos.state.il.us/bb/toc.html
IN	X	Roster of State and Local Officials
KS	X	Kansas Legislative Handbook
KY	X	Kentucky General Assembly Blue Book
LA	X	Louisiana Roster of Officials
MA	X	Massachusetts Political Almanac
MD	X	Maryland Manual
ME	X	Senate and House Registers
MI	X	Michigan Manual
MN	X	Minnesota Legislative Manual
MO	X	Official Manual
MS	X	Mississippi Official and Statistical Register
MT	X	Lawmakers of Montanan
NC	X	North Carolina Manual
ND	X	North Dakota Blue Book
NH		
NJ	X	Manual of the Legislature of New Jersey
NM		
NV	X	Nevada Legislative Manual
NY		
OH	X	Roster of the Senate and House of Representatives
OK	X	Oklahoma Almanac
OR		
PA	X	Pennsylvania Manual
RI	X	Rhode Island Government Owner's Manual
SC	X	South Carolina Legislative Manual
SD	X	South Dakota Legislative Manual
TN	X	Tennessee Blue Book
TX	X	Texas Legislative Almanac
UT	X	Utah Legislative Manual
VA	X	Manual of the Senate; House of Delegates Manual
VT	X	Legislative Directory and State Manual
WA	X	Legislative Manual
WI	X	http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/bb/07bb/index.htm
WV	X	West Virginia Bluebook
WY	X	Directory