Electoral Results and Legislative Effectiveness among Freshman Representatives

Peter Osnes
University of Colorado Boulder

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses

Recommended Citation
Osnes, Peter, "Electoral Results and Legislative Effectiveness among Freshman Representatives" (2014). Undergraduate Honors Theses. Paper 173.
Electoral Results and Legislative Effectiveness among Freshman Representatives

By

Peter Alyosha Osnes
Dept. of Political Science, University of Colorado at Boulder

Defended April 9, 2014

Thesis Advisor:
Dr. Jeffrey Harden, Department of Political Science

Defense Committee:
Dr. Daniel Jones, Assistant Director of the Honors Residential Academic Program
Dr. Edward Scott Adler, Department of Political Science, Honors Representative
Abstract

Why do freshman representatives in Congress seem to have lower legislative activity than their peers? Once the effects causing their lowered levels of success are determined, can these differences be used to advise those members on how they might pass more legislation in their first, least electorally secure, term? In this thesis I attempt to answer those two questions, by analyzing replication data from Volden and Wiseman’s *Legislative Effectiveness in Congress* (2009). I portend that the electoral margin of a candidate negatively affects their legislative effectiveness, both because they are under less reelection pressure, and they might come from more easily won, less respected districts. I find that this hypothesis is supported by the data, though only slightly. Further research in this area may uncover greater effects that further explain freshman legislative effectiveness.

Introduction

The careers of representatives often start slowly, yet their continued re-election often depends upon the ability to demonstrate significant legislative success\(^1\) in the U.S. Congress. New representatives often start their term enthusiastically, eager to turn their platform into law because their chances for reelection are strengthened when they can demonstrate a strong legislative term. At least, if we are to assume an electoral aspiration from most freshman congressmen, Mayhew’s accountability relationships would have us believe that legislative activity most actively creates accountability (Mayhew 1974, 6). Unfortunately, passing a bill through committee, the floor of the House, and then the Senate, is a complicated and intricate process not possible for many new representatives. Initial accomplishment may exist only at the level of sponsoring a bill and having it considered in Committee. Although some freshmen do

---

\(^1\) This term is used interchangeably with several others (Hasecke and Mycoffe 2007, 609). Other synonymous terms include legislative productivity (Cox and Terry 2008) and legislative effectiveness (Jeydel and Taylor 2013; Volden and Wiseman 2009). This Thesis will use the most appropriate for the situation, but assume their usage is relatively interchangeable.
pass legislation by themselves, rarely do they match, let alone surpass, the levels of legislative effectiveness of more tenured representatives. This analysis offers possible insight into legislative strategy because more legislatively successful freshmen might have greater chances of continued careers in the House of Representatives. If the chain of causality runs in that direction, placing a greater or lesser emphasis on one’s legislative agenda may increase or decrease their chances at reelection. In these findings there may be a selection bias, in that there may be a fundamental difference in electoral capability between members with high levels of legislative effectiveness. The factors allowing for this success remain unexplained. This thesis will incorporate new theories and developments in the study of legislative effectiveness, and use these developments to explain the different levels of legislative effectiveness among freshman representatives. As the primary focus, the potential relationship between electoral success and legislative effectiveness among freshman representatives will show how electoral performance may predict success as a legislator.

Many studies have measured the successes of representatives (Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair-Chapman 2003; Cox and Terry 2008; Frantzich 1979), and attempted to explain the factors involved in becoming a successful legislator, but few studies focus on new members. This is an important perspective, as new members represent the most recent changes in electoral politics, and the future of the House of Representatives. Previous studies of legislative effectiveness present models for understanding the factors contributing to greater levels of success, but these factors remain untested for freshman representatives. A comprehensive explanation of what makes a freshman representative successful holds great implications for the study of legislative effectiveness.
This analysis thesis will follow a two stage process. First, a review of the literature explaining the dynamics of a representative’s first term in the house will provide a starting model for understanding legislative effectiveness. Next, this thesis will attempt to quantitatively replicate the conclusion found in Volden and Wiseman’s preliminary study that freshmen representatives are less legislatively successful than more senior members (2009). This thesis then replicates their conclusions, and proposes a model for explaining different levels of legislative effectiveness among freshman representatives.

Previous Research and Literature Review

Legislative effectiveness

Legislative effectiveness, success, and productivity all vary in measurement and definition across political studies. Most scholars agree that greater levels of success on the floor demonstrate greater political might, and that the study of legislative effectiveness provides insight into how congressional hierarchies operate. Hasecke and Mycoff describe legislative success as, “The ability to advance bills sponsored by the member through the legislative process” (Hasecke and Mycoff 2007, 609). This approach operationalizes itself, through counting the number of bills passed by a congressman in a Congressional term. Other methods of operationalization remain. As Anderson et al. propose, “An equally important contribution is our conceptualization of the dependent variable…as a count of the number of bills by a member that move through the legislative process rather than the proportion of the bills enacted” (Anderson, Box-Steppensmeier, and Sinclair-Chapman 2003, 358). This approach covers the process of legislation, rather than purely the result, because bills that make it partially through the
legislative process may still demonstrate some legislative effectiveness. Among freshmen, this form of operationalization will help distinguish between lower levels of success.

These two approaches are consolidated and expanded by Volden and Wiseman, who created another measurement for legislative effectiveness—a Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES). This approach includes, “How many bills each legislator introduced, and how many of those bills receive action in committee, pass out of committee…, pass the house, and ultimately become law” (Volden and Wiseman 2009, 10). Using econometric models, sequentially higher weights (1, 5, and 10) are placed on a bill’s progression through the legislative process. Volden and Wiseman found that LESs may better describe the legislative effectiveness of a representative or senator than previous methods (Volden and Wiseman 2009). This is because the entire process of legislation is given weight, and unpassed bills still count towards a legislator’s effectiveness. Therefore, members who propose some legislation are coded higher than those who are completely inactive, an important consideration when isolating a particularly unsuccessful portion of the House. Also, since the quantity attained from a single bill is no longer binary, differentiation between bill progress levels becomes possible. This is useful for describing the ineffective freshman, as every single bill will provide more information than the binary methods.

Isolating Freshmen

Although past studies have explored legislative effectiveness, few have isolated freshman representatives as a population worth studying. Hibbing discusses the process of apprenticeship, coming to two conclusions. First, he submits that freshmen in the 1980s have lowered levels of

---

2 For a complete explanation of how legislative effectiveness is calculated, see pgs. 12-13 of (Volden and Wiseman 2009)
allegiance to a legislative agenda, because they viewed their role as an apprentice and first-term incumbent. Secondly, he argues freshmen have fewer opportunities to participate in legislation because of a newfound prioritization for omnibus bills, as well as procedural reforms that discourage freshman participation (Hibbing 1991, 117). Since the late 1980s, when Hibbing conducted his studies, the dynamics of representation may have changed. Nonetheless, he discourages isolating freshman representatives as a group unto themselves. He argues that the congressional representative is best analyzed using her career, not each of her terms, “The preferred approach is to view careers as continuous rather than consisting of only two parts. As such classes should be observed across their congressional careers” (Hibbing 1991, 117). I believe this exclusion neglects the significance of particular events in that term. Furthermore, important effects unique to freshmen representatives may exist independently from career effects. Important bills, whether passed or stalled in committee, may form and describe the entire career of a representative. Hibbing’s dismissal is also founded in the inability to distinguish the sponsorship of omnibus bills from free riders or other non-substantive bills. This thesis, though perhaps ignoring the career effects of representatives, will attempt to describe a member’s first two years as a member of Congress, and the effects controlling her legislative effectiveness during that time.

Volden and Wiseman do analyze freshmen as a unique subset in their analyses, though they mostly focus on freshmen effects in relation to later performance levels. They conclude that highly successful freshmen representatives both continue to be highly successful legislators, but also that they are more likely to pursue higher office, and not voluntarily retire after their first or other early terms (Volden and Wiseman 2009, 20). Furthermore, they assert that their analysis runs parallel to and supports Mayhew’s claim that legislative effectiveness may be a predictor for
higher office (Mayhew 1991). Volden and Wiseman also demonstrate the legislative significance of extended careers in the house,

“With that in mind, it is interesting to note that freshman members of Congress have an average LES of 0.385, while sophomores average 0.551. Members in their fifth term demonstrate an effectiveness level of 0.973, while those with ten or more terms of congressional service average 2.17” (Volden and Wiseman 2009, 21)

Data Organization and Methodology

The first distinction in the study of legislative effectiveness resides in the choice between units of analysis. Political scientists must decide between bill-level data and member-level data when exploring the dynamics of legislative success quantitatively. Bill-level analysis illustrates most effectively the qualities of bills through the committee process. Information regarding the sponsor, cosponsor(s), topic, seniority, legislative activity, and relevant dates readily enter into the analysis, because information from each bill is recorded within these parameters (Adler and Wilkerson 2012, 132). Alternatively, member-level analysis collects the biographical information of those studied, and centralizes that information to the member, or member-term if applicable. A study using member-level data may involve a member’s legislative history or electoral experience. Volden and Wiseman, using data from members of Congress, showed the career paths of freshman congressmen amongst varying levels of legislative effectiveness (Volden and Wiseman 2009). This thesis will focus on member-level analysis because the
biographical information related to each representative will help explain their individual legislative effectiveness.

Alternatives

Other methods considered for measuring the legislative effectiveness of legislators have been explored in the past. Individual effectiveness has been measured by conducting surveys of state legislators. They report their effectiveness and biographical characteristics individually and of their peers, allowing a novel way for measuring the details of legislative processes (Sue 2005). This approach is less appropriate for the Federal level, as standing members of the United States Congress do not receive these surveys. Also, there is doubt in the accuracy of self-reported legislative efficacy, so studies often resort to bill-level passage rates among the state legislatures (Bratton and Haynie 1999).

Activity level

Political scientists have explored the various independent variables associated with legislative effectiveness. They have found that several relationships constitute much of the variance in legislative effectiveness. As argued by Anderson et al., “A member’s activity level encourages legislative success, but gains are limited when members speak or sponsor too frequently” (Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair-Chapman 2003, 357). This would suggest that, to a point, members who give speeches and sponsor bills achieve greater levels of legislative success.
Institutional Factors

Volden and Wiseman summarize the various other independent variables affecting legislative effectiveness. They conclude that the factors involved are, “Innate ability, the acquisition and cultivation of a critical skill set, and the sophisticated utilization of key legislative institutions” (Volden and Wiseman 2009, 7). Innate ability, though difficult to quantify, could explain the remaining differences in legislative effectiveness. A “cultivation of a critical skill set” could be construed as legislative professionalism, or previous state legislative experience in a highly professionalized legislature. The “sophisticated utilization of key legislative institutions” evades simple definition. Seniority and committee membership constitute a portion of legislative sophistication, but there remains a latent ability for a legislator to achieve goals within her institution. This study, among others, seeks to explain a portion of that ability.

Electoral margin

Electoral result is quantified by Volden and Wiseman as the percentage of the two-party vote acquired to win the election (2009, 44). They square the number, as well, in order to explain different relationships than linear. They justify the operation as follows,

“Vote Share and its square are included to allow for the possibility that members from safe seats can dedicate greater time and effort to internal legislative effectiveness rather than external electioneering and to allow this effect to be nonlinear.” (2013, 331)

Political scientists have incorporated other variables into their analysis while attempting to derive legislative success. Financial contributions and fundraising power, although difficult to ascertain, may provide insight into what a freshman legislator has to offer. Hasecke and Mycoff
posit, “members can demonstrate party loyalty through floor voting and financial contributions to the party’s re-election efforts…the evidence shows that both…have a significant effect on legislative success” (Hasecke and Mycoffe 2007, 608). Party loyalty, as quantified through floor voting and financial contributions, offer new hypotheses for this study, as some freshman legislators might have greater financial influence than others. If this were the case, the possibility that greater party loyalty attained through financial contributions or floor voting becomes important to predicting legislative effectiveness among freshman legislators. Greater levels of financial contributions should, then, improve a member’s LES. Financial contributions are both difficult to identify and difficult to compare, however. Hasecke and Mycoffe tackle the problem of comparison by gathering Z-scores, indicating the deviation each member has from her Congress’s mean (Hasecke and Mycoffe 2007, 612). This approach describes each member’s contribution, and the temporal significance that contribution had.

Another subsection in the study of legislative effectiveness concerns the Senate. Similar effects, especially career-based effects, may both explain the legislative process of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Matthews qualitatively categorizes the role of senators, and thereby the expected level of legislative activity, in their first term as an “unobtrusive apprenticeship” (Matthews 1959, 1065). He continues; “The freshman senator’s subordinate status is impressed upon him in many ways,” and further describes how freshmen are discouraged from occupying legislative space (Matthews 1959, 1065). This trend is well-recognized among senators, and there is a possibility it continues to representatives. This might help explain the likelihood that freshmen are less legislatively successful than more senior members.
Legislative experience for freshman representatives is often restricted to state legislative experience, as few representatives, if any, have experience in the Senate. State legislatures often vary in intensity and involvement, so measures of professionalism have been developed in order to explain the nature of experience a representative might bring to her seat. Squire creates a measure of legislative professionalization, and describes how a state legislature might be more or less professionally organized. Salary, number of staff, and time in session vary among the legislatures, and describe how professional they are (Squire 1992, 2007). This thesis will incorporate and compare legislative professionalization and legislative experience. Legislators with equal levels of experience might still vary in their legislative effectiveness because of how professional their position was. In an effort to address this possibility, Volden and Wiseman incorporated an interaction effect, able to incorporate the possibility that more professional experience might affect legislative effectiveness differently than less professional experience (Volden and Wiseman 2009, 24).

Significance

The study of freshmen representatives is capable of describing, before other approaches, the trends present over the coming Congressional session. In essence, it seems the characteristics of the freshman class predict the behavior for the next generation of representatives. In Richard Fenno’s *Learning to Govern*, interviews of freshman congressman evoke this predictability. They claim, “The freshman class is the best representation of an absolute commitment to change” (Richard F. Fenno 1997, 24). This idealistic viewpoint shows that members often believe they carry an electoral incentive. Their first election more directly demonstrates a will of the people, and therefore they command greater legislative power than would be granted given a
linear assignment from seniority. This confidence rarely coincides with real activity on the floor, but freshmen representatives often begin their terms with beguiled enthusiasm.

Hypotheses

Several explanations applicable to freshman representatives for different levels of legislative effectiveness are present in the literature. Some, including leadership positions and seniority, are not applicable, and must elude this study because freshmen rarely or never attain leadership positions and they do not vary amongst levels of seniority.

This thesis is primarily focused on the relationship between electoral performance and legislative success. Electoral performance will be quantified as the number of standard deviations from the congressional mean a representative receives. Higher numbers denote a greater share than the congressional mean, though all freshman representatives are often significantly below this average, as incumbents often enjoy larger victory margins. It seems freshmen that win a larger margin might represent a district that will be more likely elect her in the future. At the very least, freshmen who are elected by large margins are more likely to believe that their seats are safe. Representative seats, although periodically unstable, often elect incumbents that won by large margins previously. Therefore, representatives that win smaller margins will feel pressure to strengthen their position for the next election. If this is the case, we might expect freshmen representatives to force their legislative agenda and appear as frequently as possible as sponsors of substantive bills. Therefore the central hypothesis tying these two variables together is; with greater vote margins, come lower levels of legislative effectiveness.

There are numerous controls that will help isolate the effects of electoral margin on legislative effectiveness. Volden and Wiseman, in their introduction of the LES system,
introduced many of the controls used in this experiment. A few are unusable or unsuitable to this
study, as they require a history of legislative work in the case of a lagged LES, or impossibly-
high levels of congressional positioning, in the case of the Speaker of the House.

Majority party membership, however, is anticipated to be important for a new
representative’s legislative success. Representatives with agendas similar to their party are often
given more opportunities in the passage of legislation. Thus, *membership in the majority party
should increase the legislative effectiveness of all representatives, regardless of seniority.*
Minority party members have difficulty passing legislation even when highly tenured, so
freshman minority legislators should be disadvantaged as well. Each Congressional term may
exert some force on the legislative effectiveness of the floor, as the entire body of representatives
may be more or less gridlocked, or more or less competitive. Some trends elicited without
congressional term may become nullified with its inclusion, because legislative effectiveness
may be caused by different factors throughout the history of the United States House of
Representatives. The LES already contains a consideration for Congressional term, as the
average score for each term is set to 1. This allotment falls apart when isolating freshmen,
however, so a dummy variable will be included for a baseline Congress (93rd), and the effect of
each succeeding congress. These numbers will not be reported in the final regression table, but
are available in a Stata .do replication file and will be provided upon request.

Legislators who occupy powerful positions in Congress are in a position to sponsor and
promote legislation more effectively, both because their position attains a higher level of
legislative influence and because they have more bargaining power. Few freshman
representatives ever make it to these seats in their first term, but the variable’s inclusion might
control for small effect sizes from the few members that do attain these positions. From the 93rd
Congress to the 110th Congress, fewer than 5% of freshman representatives occupied this seat—a total of 60. Those members might have higher or lower levels of legislative effectiveness, and this variable’s inclusion will control for the possibility that their authority changes their legislative effectiveness.

State Professionalism is quantified using a scale developed by Squire as a coordinated index measure for how professional a State legislative seat is (Squire 1992). There is a body of literature focused on determining the effects of highly professionalized seats. The career prospects of the seat improve when salaries, staff, and higher numbers of calendar days become available. The body of research surrounding state legislative professionalism suggests that with more professional state legislative experience come greater levels of legislative effectiveness.

Research Design and Methodology

The dataset studied is a collection of House members from the 93rd (January 3rd, 1973) to the 110th (January 3rd, 2009) Congresses. The unit of observation is Member/Terms. Some members are voted out of office after their first term, so they only have one entry, while others, like John Dingell, remain in office more than 55 years (He retired after the dataset’s final Congress, and started before the first). In the regression of Freshman Representatives he will not even be counted as his first term predates the 93rd Congress. The data source is replication data from Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer’s study titled, “When are Women More Effective Lawmakers Than Men?” available on the American Journal of Political Science Dataverse (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013).

The dependent variable, legislative effectiveness, will be measured using Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer’s LES (Legislative Effectiveness Score). Independent variables,

---

3 http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/ajps/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?globalId=hdl:1902.1/18911
including majority party membership, party membership, state legislative experience, and state legislative professionalism are useful controls that are readily available to this study. The primary independent variable of interest, the deviation from the average vote percentage each congressman receives per term, is quantified as a Z score deviation from each Congress’s mean. This variable might behave differently as a Z score deviation from each other freshman’s mean, so that variant coding will be included in the final model as well. The crucial difference between the two variable’s coding is whether the entire body of elections is considered, or just the elections of members attaining their first term. The average vote share for freshmen is lower than the average vote share for the entire body of representatives, thus replicating the findings of Volden and Wiseman.

**Data Analysis**

For this thesis, two overarching models will show the legislative effectiveness of each member of the House of Representatives as a whole, and then the specific legislative effectiveness of freshman legislators. First, a regression model will determine the extent to which freshmen have lower levels of legislative effectiveness. Then, amongst freshmen, the causes of different levels of legislative effectiveness will be studied. A discussion of trends will follow, but some immediate trends become apparent.

(See Tables 1 & 2)
Discussion

There are few initial confessions and admissions necessary to review in order to assess the scope of these findings. First, LES is an interval variable that behaves different than most. One important consideration is that it has no maximum limit, but the vast majority of cases reside in the first four points (See figure 1). In fact, the 95th percent most effective legislator (across all seniority levels) received a 3.88 score for legislative effectiveness from the 93rd to the 100th Congress’s. The average freshman received a .365 score, so even seemingly-small effect sizes have large significances. The jump from the bottom quartile to the top quartile of legislative effectiveness only involves an increase of .41, so the coefficient on Majority already approaches the bump necessary to become a successful legislator from an unsuccessful legislator.

Majority, Democrat, Power Seat, Chair, and State Legislative Experience are all dichotomous variables, so their effects do not surpass their coefficients. Vote Deviation from Congress and Vote Deviation from Freshmen are variables associated with standard deviations, so they can range, reasonably, several points from negative to positive changing the magnitude to beyond .15, possibly. State Legislative Experience * Professionalism is a variable that ranges from zero to one, so its coefficient also represents the total effect size from minimum to maximum, even though the variable’s distributional range is only zero to .659. Therefore, the magnitude is actually smaller than the listed coefficient. Also worthy of mention is that the N value is higher for Table 1 than for Table 2 because the first regression does not limit the population to freshman legislators. The N value for the first model in Table 2 is larger than the next two models because the inclusion of vote margin eliminates special elections that caused missing vote data, be it because of appointments or uncontested races.
Volden and Wiseman incorporated several additional variables, and attained significantly higher adjusted R squared values (Volden and Wiseman 2009, 42). Upon review of the replication materials provided in their paper, some variables seemed to account for vastly larger portions of this than others. This experiment is unable to include several of the most explanatory variables from their study, however, so the R squared values suffered. Most notably, the Lagged LES variable requires at least one previous term’s information, so freshmen have no values in that category. Further models incorporating campaign finance information, career experience, or district history may help alleviate this deficiency, as the knowledge of historical performance seems to be very predictive of success in the larger House. Regardless of these omissions, a few remaining emergent trends are worth exploring.

First, it seems indisputable that freshman legislators attain significantly lower levels of legislative effectiveness than their more senior colleagues. If we remember that an increase of .41 represents the change from bottom to top quartile performance of legislative effectiveness, then the coefficient of -.623 should show just how integral an effect being a freshman really is on one’s legislative effectiveness—surpassing even the difference between comparatively successful and unsuccessful. The effect size is also significant, since the only effects exceeding that of freshman status are majority status and chairing a committee. It is also evident from the table that the effect of being a freshman is negative, and significant enough to try to explain in a further analysis. The average reelected congressman attains a slightly higher-than-average LES, at 1.12. A cut of .62 demonstrates that their legislative effectiveness is severely hampered by the freshman level of seniority, and that their average legislative effectiveness can be expected to go from below average to above average, just simply by being reelected.
The next analysis attempts to provide explanatory variables for freshman legislative effectiveness, and to some extent succeeds in doing so. There still are strong effect sizes from majority, democrat, and chair variables, though. Majority party advantage for legislative effectiveness is anticipated, as there are significant procedural and logistic advantages to being a member of the controlling party. For the encoding of LES as a dependent variable, the coefficient in front of each of these can represent the difference between a successful first term and a failed one.

The three models reflect different ways of looking at freshman legislative effectiveness. First, the model without the vote margin is included to demonstrate the explanatory power of my model with the inclusion of vote margin. The second model’s adjusted R squared values do increase, but only by a little less than 2%. Of course we must remember that the inclusion of any new variable in a model increases the explanatory power of that model, so I included an adjusted R square value to account for this. This model does suffer from low R squared values, but I submit that this is because the data analyzed do not yet describe all the pertinent information in predicting legislative effectiveness. As this thesis simply attempts to submit a useful model for describing legislative effectiveness of freshman representatives, further models may provide greater explanatory power. The incorporation of campaign finance data, party history, or district history may greatly improve this model and others to follow.

The differences between the second and third model are small, but pertinent. Vote deviation from Congress shows how the electoral percentage of the individual member differs from her entire Congress’s average. This number will determine to what extent the freshman representative has higher or lower vote margins than his entire collection of peers. The vote deviation from freshman variable shows the differences from each representative’s cohort. The
practical difference between these quantifications is that congressional vote margins seem to stabilize after longer tenures, while freshman vote margins might be more affected by short term effects. The two coefficients do not seem sufficiently distinct, at least when the error terms are considered, so the results are fundamentally the same for both variables. Both are statistically significant, but not sufficiently distinguishable from each other.

The hypotheses suggested by this thesis have been affirmed. First and foremost, it seems evident that freshmen representatives who receive higher percentages of the vote attain lower levels of legislative effectiveness than members who receive smaller portions of the vote. As stated before, this effect can be taken to mean that representatives who feel their districts are more jeopardized will fight harder for legislative attention. However, this trend might also be explained by an endogenous effect. Members who have large vote margins might have run with the express knowledge that their district would be easy to win. If this is the case, members with lower legislative ambition might seek the position, when more competitive districts will weed these candidates out. An inclusion of party history for the district, specifically the tendency for members of the representative’s party to have won in the past, might help clarify between these explanations. This is because districts with stronger party histories that have just suffered a low return might show that the recent election is more competitive than previous ones have been, and strong party histories that have just garnered another strong victory might show less competitive elections. Another useful variable to try to include might be a summary of campaign contributions and campaign spending. Districts that ran more expensive campaigns, but attained the same vote margin for the winning party as less expensively-campaigned districts, might have more competitive elections. Conversely, districts with low levels of campaign spending and high vote margins might have severe partisan leanings, or a history of low competitiveness.
Conclusion

This thesis works to explain the legislative effectiveness of freshman representatives. As their average levels of success are often quite a bit lower than their peers, an initial attempt at describing different levels of success among freshmen might yield insight into how freshmen may increase their legislative effectiveness. This thesis proposes that increasing electoral margins have a negative effect on legislative effectiveness. The acting theory is that greater vote shares may demonstrate less competitive elections, and reduce the incentive a representative has to pass as much constituent-serving legislation. Conversely, representatives who received smaller portions of the vote might seek legislative titles and sponsorships in an attempt to solidify their reputation as an important member of the House.

Previous research has neglected to isolate freshmen, and has instead focused on career effects, and general seniority. Many important effects are present across the career of a congressman, such as increasing legislative freedom and seat security, but uncovered effects remain in the first term of a representative. This thesis compares freshmen with the body of Congress as a whole, and replicates the conclusions of past research that freshmen are less legislatively successful than more tenured colleagues. It then explores the nature of this disparity, and concludes that some presupposed hypotheses are supported, such as majority party status and chairing a committee having a positive effect on legislative effectiveness. The next variable of interest, percentage of vote share, follows a significant negative correlation that suggests a slight disadvantage, legislatively, in garnering larger percentages of the vote share. There are a few notable complications, however. The adjusted r squared value increases by less than .02 out of a total .25, which means there are many remaining influences upon legislative effectiveness, even if much is left to random error. Also, the magnitude of the variable seems to be smaller than
others, a total of .159 for three different standard errors\textsuperscript{4}. This would have greater significance among the lowest achieving members, as the LES scores are not normally distributed (see figure 1).

Nonetheless, the data do support this central claim; with each standard deviation\textsuperscript{5} below the average entering freshman’s vote margin, representatives are .042 LES points higher\textsuperscript{6}. Furthermore, there are distinguishable differences in legislative effectiveness with differences between vote shares in as little as one standard deviation, in the case of -1 to 0 (see figure 2). This shows that, if nothing else, the more successful freshman legislators have lower vote shares than those who have average vote shares. The confidence intervals do start to expand significantly past the average vote share of about -.7. This shows that either fewer observations exist in the high vote share zones, or legislative effectiveness is less predictable among members who received high vote percentages than low vote percentages, or both.

A few other final aspects of this study worth mention are the controls. Legislative effectiveness among freshman representatives is not explained much at all by previous legislative experience. This is surprising, as many have theorized that experience in state legislatures may help the freshman representative grow accustomed to the intricacies of legislative work more quickly. Approximately half did have such experience, while the other half did not. There were negative effects when the entire Congress’s state legislative experience was considered. This is also surprising, but not the subject of this thesis. Majority party membership, as expected, had an overwhelmingly positive effect on legislative effectiveness. The specific party mattered significantly as well, though this might be due to historical trends present in the data (Democrats

\textsuperscript{4} The Coefficient of Vote Deviation from Congress (.053) * 3
\textsuperscript{5} A useful benchmark for evaluating standard deviations of vote margin is 1 stdev = 10 percentage points
\textsuperscript{6} For context, this is the approximate difference between the following percentiles: 0-16, 34-45, 71-72, etc.
and Republicans were not in power for equal periods of time in the 93rd to 110th Congresses. Thus, timed effects might persist even when controlling for party).

The complications and reservations inherent in this analysis might be addressed by more intricate and nuanced research. The present analysis has several problems that may be fixed in later studies. First, vote share is only a measure of the vote received by the individual member in their election. Theoretically, it does not describe the overall competitiveness of the election, the support they received from their national party, the number of challengers, or the extent to which they were challenged in the primary. Any inclusion of these considerations would greatly improve the analysis, and may alter the conclusion of this thesis. A few questions arise as well, and they may be answered by further analysis. First, do these trends continue into historic Congresses? Also, is variance in vote share present due to competitiveness of the election, lack of a quality challenger, or the political clout of each candidate? Also, are there controlling factors that may eliminate this variance? There is actually significant possibility that the relationship between legislative effectiveness and vote share is controlled for by a third variable, but a legitimate effort at isolating variance in legislative effectiveness did not yield a source. Further research may do so.

Though this analysis proposes more questions than it answers, freshman representatives are less legislatively successful, and that those who received high vote shares are even less legislatively successful. A liberal application of this finding would cause us to value the competitive election—perhaps they draw more legislatively effective candidates, or they push each representative to write more laws due to an electoral incentive. Also, members who fight for margins past reasonably-certain victory may view the House as a position to be secured, rather than continually earned. A representative should be representative continually, and they
should pass bills regardless of their electoral safety. If secure spots assure that a representative may “coast by”, then we should seek to challenge the spots of those members, in an attempt to maximize our legislative process. Then again, greater quantities of legislation do not signify higher qualities of legislation, so perhaps these claims are misaligned. Regardless, we now have more information on how and why freshman legislators pass legislation in their first term than before.
### Freshman Effect on Legislative Effectiveness

| Variable                                      | Estimate | Std. Error |   t   | Pr(>|t|) |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|------------|-------|----------|
| Freshman                                      | -0.623***| (0.041)    |       | < 0.001 |
| State Legislative Experience                  | -0.102** | (0.051)    |       | < 0.01  |
| State Legislative Experience * Professionalism| 0.457*** | (0.143)    |       | < 0.001 |
| Female                                        | -0.014   | (0.052)    |       | 0.43     |
| Distance from Floor Median                    | -0.060   | (0.084)    |       | 0.37     |
| Power Seat                                    | -0.257***| (0.034)    |       | < 0.001 |
| Chair Seat                                    | 3.546*** | (0.068)    |       | < 0.001 |
| Majority Party                                | 0.806*** | (0.040)    |       | < 0.001 |
| Democrat                                      | -0.104***| (0.031)    |       | < 0.001 |
| Constant                                      | 0.593*** | (0.052)    |       | < 0.001 |
| N                                             | 7851     |            |       |          |
| Adjusted $R^2$                                | .369     |            |       |          |

* $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed), ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.  

**Table 1 Freshman Effectiveness**
## Determinants of Freshmen Legislative Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Variant</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vote Deviation from Congress</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.053***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>0.042***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote Deviation from Freshmen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.042***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>0.299***</td>
<td>0.316***</td>
<td>0.316***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.139***</td>
<td>0.105***</td>
<td>0.105***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Seat</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.063)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>6.299***</td>
<td>6.311***</td>
<td>6.312***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.469)</td>
<td>(0.469)</td>
<td>(0.469)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legislative Experience</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.047)</td>
<td>(0.047)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legislative Experience *</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
<td>(0.139)</td>
<td>(0.139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.246***</td>
<td>0.209***</td>
<td>0.243***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.055)</td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1274</td>
<td>1155</td>
<td>1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.251</td>
<td>.251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* * p < 0.1 (two-tailed), ** p < 0.05 , *** p < 0.01.

Table 2 Legislative Effectiveness of Freshmen
Figure 1

Figure 2
Bibliography


