Legislative Effectiveness in Congress

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Abstract

We argue that congressional scholarship would benefit from an aggressive agenda to incorporate legislative effectiveness more fully into theoretical and empirical examinations of Congress. To facilitate this effort, we advance hypotheses from a foundational theory of lawmaking effectiveness that arises from members' innate abilities, cultivated skills, and institutional positioning. We develop a method for cardinally ranking members of the U.S. House of Representatives in terms of their effectiveness at moving bills through the legislative process, and we apply this method to generate a Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES) for each House member in each of the 97th-109th Congresses. We demonstrate that our measure is consistent with our theoretical hypotheses, and that it is relevant to the examination of numerous prior theories of legislative politics. We suggest a number of theoretical and empirical venues that could be enhanced by a greater focus on legislative effectiveness in Congress.

Legislative Effectiveness in Congress

Regardless of profession, from salespeople to journalists to major league sluggers, some individuals outperform their peers. Lawmakers are no different. It takes a certain set of political skills (and the right political circumstances) to formulate a viable solution to a major public policy problem, to construct a coalition in support of that solution, and to shepherd the related legislation through committee, across the floor, and into law. Uncovering the personal and institutional characteristics that lead some members of Congress to be more effective legislators than others is crucial to developing a fuller understanding of political representation, of legislative bargaining, and of public policy formation.

The concept that some members of Congress are more effective than others comports well with conventional wisdom and modern parlance. For example, when Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) unexpectedly fell ill in May of 2008, Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) called him the "most effective" senator ever, and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) said, "I have described Ted Kennedy as the last lion in the Senate…. I have held that view because he remains the single most effective member of the Senate."[1] Similarly, upon naming Rep. Rahm Emanuel as White House chief of staff in November of 2008, President-elect Barack Obama commented, "No one I know is better at getting things done than Rahm Emanuel." And Republicans like Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) conceded, "Rahm knows Capitol Hill and has great political skills."[2]

Political scientists have long believed that such classifications of "being effective" or "getting things done" are important to understanding legislative politics. Truman (1951, 344-345), for example, discusses how the effectiveness of skilled legislators influences the

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[1] Quotations taken from CNN.com, May 20, 2008.

[2] Quotations taken from CNN.com, November 6, 2008.

congressional agenda, in that it "creates its own following; less experienced or overly busy members will often be guided by the skilled veteran." Fenno (1978, 137) points to how legislative effectiveness is advertised by incumbents on the campaign trail, and how "to the extent possible – even if it requires a bit of imagination – members will picture themselves as effective users of inside power" when meeting with constituents. Moreover, as Mayhew (1991, 110) eloquently notes, legislative effectiveness is ostensibly a necessary precondition for political career advancement: "like power contenders in the Roman Republic who headed for Gaul or Spain to win battles, would-be presidents try to score points by showing they can actually do something – pass laws." Hence, one would naturally suspect that a legislator's ability to move bills through the legislative process would have a direct bearing on the types of coalitions that she participated in, on her electoral security, and on the viability of her career progression onto higher office.

Despite the perceived importance of legislative effectiveness and its relevance to the lawmaking process, recent scholarship has failed to build on the claims of earlier scholars or current practitioners. While some recent theories have included components of effectiveness, such as in electoral or interest group settings (e.g., Groseclose 2001, Hall and Deardorff 2006), the dearth of theoretical research that analyzes the impact of members' effectiveness in the lawmaking process is surprising. On the empirical end of legislative scholarship, a body of work in the state politics literature has focused on individual effectiveness, typically (e.g., in studies of the North Carolina legislature), although not exclusively, relying on elite surveys to generate individual reputational rankings of legislative effectiveness (Meyer 1980; Hamm, Harmel, and Thompson 1983; Saint-Germain 1989; Weissert 1991a, 1991b; Miquel and Snyder 2006). And while a number of scholars have taken important steps toward evaluating legislator effectiveness

at the national level (e.g., Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair-Chapman 2003; Cox and Terry 2008; Frantzich 1979; Hall 1987, 1992; Matthews 1960; Schiller 1995; Thomas 1991; Wawro 2000), no effort to date has yielded a widely-accepted, generalizable metric of individual legislative effectiveness in the U.S. Congress.

The early and exploratory nature of the work on legislative effectiveness stands in sharp contrast to numerous more fully developed theories of Congress. For example, spatial theories of Congress have yielded hundreds of scholarly works. Distributive theories of Congress have helped explain budgetary and taxation decisions (e.g. Baron and Ferejohn 1989, Primo and Snyder 2008, Weingast 1979) and motivated empirical scholarship (e.g., Bickers and Stein 2000, Evans 2004, Stein and Bickers 1994). Informational theories have systematically explored the role of expertise in legislative organization and policy choice (e.g., Gilligan and Krehbiel 1987, Krehbiel 1991). And partisan theories have produced significant theoretical and empirical scholarly debate (e.g., Aldrich 1995, Cox and McCubbins 2005, Rohde 1991).

The lack of a comparable set of theoretical advancements and empirical investigations regarding legislative effectiveness may be concerning in its own right, given that effective lawmaking has been deemed important by interested parties ranging from top political scientists over the past century to current practitioners. Moreover, further development of scholarship on legislative effectiveness is important in that each of these aforementioned theories may only be fully understood in the context of legislative effectiveness. For example, spatial models would seem to indicate that legislators near the median would be more successful in promoting their ideas than would extremists. Yet, an effective member may be valuable to coalitions either on the left or the right, and therefore an effective legislator may appear to be "centrist" due to her coalitional activities across the ideological spectrum rather than due to her true underlying policy

preferences. Similarly, informational theories require a level of effectiveness in gaining

expertise and in using information strategically to yield better policy outcomes. Moreover,

parties would be limiting themselves if they did not strategically position effective lawmakers in

key committee and leadership positions.

Due to the potential centrality of legislative effectiveness to theoretical and empirical

scholarship on legislative politics, we advocate a broad research agenda on legislative

effectiveness that consists of four main components. First, explicit models of congressional

politics and policymaking should be developed with a central assumption being that legislators

differ in their lawmaking abilities. Second, broad and generalized empirical measures of

individual legislative effectiveness should be constructed to set the stage for various quantitative

examinations of congressional politics. Third, such measures should be used to test the new

theories of congressional politics built upon the concept of legislative effectiveness. Fourth,

legislative effectiveness measures should also be used to examine existing theories of

lawmaking, ranging from spatial to partisan theories. We see this agenda involving many

legislative scholars over a number of years, before we will be in a position to appreciate the role

of individual legislator effectiveness in congressional politics and policymaking.

In this paper we take incremental but important steps in this research agenda. First, we

develop the theoretical concept that legislators become effective lawmakers through innate

ability, by cultivating a crucial skill set over time, and by using the institutional structures of

Congress to translate those abilities and learned skills into legislative accomplishments. Second,

we develop substantively meaningful Legislative Effectiveness Scores (LESs) for members of

the U.S. House of Representatives. We then assess the internal validity of these measures by

examining hypotheses arising from our theoretical construct and by exploring how these scores reflect current theoretical understandings of the internal workings of Congress.

Before turning to theoretical and empirical examinations of legislative effectiveness, it is important to note the limitations of our current work. First, we believe that several considerations are relevant in determining how members of Congress succeed in pursuing their goals and in representing the American people. For example, being an effective fundraiser and campaigner are crucial elements to members' reelection goals, as is being an effective manager of a sizable staff for issues of responsiveness to constituents. Our goal here, however, is not to assess every aspect of what makes a member of Congress successful. While we believe that measuring "fundraising effectiveness" or "electoral effectiveness" could be quite valuable, we are here interested solely in "legislative effectiveness," characterized bluntly as the extent to which a member is effective at formulating and advancing legislation. While this is admittedly a limited part of the activities undertaken by representatives, advancing legislation is in our view so fundamental to a lawmaker's core purpose as to merit a central place in the study of legislative politics. Second, we construct our measure based on the advancement of legislation, and are thus setting aside the skills required to block the legislative initiatives of others. We also set aside normative judgments about whether specific pieces of legislation are "good," in terms of reflecting the wishes of constituents or providing effective policy solutions, or even whether any policy change is better than the current status quo in a particular policy area. Third, we only offer Legislative Effectiveness Scores for members of the House of Representatives here, leaving similar scholarship on the Senate to future work.

Toward a Theory of Legislative Effectiveness

As suggested above, the fact that some lawmakers are better able to formulate solutions to public policy problems and to move those solutions through the legislative process is relevant to virtually every well-developed theory of congressional politics, and suggests potential avenues for exploration. While the current paper does not develop these sorts of theoretical possibilities in detail,[3] we begin to set the groundwork for such future explorations by considering what it takes to be an effective legislator. Whether members are motivated by reelection (Mayhew 1974) or by such goals as institutional power or good public policy (Fenno 1978), passing legislation to please their constituents and to advance their policy agendas is an important component of being a member of Congress. While members clearly engage in numerous other activities as well, it is the rare member who does not even sponsor a single piece of legislation. Indeed, in any given Congress, less than ten members fail to introduce any bills whatsoever, and the average member introduces more than a dozen bills with substantive policy implications.

Yet, this does not mean that all members will be equally effective in their legislative pursuits. We argue that three key components are necessary to become a highly effective legislator: innate ability, the acquisition and cultivation of a critical skill set, and the sophisticated utilization of key legislative institutions. On its face, this argument is fairly consistent with commonplace discussions of effective members of Congress. In discussing the career of Sen. Ted Kennedy, for example, political commentator David Brooks recently suggested that being a member of Congress "is a job that requires actually a pretty complicated skill set. Ted Kennedy has earned that skill set. He has that skill set – passing legislation."[4]

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[3] We do not, for example, offer a theory of how parties cultivate and position their most effective members, how coalition formation processes are altered to include more effective lawmakers, or how an information-based legislative organization is shaped by varying legislator expertise.

[4] Commentary on "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," December 19, 2008.

This brief quote contains a number of elements central to our view about what makes an effective legislator – that effective members possess important skills, that they can cultivate these skills over time, and that these skills translate into a measure of effectiveness that involves the movement of legislation through Congress.

The innate abilities that produce effective legislators are not easily measured or quantified. Some lawmakers can simply engage in "the art of the possible" in ways that others cannot. They not only see policy solutions to pressing problems, but they also know how those solutions must be modified to become politically viable. These are abilities that some members of Congress have at high levels and that others, even if they dedicate all of their time and effort to cultivating such abilities, simply cannot achieve.

And yet cultivating this critical skill set is part of becoming an effective legislator. Whether a member of Congress starts with a high or a low innate lawmaking ability, she can indeed improve over time. As members interact with their colleagues, they understand one another's passions and constituent needs. They come to know legislative rules and procedures and they start to see broader coalitional possibilities than they had known before.

Even the most skilled and studied lawmaker, however, is not able to accomplish anything by herself. Obtaining a committee chairmanship, having numerous like-minded colleagues, or being in the majority party all offer institutional possibilities not available to other members. Without some ability to set the agenda, even an otherwise skilled member's bills risk being lost among the thousands of other proposals entertained in any Congress.

These three simple factors – innate ability, cultivation of skills, and institutional positioning – help us understand which members get things done in Congress. And they present us with three brief hypotheses that we test below.

Innate Abilities Hypothesis: *If some members have greater innate abilities than do others, these abilities should be evident year-in and year-out in Congress after Congress, regardless of a member's seniority or institutional position.*

Skill Cultivation Hypothesis: *If crucial lawmaking skills can be cultivated over time, members' degrees of effectiveness should increase throughout their legislative careers.*

Institutional Positioning Hypothesis: *If institutional positioning matters for skills and abilities to translate into lawmaking effectiveness, members of the majority party and committee chairs should be among the most effective members of Congress.*

Measuring Legislative Effectiveness

To investigate these hypotheses, we first need a measure of legislative effectiveness. In devising our measure, we are interested in identifying the differences across legislators in formulating meaningful bills and moving them through the legislative process from introduction to the ultimate signing into law. In so doing, this measure would be useful in uncovering features of individual lawmakers, of their strategic choices, and of the legislative process that determine what bills become laws. Moreover, to the extent that Congress is comprised of members with varying lawmaking skills, and to the extent that such variation is important in understanding the organization and operation of Congress, a legislative effectiveness measure should also serve as a useful explanatory variable in its own right.

Given that we are explicitly defining effectiveness in terms of members moving bills through the legislative process, we could embrace existing approaches that engage similar questions. Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair (2003), Cox and Terry (2008), and Hasecke and Mycoff (2007), for example, quantify legislative effectiveness, or *success*, as the number of bills that a legislator introduces that pass the chamber and/or pass out of committee. Alternatively, beginning with Matthews (1960), scholars (e.g., Frantzich 1979) have

operationalized effectiveness as a legislator's "hit rate," that is, the percentage of bills that she introduces that are passed out of committee and/or passed out of the House.

Focusing solely on the number of bills that pass the House (or the analogous conversion rate), however, seems to neglect certain aspects of the legislative process that are also related to our conception of legislative effectiveness. While there is a good deal of variance across legislators' success rates (or the number of bills passed), there is even more variation across legislators regarding their successes at other stages in the legislative process, such as having bills receive attention in committee, a place on a legislative calendar, and the like.[5] We believe that these differences constitute important information that captures how different legislators might be more (or less) effective at lawmaking. Any overall measure of effectiveness should account for these differences, as success in early stages of the legislative process likely indicates at least the potential for future success at later stages.

To operationalize legislative effectiveness then, we embrace a multi-stage method of analysis wherein we consider how many bills each legislator introduces, and how many of those bills receive action in committee, pass out of committee and receive action on the floor of the House, pass the House, and ultimately become law.[6] In devising our measure, we also account

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[5] Krutz (2005) engages a similar approach in analyzing which bills are more likely than others to be winnowed out as they proceed through the legislative process.

[6] This method therefore does not account for legislators who do not sponsor many successful bills, but rather "work behind the scenes" to bring legislation to its fruition (or those who serve as effective obstacles to bill progress). While we believe that such legislators definitely exist and play an important role in lawmaking, they comprise a relatively small minority of all members of Congress and their actions are exceedingly difficult to assess in an objective manner. By focusing on the progression of the bills that members actually sponsor, we are capturing the most transparent and objective set of indicators of legislative effectiveness.

for variations in the substantive significance of the different bills that are introduced by legislators.

In concrete terms, to develop each member's Legislative Effectiveness Score, we first identify which legislator sponsored each bill in each Congress, and what happened to those bills at each potential stage in the legislative process. While undertaking such a task could be incredibly cumbersome, the availability of electronically-accessible copies of the *Congressional Record* simplifies our task considerably. Computer code was written to collect all relevant information from the Library of Congress website, THOMAS, for every public house bill (H.R.) that was introduced into the 97th-109th Congresses.[7] For every bill, we identify the sponsor and every step in the legislative process as identified in the "All Congressional Actions with Amendments" section of the bill's "summary and status" hyperlink. After collecting this information, we code the dates and incidence of each major stage of each bill's progression through the legislative life cycle. For example, we identify when the bill was introduced and referred to committee (and the identity of the committee or committees), as well as identifying if the committee held hearings, engaged in markup, sent the bill to subcommittee, reported the bill from committee, whether a rule was assigned to the bill on the floor, whether the bill was amended, whether it passed the House, whether it went to a conference committee, and so on.

Upon identifying the progress of every public House bill, we then identify how many bills each legislator sponsored as well as how many of those sponsored bills successfully completed subsequent steps in the legislative process in each Congress. To generate our measure

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[7] For the purposes of analysis, we confine our attention to House Bills, and discard all House Concurrent Resolutions, House Resolutions, and House Joint Resolutions. Our computer code utilizes the Ruby on Rails framework for the MySQL database system.

of effectiveness, we focus on the following statistics: the number of bills that each member

sponsored (BILL); and the number of those bills that received any action in committee (AIC), or

action beyond committee (ABC) on the floor of the House. For those bills that received any

action beyond committee, we also identify how many of those bills subsequently passed the

House (PASS), and how many subsequently became law (LAW). Given these data, we seek to

calculate an aggregate effectiveness measure for each legislator in each Congress.

It could be argued, correctly in our view, that not all bills are of equal importance, and

thus might not be equally indicative of a member's overall lawmaking effectiveness. Naming a

post office can be achieved with considerably less legislative effort than reforming Social

Security. To account for such variation, we categorize all bills as being either

commemorative/symbolic (C), *substantive* (S), or *substantively significant* (SS). Our

categorization is based on the following coding protocol. A bill is deemed *substantively*

significant if it had been the subject of an end of the year write-up in the *Congressional*

Quarterly Almanac.[8] A bill was deemed *commemorative/symbolic* if it satisfied any one of

several criteria, such as providing for a renaming, commemoration, private relief of an

individual, and the like.[9] Finally, all other bills, and any erstwhile "commemorative/symbolic"

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[8] This coding protocol is similar to Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair-Chapman's (2003, 365) denotation of

"hot" bills in the 103rd Congress—those that were the subject of a cover story in a 1993-94 issue of *Congressional*

Quarterly Weekly Report.

[9] Based on a complete reading of all titles, the following terms from bill titles are used to label them

commemorative/symbolic: commemoration, commemorate, for the private relief of, for the relief of, medal, mint

coins, posthumous, public holiday, to designate, to encourage, to express the sense of Congress, to provide for

correction of, to name, to redesignate, to remove any doubt, to rename, and retention of the name. We then

bills that were also the subject of a *CQ Almanac* write-up were classified as *substantive*.[10]

Across the 97th through the 109th Congresses, 75,259 bills were introduced, 4,107 of which were commemorative/symbolic, and 4,469 of which were substantively significant. After classifying each bill into one of these three categories, we calculated a Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES), for each member *i* in each Congress *t*, as follows:

$$
LES_{it} = \left[\begin{array}{c}
\left(\dfrac{\alpha BILL_{it}^{C} + \beta BILL_{it}^{S} + \gamma BILL_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} BILL_{jt}^{C} + \beta \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} BILL_{jt}^{S} + \gamma \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} BILL_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\
+ \left(\dfrac{\alpha AIC_{it}^{C} + \beta AIC_{it}^{S} + \gamma AIC_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} AIC_{jt}^{C} + \beta \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} AIC_{jt}^{S} + \gamma \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} AIC_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\
+ \left(\dfrac{\alpha ABC_{it}^{C} + \beta ABC_{it}^{S} + \gamma ABC_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} ABC_{jt}^{C} + \beta \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} ABC_{jt}^{S} + \gamma \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} ABC_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\
+ \left(\dfrac{\alpha PASS_{it}^{C} + \beta PASS_{it}^{S} + \gamma PASS_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} PASS_{jt}^{C} + \beta \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} PASS_{jt}^{S} + \gamma \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} PASS_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\
+ \left(\dfrac{\alpha LAW_{it}^{C} + \beta LAW_{it}^{S} + \gamma LAW_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} LAW_{jt}^{C} + \beta \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} LAW_{jt}^{S} + \gamma \sum\limits_{j=1}^{N} LAW_{jt}^{SS}} \right)
\end{array} \right] \left[\dfrac{N}{5} \right],
$$

where the five large terms represent the member's fraction of bills (1) introduced, (2) receiving action in committee, (3) receiving action beyond committee, (4) passing the House, and (5) becoming law, relative to all *N* legislators. Within each of these five terms, commemorative bills

individually read each bill title containing these search terms, and removed it from the commemorative/symbolic list if the bill also sought substantive policy changes.

[10] Hence, a small number of bills that had originally been designated as commemorative/symbolic were upgraded to be classified as substantive bills. An example of such a bill is H.R. 9 in the 97th Congress ("A bill to designate components of the National Wilderness Preservation System in the State of Florida").

are weighted by α, substantive bills by β, and substantively significant by γ. The overall

weighting of $N/5$ normalizes the average LES to take a value of 1 in each Congress.

Several features of this construction are worth noting. First, because of the substantial

differences in the number of bills that are introduced (75,259 bills over our time period) and the

number of bills that advance to further stages (3,812 becoming law, for example), our

operationalization necessarily gives greater weight to members who are more successful in later

stages of the process (e.g., having a bill pass the House or become law) than earlier stages of the

process (e.g., bill introduction or action in committee). Thus a member who introduces a large

variety of bills mainly for symbolic purposes, but with little interest in moving them through the

legislative process, will receive a quite low LES. Our measure also captures intermediate stages,

in addition to the introductory and concluding stages in the legislative process.

Second, throughout our analysis as reported here, we assign $\alpha = 1$, $\beta = 5$, and $\gamma = 10$,

signifying that substantively significant legislation exerts ten times the weight on the LES as

commemorative legislation and twice as much as normal substantive legislation. These weights

were chosen to reflect the view that advancing a substantively significant bill is more difficult

than moving general substantive legislation; and likewise, that advancing substantive legislation

is a stronger indicator of legislative effectiveness than moving commemorative/symbolic

legislation. Beyond these weights having a degree of face validity, it should be noted that the

findings presented below, where the LES is explained in terms of personal and institutional

attributes, are robust to a wide array of alternative specifications, with $\alpha < \beta < \gamma$. Moreover, as

discussed in detail in Supplemental Appendix A and noted below, the 1-5-10 weighting scheme

also produces the greatest predictive value in the full econometric models of Table 2 (below) of

all integer combinations of $1 \leq \alpha \leq 10$, along with $1 \leq \beta \leq 10$, and $1 \leq \gamma \leq 10$, thus indicating

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that these reasonable assumed weights also allow the underlying political circumstances that produce effective members to shine through.

Finally, the LESs display significant variation, ranging from the "most effective" legislator, Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI), who had an LES of 17.637 in the 109th Congress, to the 91 instances in our dataset where members of Congress have LESs equal to zero. To give a sense of how Sensenbrenner attained such a high score, consider that the average member of the 109th House introduced 14 substantive bills. One in three members introduced a bill deemed significant; and one in two introduced a commemorative bill. Coming out of committee, the average member had only one substantive bill left in the legislative process; one in four members had a substantively significant bill; and one in four had a commemorative bill still receiving consideration. While almost all of those remaining commemorative bills became law, less than half of the substantively significant bills and less than one third of all substantive bills became law after passing out of committee. By comparison, Sensenbrenner introduced one commemorative bill, which died in committee, but he sponsored 48 substantive bills, 25 of which found their way out of committee, 16 of which passed the House, and 6 of which became law. Moreover, for the far more selective substantively significant category, Sensenbrenner sponsored 11 bills, all of which reached the floor, 9 of which passed the House, and 2 of which became law. As a member of the majority Republican Party and as Chair of the Judiciary Committee, Sensenbrenner was well positioned to be effective. That he sponsored such measures as *Amendments to the Voting Rights Act of 1965*, *Amendments to the USA PATRIOT ACT*, and others that became law in the 109th Congress attests to his overall effectiveness.

In constructing a measure of legislative effectiveness, the end product may be judged on a number of criteria. For example, first, does the measure capture the increasing difficulty of

moving more important bills through Congress and of moving bills further through the legislative process? Second, does the measure offer explanatory power regarding important political phenomena, such as which members seek higher office and which members voluntarily leave Congress? Third, does the measure reflect and further uncover previously examined elements of congressional policymaking, such as the roles of political parties, committee leaders, or race and gender effects? The first of these criteria is satisfied by construction, with greater weights placed on a member's LES for moving bills further through the process and for more substantively significant legislation. The second and third criteria can be assessed through explorations of our initial hypotheses and those of previous theories of legislative politics.

Initial Analysis of Hypotheses

In the introduction we argued that a broad agenda researching legislative effectiveness involves theorizing, measuring effectiveness, and then using the generated measures to test new and existing theories of congressional politics. In this section, we offer tentative explorations of the three hypotheses generated above, before turning to more systematic analyses of which members are the most effective and why. In an initial step toward theory development, we argued that legislative effectiveness is a function of innate abilities, of a well-cultivated skill set, and of institutional positioning. Here we explore these concepts in some detail.

Innate Abilities

While innate ability is itself difficult to measure, such abilities likely manifest themselves in ways that are subject to systematic investigation. In particular, we hypothesize that innate abilities allow the same members to be effective in Congress after Congress, even in their earliest Congresses, and even as they move in and out of key institutional positions. To begin our assessment of this hypothesis, we simply correlate each member's LES in Congress t with his or

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her LES in the previous Congress. It is important to note that there is nothing about the data generating process that would lead us to expect a strong positive correlation over time absent tapping into common innate abilities of the same members over time. That is, at the start of every Congress, everyone's LES is identical. Only her actions of introducing bills and shepherding them through the lawmaking institutions within Congress elevates a member up from the score of zero that she would receive by doing nothing.

Supporting the concept of innate abilities yielding legislative effectiveness, there is strong initial evidence LESs persevering across a legislator's career from one Congress to the next. The coefficient of correlation between LES_t and LES_{t-1} is 0.66 (p-value < 0.001), consistent with members maintaining their effectiveness over time.

Next, to the extent that we are truly capturing legislators' abilities to navigate the legislative process, these abilities should still exist even when they find themselves switching from being in the majority to being in the minority party (and vice-versa). Given that our data include the regime change that occurred with the Republican takeover in the 104th Congress, we can investigate this point by identifying the correlation between members' LESs in the 103rd and 104th Congresses, when their majority-minority statuses were reversed. For both majority and minority party members, we find that their LESs in the 103rd Congress are positively correlated with their 104th Congress LESs. That is, effective Democrats in the 103rd Congress were still relatively effective in the 104th Congress, even after they moved from being in the majority to being in the minority (and likewise for the Republicans).   For Republicans, the correlation between their scores in the 103rd and 104th Congresses is 0.33 (p-value < 0.001), whereas the correlation across Congresses for Democrats is 0.21 (p-value = 0.004).

Innate abilities should also help effective committee members become effective committee chairs. A simple way to assess this possibility is to identify the correlation between members' LESs in the Congress directly before they became committee chairs, and in first Congress that they obtained a chair. Investigation reveals that the correlation between a member's LES in the Congress before he or she acquired a committee chair and the first Congress when he or she was a chair is positive (0.20) and significant (p-value = 0.07).

Innate ability in its rawest form can perhaps be best detected in a member's freshman LES. Just as we found that the average member maintains a similar LES from one Congress to the next, an ability-based effectiveness score should show a strong correlation between one's freshman effectiveness and one's sophomore effectiveness. One way to explore this possibility is to examine which members are above or below the median member of their freshman class, broken down by party (which is shown below to be a significant predictor of effectiveness). As we can see in a simple cross-tabulation in Table 1a, there is a clear connection between members' freshman and sophomore term LESs. Members who were above the freshman median LES in their party in their first term were more likely to be above the sophomore median LES in their party in their second term. Likewise, those members who were below the freshman median LES in their party during their first term were more likely to stay below the median in their cohort (in their party) when they move into their sophomore terms. These results suggest that, while there is certainly room for growth and improvement, legislators come to the chamber with a certain set of skills, and those that are successful early on continue to be successful, while those who are not effective tend to remain relatively ineffective in future terms.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

That said, could these innate abilities as detected, albeit imperfectly, by a member's freshman LES, help predict that member's political future? Cursory analysis reveals some interesting findings. If we consider the most effective freshmen in the 98th Congress, for example, we can identify several individuals who continue to be prominent members of the House, or have advanced onto higher office. As shown in Supplemental Appendix B, those members who were in the top 10% of their freshman class included Rick Boucher (D-VA) and Alan Mollohan (D-WV), both of whom continue to be prominent members of the House of Representatives, as well as Bill Richardson (D-NM) and Barbara Boxer (D-CA), both of whom have moved onto higher office. Most members in the top 10% of the 98th freshman class had state legislative experience, while none voluntarily retired from Congress. Consideration of other entering classes reveals other "rookie sensations" in the top 10% of their entering classes who continue to be prominent in public life, including Barney Frank (D-MA) and Chuck Schumer (D-NY) in the 97th Congress, David Price (D-NC) in the 100th Congress, and Roy Blunt (R-MO) in the 105th Congress.

While these examples are suggestive, one might wonder whether more systematic evidence can be examined regarding the relationship between the innate abilities revealed in freshman effectiveness and career prospects. Table 1b addresses this question head-on by identifying how many members who were above the median in their freshman cohorts (within their party) chose to seek higher office during their subsequent careers in Congress. For the purposes of analysis, we define "higher office" to be a Senate seat, a governorship, the presidency or vice-presidency, or a mayor of a major city.[11] Our analysis demonstrates that those members who were in the upper half of their parties' freshman cohorts in terms of LES had

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[11] We thank Daniel Butler for generously providing us with these data.

55% greater odds of seeking higher office at some point in their congressional careers (81/350) than below average members (58/389). Hence, consistent with Mayhew (1991), legislative effectiveness seems to be a precondition for aspiring to higher office.

An alternative way to engage this question is to ask whether members of Congress with less innate ability are more likely to retire voluntarily. Table 1c presents similar analysis to Table 1b by identifying how many members who were above and below the median LES in their freshman classes (by party) chose voluntarily to retire during their time in Congress. As we can see, those members who are below the median freshman LES in their cohort within their party, have 46% greater odds of retiring voluntarily (92/355) than those members who were more effective during their freshman terms (65/366). Hence, not only does effectiveness seem a relevant consideration for career advancement, but early patterns of ineffectiveness are clearly related to members' choices to leave office altogether. Whether these members leave because they are frustrated by their lack of effectiveness, or because they are offered fewer opportunities for career advancement by other influential members in the chamber, is an open question and worthy of further study. The fact that even the limited LES freshman snapshot helps to predict members' long-term career choices, however, provides further evidence that innate ability and initial effectiveness are crucial in understanding which members of Congress subsequently "get things done," who moves up, and who moves on.

A Cultivated Skill Set

The above analysis strongly suggests that legislative effectiveness is a product of innate abilities that carry forward from one term to the next and that shape the path of congressional careers. Yet, there are many members in Table 1a who move up (or down) in relative effectiveness between their freshman and sophomore terms. And the correlations of members'

scores over time may mask significant variation. Members can take significant steps to build up the skill set needed to be effective lawmakers. They can attempt various strategies and reinforce those that have the greatest success. They can learn from one another. They can build close working relationships with staffs and other members through connections from their home states, their parties, and the various caucuses that they belong to. One of the aggregate implications of these micro-level choices is that, over time, members should tend to become more effective.

Considering the effects of seniority on members' LESs is sufficient to demonstrate some degree of growth in the average member's skill over time. Recall that the Legislative Effectiveness Scores are set to a mean of one. 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.

This growth in effectiveness over time is indicative of members cultivating the crucial skill sets necessary to get things done in Congress. Moreover, this rise in LESs over time takes place also among members who are favorably endowed institutionally. Consider a member's first term as committee chair. There is much to be learned about being an effective chair. These new chairs' average LES is 4.08. After a few years of experience, however, the average chair is even more effective. For example, chairs in their third term of service and beyond average 5.00 for their LESs. In short, whether serving as an average member of Congress or as a committee chair, lawmakers have the ability to cultivate skills that result in greater legislative effectiveness, and they tend to take these opportunities to the tune of producing more legislation that finds its way further through the legislative process.

Institutional Positions

Many of the above facts and figures already support the idea that, beyond innate ability and the cultivation of critical skills over legislative careers, truly effective members of Congress achieve their legislative success by utilizing the institutional positions that they find themselves in. Moreover, some positions are more valuable than are others. Parties work hard to gain majority status and members covet committee chairmanships. One possible reason for such ambitions is that these institutional positions allow members to become much more effective lawmakers. Consistent with our expectations, the average LES of a committee chair is 4.53, while rank-and-file members average 0.814. This difference in means is highly significant (p-value < 0.001), as is the difference in LES between the average majority party member (LES of 1.48) and the average minority party member (LES of 0.387).

Consideration of Existing Theories

Having laid out foundational hypotheses regarding legislative effectiveness, constructed general Legislative Effectiveness Scores, and explored our theoretical hypotheses with these scores, the remaining issue to be addressed here is whether these scores and their analysis can also shed further light on current scholarly debates about the workings of Congress. Many theories of the legislative process have focused not on legislative effectiveness *per se*, but rather on the roles of such institutional and personal attributes as parties, the floor median, committees, race, gender, and ethnicity on the lawmaking process and on representation more generally. Although therefore not frequently articulated in terms of effectiveness, these theoretical contributions can be subjected to examination through the lens of legislative effectiveness, while at the same time helping us understand members' relative effectiveness. Based on previous scholarship, as well as on our preliminary analysis above, the following nine factors may well be related to a legislator's movement of bills through the legislative process.

Seniority Considerations

As noted above, we hypothesize that the cultivation of members' skills over time results in greater effectiveness. This claim is consistent with a longstanding body of research (e.g., Fiorina 1977, Mayhew 1974), suggesting that, as legislators spend more time in Congress, they become better, and more effective, at lawmaking. They have gained information and expertise regarding issues, other members' preferences, and the workings of the legislative process. As such, we would expect based on prior research, as well as our hypothesis, that more senior legislators would have a heightened ability to navigate the nuances of legislative politics.

Previous Legislative Experience

Consistent with the acquisition of skills considerations above, one might expect that legislators who have previously served in their state legislatures would be more effective than legislators without similar experiences. To the extent that effectiveness is a talent that can be acquired and cultivated across time, state legislatures might serve as training grounds for members of Congress to develop skills that will help them in their future careers in the House. Such state level political opportunities have long been considered a great benefit of American federalism (Peterson 1995: 8). Because legislatures vary in their levels of professionalism (e.g, Squire 1992), however, one might suspect that some legislatures serve as more rigorous proving grounds than others. Hence, we might expect the influence of previous state legislative experience to vary depending on different levels of state legislative professionalism.

Party Influence

Above, we suggested that majority party control might provide the institutional advantage necessary for a substantial boost in legislative effectiveness for that party's members. A vibrant debate has developed over the past two decades regarding the extent to which political parties,

and the majority party in particular, are influential in legislative politics (for early contributors,

see Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Krehbiel 1993, 1999; Rohde 1991). Several

theories posit different mechanisms of partisan influence, each with implications for the

prospects of party members' legislative effectiveness. Broadly speaking, if the majority party is

able to exercise influence over the legislative process at the expense of the minority party, then

we would expect that members of the majority party would be more effective at moving bills

through the House than would members of the minority party.

Legislative Leadership

A subset of strong-party theories has focused on the ways in which party leaders, in

particular, are able to exert influence over the legislative process. Whether they engage in

coercive arm-twisting to compel members to vote in accordance with their demands, as

presumably occurred in the era of "Czar" Cannon (e.g., Jones 1968), or if their influence is less

heavy-handed and is tantamount to legislative "vote-buying" (e.g., Snyder and Groseclose 2000),

one would expect that bills sponsored by majority party leaders would be more likely to be

considered in committee, receive attention outside the committee, and pass the House.

Alternatively, for bills sponsored by minority party leaders, we might expect the opposite, with

their efforts being suppressed by counteractive pressure on the part of majority party leaders.

Committee Influence

Above we hypothesized, and tentatively found, that institutional positions of committee

leadership greatly influence members' possibilities for effective lawmaking. Such a finding is

broadly consistent with the wide body of literature (e.g., Denzau and MacKay 1983, Shepsle and

Weingast 1987, Weingast and Marshall 1988) suggesting that committees facilitate distributional

politics. Given this view of committee strength, some members of Congress may well benefit

more than others. Chairs and members of the most powerful committees (Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means) should be disproportionately influential in comparison to the average member of the House. We would thus expect that bills sponsored by committee chairs generally and by members of the power committees would be more likely to be considered by their (and other) committees, more likely to reach the floor, and more likely to succeed in subsequent stages of the legislative process, which would result in greater effectiveness scores.

Ideological Considerations

In contrast to the proponents of strong party theories and of committees as outlying high demanders, an alternative perspective argues that legislative politics is majoritarian, and thus conducted in accordance with the policy preferences of a majority of members. Building on unidimensional median voter models (Black 1958, Downs 1957), a number of scholars argue that policies reflecting the preferences of the median voter are most likely to pass the House (e.g., Krehbiel 1991, Wiseman and Wright 2008). Hence, if legislators propose policies close to their ideal points, we would expect that the fates of bills supported by those legislators who are closest to the median voter would be more favorable than those of more extreme liberals and conservatives. Hence, more centrist legislators should be more effective.

Race and Gender Considerations

Because they are drawn from demographic groups that are both currently and historically underrepresented in Congress (descriptively, speaking), female legislators and those from racial and ethnic minorities may be disproportionately active in advocating policies neglected by others (e.g., Gertzog 1984, Leader 1977, Mezey 1978). While a body of scholarship has analyzed the experiences of female legislators and those from racial and ethnic minorities in state legislatures with varying results (e.g., Hamm, Harmel, and Thompson 1983; Saint-Germain 1989), much less

work explores race and gender concerns in a broad, congressionally-oriented framework.

Bringing issues onto the agenda that have been neglected previously, women and minorities may

be particularly effective in seeing new solutions to important problems, or particularly

ineffective in raising concerns that do not resonate with other lawmakers. Moreover, women and

minorities might find natural coalitions of members in support of their legislation through such

groups as the Congressional Black Caucus or the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues.

Natural Coalition Partners

Coming from the same state might also present the possibility of a natural coalition,

yielding greater legislative effectiveness. Because legislators from the same state might be

relatively ideologically similar to each other, or face similar distributive pressures in trying to

represent their constituents, a legislator might find coalition partners among the members of her

delegation. As such, one might suspect that legislators from states with larger congressional

delegations would be relatively more effective than those from states with smaller delegations.

The Electoral Connection

Finally, as noted by Fenno (1978), legislators implicitly believe that their effectiveness in

Congress is valued by their constituents. Such a relationship could be based on the position

taking involved in bill sponsorship or cosponsorship, or on credit claiming for advancing bills

toward their fruition in law (Mayhew 1974). To the extent that voters value such activities, one

would expect a relationship between legislators' effectiveness and their electoral security.

Multivariate Analysis

While the above list of political concerns is not meant to be all-inclusive, these factors

collectively represent a body of considerations that we suspect would be related to a legislator's

effectiveness. To identify whether, and how, such relationships might hold, we conducted

ordinary least squares regression analysis (with standard errors clustered by member to account for potential non-independence of their scores over time), controlling for these different factors.[12] Data on members' party affiliation, gender, ethnicity, vote share in the previous elections, seniority, whether or not they had served in their state legislatures, and whether they hold party leadership positions were drawn from various volumes of the *Almanac of American Politics*. Committee assignment data were drawn from Charles Stewart's committee data (see Nelson 1992, Stewart and Woon 2005) maintained on his website. State legislative professionalism was drawn from Squire's (1992) updated measure, which operationalizes professionalism as a weighted combination of the legislature's salary, staff, and time in session, relative to that of Congress. Finally, legislators' spatial preferences were measured by their Poole and Rosenthal first-dimension DW-NOMINATE scores. Variable descriptions, summary statistics, and sources are given in Supplemental Appendix C.

Our analysis from these regressions is presented in Table 2. Model 1 simply shows the regression of the LES on the member's LES from the previous Congress, along with a constant. As discussed above, and consistent with our innate abilities hypothesis, members show a strong positive correlation from Congress to Congress in their Legislative Effectiveness Scores. Models 2 and 3 of Table 2 include variables capturing all nine factors from previous theories on legislative politics discussed above. Model 2 considers all members in our sample from the 97th-

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[12] While we here explore the relationship between these key independent variables and members' LESs in a linear manner, it is worth noting that some of these relationships may be much more complex, with effective legislators likely to increase their reelection chances and to attain better committee assignments and leadership posts, for example. Further investigations of these complex relationships in the future are likely to be fruitful and informative.

109th Congresses, and Model 3 excludes those legislators who do not have a lagged effectiveness score (so that the sample is identical to the one analyzed in Model 4 below).[13]

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Consistent with our initial explorations above regarding members accumulating skills over time and relying on key institutional positions to aid in their effectiveness, the results in Models 2 and 3 reveal that a member's LES is clearly higher if she is more senior (though the impact of seniority is decreasing across a member's career), if she is a member of the majority party, or if she is a committee chair. Given that scores have been normalized to be mean 1.0 within each Congress, the magnitudes of the coefficients imply that majority party members and committee chairs are about two to five times more effective, respectively, than the average (non-majority) member of Congress.[14] However, the coefficient on *Seniority* suggests that the majority party advantage is not completely overwhelming. More specifically, relatively senior minority party members (those that have been in Congress for more than six terms) are as effective as the average majority party member without such experience.

Several of these findings comport well with existing research. Drawing on various reputational rankings for the North Carolina legislature, for example, Meyer (1980, 564), Weissert (1991b) and Miquel and Snyder (2006) demonstrate that majority party members and

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[13] The results reported below are substantively identical to those that emerge if analysis is conducted on logged LES as a dependent variable. Results from a tobit analysis are also highly substantively similar.

[14] Consistent with the work of Adler and Wilkerson (2005, 2007) committee chairs' greater effectiveness is likely influenced by the fact that many high priority bills that go through committees (and are presumably guaranteed to pass, such as reauthorizations) are introduced on behalf of the committee by their chairs. Hence, consistent with our institutional positions hypothesis, holding such positions would clearly enhance these legislators' observed effectiveness at creating laws.

more senior legislators are perceived to be more effective lawmakers than more junior and minority party legislators. Frantzich (1979) demonstrates that majority party, and more senior, House members have higher bill passage rates than minority party or less senior members; and his seniority finding is reinforced by Hamm, Harmel, and Thompson's (1983) study of the Texas and South Carolina legislatures. More recently, Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair (2003) and Cox and Terry (2008) have also found that majority party members, committee chairs, and more senior members have relatively more bills advance out of committee and pass the House than their more junior and minority party counterparts.

Our results reveal that the skill sets cultivated through state legislative experiences do not translate well to legislative effectiveness in Congress. A mild degree of support for learning within the most professional state legislatures is found in the positive coefficient on the interaction between service in the state legislature and that legislature's level of professionalism, but it does not attain statistical significance at conventional levels.

With respect to leadership positions, we find that majority party leaders have slightly lower LESs, yet the difference is not statistically significant. In contrast, minority party leaders and the Speaker of the House have lower LESs, with the differences being statistically significant. These findings are inconsistent with the work of Frantzich (1979), Hamm, Harmel, and Thompson (1983), Miquel and Snyder (2006), and Weissert (1991b) who generally find that party and chamber leadership is positively related to various forms of perceived (or actual) legislative productivity and effectiveness. While the negative coefficient on *Speaker* may be surprising at first glance, it is important to realize that our measure of effectiveness is based on how far legislators' bills advance in the legislative process. Because the Speaker of the House traditionally introduces few, if any, bills, and those bills that are offered are often controversial

or represent major portions of the majority party agenda (e.g., the *Contract with America* in the 104th Congress), it should not be surprising that the Speakers' bills might be less likely to advance than other bills. This is not to say that the Speaker is an ineffective legislator, but rather that the way we are conceptualizing effectiveness, as the ability of legislators to advance their bills through Congress, might not capture other notions of effectiveness, such as those which may be exerted by the Speaker.

Models 2 and 3 also reveal that members of top committees (i.e., Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means) who are not chairs have lower LESs than rank-and-file members of the House.[15] This finding likely follows from the fact that much of the high priority legislation that goes through these committees (e.g., Appropriations bills with a substantial likelihood of passage) is introduced by the committee chairs. Rank-and-file members of top committees tend to concentrate their efforts on the important areas governed by their committees, and therefore introduce less legislation than the average House member. Such tendencies naturally contribute to lower LESs for these members.

With respect to gender, and race and ethnicity, we see that women have higher LESs than men, while African-American legislators have lower LESs than whites, with no systematic differences between Latino members and the average member of Congress.[16] These findings are consistent with some strands of the legislative politics literatures on race, gender, and ethnicity. Saint-Germain (1989) and Bratton (2005), for example, find that female legislators experience

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[15] These findings are substantively identical if we define power committees to include the Budget Committee.

[16] Further analysis (not included here) reveals that African-American legislators are significantly more effective than the average member of Congress at moving commemorative/symbolic bills through the legislative process. This finding suggests that further study is necessary to understand the various strategies that are employed by different legislators to advance their policy agendas.

higher rates of success than their male counterparts in several state legislatures; and Bratton and Haynie (1999) find that African-American legislators are less successful in several state legislatures. In contrast, Hamm, Harmel, and Thompson (1983) find that ethnicity is not heavily correlated with number of bills (or rate of bills) that are sponsored and passed in the Texas and South Carolina House of Representatives; and Thomas and Welch (1991) find that female state legislators are generally less successful than their male counterparts. In one of the few works that addresses these questions at the congressional level, Jeydel and Taylor (2003) find that legislative success is not clearly related to gender.[17]

With respect to vote share, we see that more electorally-safe members are more effective, but the relative impact of electoral safety on legislative effectiveness exhibits decreasing returns. This finding suggests that at-risk members might devote their efforts to activities other than legislative productivity (e.g., district casework), while safer members can (or choose to) focus their attentions on becoming effective lawmakers. Alternatively, if legislators are rewarded at the polls for their effectiveness, one would expect that the most electorally safe legislators are those who are most successful getting legislation introduced and passed into law. These findings, combined with existing studies (e.g., Frantzich 1979, Miquel and Snyder 2006, Weissert 1991b) that have yielded contradictory findings on this matter, suggests that the true relationship between electoral success and legislative effectiveness may require much additional work to disentangle. Finally, we see that a legislator's distance from the chamber median, and the size of her state's congressional delegation are not statistically significant predictors of her LES.

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[17] Consistent with Anzia and Berry (2008) one possible explanation for our female legislator finding is that female candidates might be generically discriminated against in the electoral arena; and hence, female candidates who are ultimately elected tend to have greater innate lawmaking ability than their average male counterparts.

Model 4 in Table 2 presents the results from a regression controlling for all of a legislator's personal and institutional attributes, as well as his or her lagged LES. As we can see from this model, a member's lagged LES continues to be positively related with his or her LES in the current Congress, even when controlling for a myriad of personal and institutional attributes. This is consistent with our view that members have innate abilities that aid in their effectiveness over time. The signs and significance of the coefficients on the different personal and institutional variables are substantively similar to those models without controlling for lagged LES. As before, cultivation of skills by senior members aids in their overall effectiveness, and the key institutional positions of committee chairs and majority party members enhance members' effectiveness as well, even controlling for their innate abilities.

Finally, the adjusted-R^2 of Model 4 is 0.56, suggesting that about 56% of the variance in a member's LES can be explained by his or her lagged LES score (i.e., how effective the member was in the previous Congress), and the personal and institutional circumstances that he or she faces in the current Congress. Hence, although each member engages in numerous activities resulting in her LES in any given Congress, the underlying factors of innate ability, acquired skills, and institutional position, coupled with considerations from earlier theories of legislative politics, go a long way toward explaining who "gets things done" in Congress.[18]

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[18] In considering these findings, however, a plausible concern might be that legislators' decisions to expend *effort* might influence their effectiveness in ways are not controlled for in our analysis. To account for this possibility, in auxiliary analysis (not presented here) we identified "high effort" legislators as those who introduced at least 10 bills in a Congress and found that the propensity to be a high effort legislator correlates with many of the variables in Table 2 in predictable ways. Furthermore, we find that the results of Table 2 are substantively similar to what occurs if we confine our analysis only to those "high effort" members.

In sum, the legislative effectiveness scores offered here have some face validity, not just in the objective way in which they are constructed, but also in how they reflect concrete concepts of congressional politics without picking up vast amounts of unexplained noise; and we argue that the concept of legislative effectiveness offers a useful lens through which to view major theories of legislative politics. Given the tentative nature of the current findings, however, we suggest that much work is left to be done. For example, first, fruitful work will likely arise from examining each of these theories separately, using legislative effectiveness scores broken down by Congress, by committee, or by issue area. Second, systematic explorations of existing theories taking into account the *interrelated* nature of effectiveness and committee appointments or of effectiveness and electoral success, for instance, will likely isolate clearer underlying mechanisms of legislative organization, electoral behavior, and legislative effectiveness. Third, subtler effects should also be explored in future work, such as interactions between committee chairs and their distance from the floor or majority party median (to explore gatekeeping and committee responsiveness to party preferences) or between gender and party control.[19]

Conclusions and Future Directions

Why are some lawmakers consistently found in the middle of the most intriguing political and policy concerns of the day, while others are rarely heard of outside of their districts? To what extent is U.S. national public policymaking controlled by a small group of highly effective and influential elites? These sorts of questions have driven political inquiry on Congress for

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[19] In additional analysis not reported here, for example, we find that the enhanced effectiveness of women is systematic and strong for women in the minority party, but that men and women in the majority party have about the same level of legislative effectiveness, all else equal. We also find (with modest statistical support) that a legislator's distance from the majority party median is negatively correlated with his or her effectiveness, which is clearly relevant to the parties-in-legislatures debate.

decades. Yet the concept that some members of Congress are more effective as lawmakers than others has yet to receive the attention it deserves as a fundamental cornerstone of legislative studies. In this paper, we call for legislative scholars to turn their attention to a broad agenda on legislative effectiveness in Congress. We take steps toward advancing that agenda ourselves.

We argue that at the foundations of legislative effectiveness are the three concepts of innate ability, acquired skill, and institutional positioning. We develop Legislative Effectiveness Scores for each member in each of the 97th through 109th Congresses, based on their sponsorship of legislation, the fate of that legislation, and the legislation's substantive significance. We demonstrate that members' innate abilities, acquired skills, and institutional positions are well reflected in their LESs. And we demonstrate that legislative effectiveness is related to many of the theoretical concepts common throughout the congressional politics literature. Some intriguing results, such as the high effectiveness of majority party members, women, and committee chairs call out for further investigations of how the underlying political processes work to produce these findings. Other findings, such as that a freshman member's effectiveness score significantly predicts his or her career choices to seek higher office or retire from the House indicate that the LES has tapped into something fundamental about the political make-up of individual lawmakers.

However, we see this paper as just the tip of the iceberg for the legislative effectiveness agenda. Potential theoretical explorations of how effective members influence congressional politics touch on every aspect of the legislative process. Theories of elections could explore whether more effective members are able to use such successes to find some breathing space in taking ideological positions that vary from the district's median position. Theories of interest groups could focus on when lobbyists concentrate their efforts on effective members versus on

majority building activities. Spatial theories could incorporate the need for support by key

effective members rather than just a bare majority of legislators. Informational theories could

account for different abilities and expertise of more effective members. Partisan theories could

explore the cultivation and positioning of key committee members and party leaders from among

the most effective party members.

Empirical investigations of all of these possibilities could be based in part on utilization

of the Legislative Effectiveness Scores described here. Indeed, while we explore the *causes* of

legislative effectiveness, future work on the *effects* of legislative effectiveness, using the LES as

an independent variable in explaining such phenomena as reelection, fundraising, and

progressive ambition, would be of great value. Moreover, we believe that this paper raises far

more empirical questions than it answers. For example, what should a typical member of

Congress do in her early terms to enhance her effectiveness over time? What specific strategies

do members engage in to acquire an effective skill set from one Congress to the next? Do

members emulate the effective legislative strategies of their colleagues? Do they learn from their

own successes and failures over time? Are there some members who, as rank-and-file members,

are fairly effective, but who as committee chairs are among the most effective members ever

seen in Congress? If so, how were they able to use their institutional position to its greatest

advantage? We encourage other congressional scholars to join in this effort to explore legislative

effectiveness in Congress in a systematic fashion.

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Table 1a: Relationship between Effectiveness in Freshman and Sophomore Terms

	Below the Median Sophomore LES within their party	Above the Median Sophomore LES within their party	Total
At/Below the Median Freshman LES within their party	217	97	314
Above the Median Freshman LES within their party	127	219	346
Total	344	316	660

$$\chi^2(1) = 69.26 \text{ (p-value} < .001)$$

Table 1b: Relationship between Effectiveness in Freshman Term and Seeking Higher Office

	Does Not Seek Higher Office	Seeks Higher Office	Total
At/Below the Median Freshman LES within their party	389	58	447
Above the Median Freshman LES within their party	350	81	431
Total	739	139	878

$$\chi^2(1) = 5.57 \text{ (p-value} = 0.018)$$

Table 1c: Relationship between Effectiveness in Freshman Term and Decision to Retire

	Does Not Retire From Office	Ever Retires from Office	Total
At/Below the Median Freshman LES within their party	355	92	447
Above the Median Freshman LES within their party	366	65	431
Total	721	157	878

$$\chi^2(1) = 4.52 \text{ (p-value} = 0.033)$$

Table 2: Determinants of Legislative Effectiveness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lagged Effectiveness Score	0.700***			0.505***
	(0.030)			(0.039)
Seniority		0.152***	0.137***	0.058***
		(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.015)
Seniority^2		-0.003**	-0.002	-0.002**
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
State Legislative Experience		-0.016	-0.020	-0.016
		(0.097)	(0.111)	(0.066)
State Legislative Experience $\times$ Legislative Prof.		0.304	0.374	0.227
		(0.327)	(0.367)	(0.207)
Majority Party		0.882***	1.009***	0.605***
		(0.069)	(0.083)	(0.053)
Majority Party Leadership		-0.101	-0.102	0.122
		(0.229)	(0.236)	(0.155)
Minority Party Leadership		-0.430***	-0.380***	-0.121
		(0.139)	(0.137)	(0.087)
Speaker		-1.157***	-1.060***	-0.957***
		(0.309)	(0.284)	(0.305)
Committee Chair		2.648***	2.610***	1.769***
		(0.304)	(0.310)	(0.204)
Power Committee		-0.442***	-0.473***	-0.257***
		(0.070)	(0.074)	(0.038)
Distance from Median		0.006	0.038	-0.032
		(0.141)	(0.168)	(0.106)
Female		0.106*	0.168***	0.119***
		(0.055)	(0.065)	(0.041)
African-American		-0.362***	-0.318***	-0.192***
		(0.084)	(0.091)	(0.059)
Latino		0.059	0.082	0.022
		(0.095)	(0.098)	(0.065)
Size of Congressional Delegation		-0.001	-0.002	-0.001
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Vote Share		0.018	0.032**	0.028**
		(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.012)
Vote Share^2		-0.0001	-0.0002**	-0.0002**
		(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Constant	0.407***	-0.820*	-1.322	-1.048**
	(0.025)	(0.438)	(0.574)	(0.459)
N	4511	5505	4402	4402
Adjusted-R^2	0.44	0.40	0.40	0.56

Robust standard errors in parentheses, observations clustered by member.
* $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed), ** $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed), *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Supplemental Appendix A: Comments on weights for legislative categories in LES

In selecting the values for α, β, and γ to generate each member's LES, we sought to choose values that reflected the belief that substantively significant legislation (weighted by γ) would be generally more influential than substantive legislation (weighted by β), which in turn would be generally more influential than commemorative/symbolic legislation (weighted by α). Our selection of 1, 5, and 10 to correspond with α, β, and γ, respectively, reflects this assumption. In order to ascertain the substantive impacts of varying these weights, the following methodology was employed.

First, we replicated our regression analysis in Table 2, Model 4 where we allowed the weights of α, β, and γ to take on any integer values between 1 and 10, inclusive. Upon completing these 1000 regressions, we compared the R^2 that corresponded with each regression to identify the weights that yielded the best fit for the data, given these independent variables. Our results revealed that the specification that yielded the lowest R^2 (of 0.06) was the one where $\alpha = 10$, and $\beta = \gamma = 1$ (i.e., substantively significant bills were weighed as highly as substantive bills, and both were weighted ten times less than commemorative legislation.) In contrast, we found that the specification that yielded the greatest R^2 (of 0.56) was the one where $\alpha = 1$, $\beta = 5$, and $\gamma = 10$, which is the model that we ultimately used in the analysis in this paper. Moreover, all regressions based on $\alpha < \beta < \gamma$ showed the same fundamental patterns of variable significance as those reported in Model 4 of Table 2. Thus the main results are quite robust to the choice of weights.

To further investigate the robustness of these findings, we replicated this analysis, allowing α, β, and γ to take on any integer values between 1 and 100. Our analysis reveals that across this region of the parameter space, there is no interior solution that maximizes the R^2 of the regression. Instead, we find that R^2 is maximized whenever $\alpha = 1$, γ takes the maximal value of the interval, and β is about half the size of γ. Conversely, we find that R^2 is minimized whenever $\gamma = \beta = 1$, and α was the maximal value of the interval. In no cases did the R^2 achieve a value greater than 0.56. The substantive results of these alternative regressions so closely mimic those of Table 2 (as long as $\alpha < \beta < \gamma$), that we are comfortable using the 1-5-10 weightings throughout the paper.

Supplemental Appendix B: Freshmen in top 10% of their cohort in LES in 98th Congress

Name	LES	State Legislature?	Current Political Position
Rich Boucher (VA)	2.595	Yes	House
Katie Hall (IN)	2.156	Yes	Lost reelection bid (99th Congress)
Bill Richardson (NM)	1.997	No	Governor
Barbara Kennelly (CT)	1.352	No	Lost bid for Governor (1998)
Barbara Boxer (CA)	1.333	No	Senate
James McNulty (AZ)	1.202	Yes	Lost reelection bid (99th Congress)
John Bryant (TX)	1.087	Yes	Lost bid for Senate (1996)
James Clarke (NC)	0.946	Yes	Lost reelection bid (99th Congress)
Alan Mollohan (WV)	0.898	No	House

Supplemental Appendix C: Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Description	Mean	Std. Dev.
Seniority[a]	Number of terms served by member in Congress	5.170	3.937
State Legislative Experience[a]	Equals "1" if member served in state legislature	0.507	0.500
State Legislative Professionalism[b]	Squire's index of state professionalism relative to Congress	0.285	0.151
Majority Party[a]	Equals "1" if member is in majority party	0.561	0.496
Majority Party Leadership[a]	Equals "1" if member is in majority party leadership	0.011	0.103
Minority Party Leadership[a]	Equals "1" if member is in minority party leadership	0.008	0.089
Speaker[a]	Equals "1" if member is Speaker of the House	0.002	0.050
Committee Chair[c]	Equals "1" if member is a committee chair	0.050	0.218
Power Committee[c]	Equals "1" if member serves on Rules, Appropriations, or Ways and Means	0.251	0.434
Distance from Median[d]	|Member i's DW-NOMINATE score – Median member's DW-NOMINATE score|	0.364	0.222
Female[a]	Equals "1" if member is female	0.096	0.295
African-American[a]	Equals "1" if member is African-American	0.070	0.255
Latino[a]	Equals "1" if member is Latino/Latina	0.033	0.178
Size of Congressional Delegation[e]	Number of districts in state congressional delegation	18.34	14.16
Vote Share[a]	Percentage of vote received in previous election	68.58	13.72

Data sources:
[a]Constructed by authors based on *Almanac of American Politics*, various years.
[b]Constructed by authors based on updates to Squire (1992).
[c]Constructed by authors based on Nelson (1992) and Stewart and Woon (2005).
[d]Constructed by authors from DW-NOMINATE scores provided by Keith Poole.
[e]Constructed by authors.