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The Impact of Party and Ideology on Roll-Call Voting in State Legislatures

To assess the relative impact of party and ideology on legislative behavior, I utilize survey-based measures of legislator ideology to examine voting in five state legislatures. The results suggest that, although party and ideology both influence voting, the impact of party is greater. The magnitude of this impact varies, however, from chamber to chamber. The activity of parties in the electoral arena explains part of this variance, with more active parties having more influence. Thus, research on legislative behavior should focus on the context surrounding the decision-making process in order for us to understand the influences on voting.

In attempting to understand how public policies are formulated, political scientists have focused on the nature of decision making in legislatures and on the influences on elected officials' roll-call decisions. Many studies have examined the impact of political parties and the personal beliefs of legislators. There is much debate over which of these two factors is more important, however. The lack of consistent findings regarding legislative decision making stems largely from the mismeasurement of legislator ideology. The key problem is that direct, independent measures of legislator ideology are difficult to obtain. Because the key influences over roll-call voting are highly interrelated, the findings that emerge from these studies are inconclusive.

Given this mismeasurement, the debate about the relative role of party and ideology in influencing legislative decision making continues. Some scholars argue that it is the legislators' fundamental beliefs that give rise to parties, which in turn drive roll-call voting; others argue the personal beliefs of legislators are sometimes in conflict with their partisan affiliations, which may trump beliefs in determining votes. But most studies fail to provide conclusive evidence that party matters, because they lack independent assessments of the personal beliefs of elected officials. The question of whether or not parties matter then is still unresolved.

In this article, I utilize independent measures of party and ideology, acquired from surveys of state legislative candidates, to examine the individual influence of each of these factors on roll-call voting in five U.S. state legislatures over the 1993–98 legislative sessions. The results of my analysis indicate that both party and ideology exert consistent and large effects on roll-call voting. These findings give weight to a growing body of literature that argues political parties are central to understanding the nature of decision making in legislative bodies. This analysis also shows variance in the magnitude of the impact of each of these factors; preliminary analysis suggests this variance is in part due to the electoral activity of political parties. Where parties are more active in the electoral arena, parties exert more influence over roll-call voting. These results reveal the importance of examining the context of state politics in order to truly understand the legislative decision-making process.

Influences on Roll-Call Voting

Research has shown that the personal beliefs of legislators, typically modeled using interest group ratings as a proxy for personal beliefs, play an important role in determining their legislative behavior (Kalt and Zupan 1984; Kau and Rubin 1979; Kau, Keenan, and Rubin 1982; Segal, Cameron, and Cover 1992). What these studies lack, however, is a measure of legislator beliefs that is independent of roll-call voting. Using interest group ratings to determine the influence of personal ideology on votes may seriously overestimate the importance of ideology and underestimate the importance of other variables in the model, since votes and ratings tap the same underlying dimension (Jackson and Kingdon 1992, 809). That is, the interest group ratings themselves may have been influenced by factors such as political parties. Thus, these studies suffer from a serious methodological flaw.

A handful of studies at the state and national level use survey data on legislator ideology to examine its influence on legislative behavior, and these studies find that personal beliefs are important (Miller and Stokes 1963; Patterson and Scully 1998). But this research also suffers from methodological shortcomings. For example, Miller and Stokes rely on a small sample of constituents and focus on only one legislature (Congress), thus impairing their ability to draw conclusions about legislatures generally. Patterson and Scully also look at only one legislature (Ohio) and focus on party votes only. This approach is problematic because these votes may be particularly important to political parties, so parties may work especially hard to

whip their members into line. Thus, the exclusion of other votes may lead to an overestimation of the influence of party and impair our ability to draw conclusions about the relative influence of different factors over roll-call voting.

Hence, it is unclear the extent to which ideology influences vote decisions. There are a number of reasons to believe, however, that ideology influences legislative behavior and that this influence is significant. Representatives may seek to promote their ideological beliefs for the satisfaction of knowing they are helping others or simply because they believe they are doing the right thing (Kalt and Zupan 1984, 281; Wittman 1983). Finally, because it is difficult for legislators to ascertain exactly what their constituents want for each vote that legislators are called upon to cast, legislators may assume the voters elected them because they share personal beliefs. Hence, legislators may believe that their own preferences are the best proxy for the preferences of their constituents.

When asked to rate the importance of various factors in their vote decisions, legislators also tend to indicate these decisions are influenced by party (Kingdon 1989; Matthews and Stimson 1975; Ray 1982; Songer et al. 1986). Despite direct evidence from legislators themselves that political parties play an important role in influencing votes, there is much debate on the extent to which parties influence roll-call voting and exactly how parties exert any influence they do have.

On one hand, some scholars argue that in a legislature with unidimensional voting, the pivotal or median voter determines the chamber's choices. If it is the pivotal voter's location that determines the outcome, then parties play no formal role in influencing the outcome of votes (Krehbiel 1998, 2000). Essentially, these scholars argue that the relationship between party and vote decisions is spurious; the fundamental relationship is between beliefs and votes, not partisan identification and votes (Fiorina 1974; Krehbiel 2000; Shade et al. 1973; Shannon 1968).

On the other hand, numerous studies attempt to counteract this claim, with some researchers arguing politicians may support their party because parties make it easier to achieve their policy goals (Aldrich and Rohde 1997; Cooper and Brady 1981), while others argue politicians support their party because they desire to be reelected and their electoral fate may be tied to the brand name of the party (Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Smith 2000). Finally, some scholars argue that elected officials may support their party out of a sense of commitment to and belongingness in the party organization (Baer 1993; March and Olsen 1989). Whatever the mechanism for

party influence, many researchers refute the claim that parties do not matter in legislatures.

Thus, scholars argue both that parties play little role and that parties play a key role in influencing legislative decision making. The ambiguity surrounding these findings stems primarily from the difficulty of obtaining independent measures of the key variables of interest. "Serious technical obstacles stand in the way of estimating the indirect effects of party, the most important of which is isolating exogenous variables for party and preferences" (Smith 2000, 205). For instance, it is difficult to ascertain the true nature of parties' influence over roll-call votes when adequate controls for the personal ideology of elected officials do not exist; these two variables are inexorably intertwined. Only by utilizing non-roll-call-based measures of ideology can we begin to clarify the debate surrounding the nature of legislative decision making and answer questions such as whether and when parties matter.

Data

For this analysis, I chose five states that were surveyed for the Election Dynamics Project (EDP) conducted by John Frensdreis and Alan Gitelson: Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. As part of the EDP, all general-election state legislative candidates and county party chairs from the Democratic and Republican parties were surveyed during the 1992, 1994, and 1996 election cycles. The survey asked respondents to place themselves on a liberal-conservative scale. The responses to this question provided a key independent variable in this analysis.

While these states do not constitute a random sample of the 50 states, they do vary on a number of key characteristics. For example, with respect to party competition as measured by Aistrup (1993) for the 1980–85 period, the states' average scores range from $-.3506$ in Florida to $.2290$ in Colorado. Between these extremes, Illinois scores $-.0179$, Missouri $-.2259$, and Wisconsin $-.1066$. Few states fall closer to the lower extreme for this measure than Florida, and, at the upper end, only South Dakota, Idaho, and Utah score higher than Colorado. These states also exhibit variety on key indicators of legislative professionalism. For example, Colorado had relatively low legislator salaries (\$17,500) with no raises during this period and provided little to no money for office and staff expenses (legislators were not given staffing allowances during the 1993–94 session and were given only \$1000 in subsequent sessions). In contrast, Florida legislators received

a monthly allocation for staff that exceeded Colorado's allocation for the entire session, and only four other legislatures provided salaries greater than those in the Illinois legislature. Finally, there is also variation in the patterns of party control in these legislatures. Republicans controlled the Colorado legislature and Democrats controlled the Missouri legislature during the entire time period, but there was at least one change in party control in Florida, Illinois, and Wisconsin during these legislative sessions. Although it would have been useful to look at other states for this analysis, the use of variables from the EDP survey constrained the analysis to those states selected for the EDP survey.

This analysis focuses on a subset of survey respondents, namely those state legislative candidates who were elected to office and became state legislators. Of those who returned surveys, 383 in 1992, 390 in 1994, and 318 in 1996 were from winning candidates. Response rates, as shown in Table 2, ranged from a high of 60.6% in the Wisconsin House in 1992 to a low of 28.3% in the Florida House in 1996. The average response rate across all survey cycles and chambers was 50.3%.¹ Because many of the state senates are relatively small bodies, even a fairly healthy response rate produces a very small number of cases in a few situations. To avoid the problems associated with estimation involving such small numbers, I only included those chambers yielding more than 15 respondents in this analysis. As a result, the Colorado Senate for the 1993–94 session, the Florida Senate for the 1995–96 and 1997–98 sessions, the Missouri Senate for the 1997–98 session, and the Wisconsin Senate for the 1993–94 session were eliminated from the investigation.

Perhaps the more important question, aside from how many legislators responded to these surveys, is how representative these respondents were of the chamber at large. To answer this question, I ran tests that compared all members in a given session to survey respondents on a number of characteristics, including district demographics, partisan affiliation, and tendencies to vote liberally (NOMINATE scores). The one-sample T-tests (results not presented here) indicated that these samples were fairly representative of the legislature as a whole. In no cases were there significant differences between the voting records and the partisan affiliation for the sample of legislators versus those for the entire legislature. Additionally, there was no difference among legislators in their tendency to respond to the survey that could be attributed to the competitiveness of the election: legislators from competitive races were no more or less likely to respond to the survey than those from noncompetitive races. Finally, when I compared the demographic composition of the districts of the sample

legislators and that of the entire legislature, I found only two significant differences out of a total of 69 comparisons, and these differences were small in a substantive sense. All in all then, although a few significant differences emerged between the sample and the population of state legislators in these analyses, the sample seemed to be representative of the legislature as a whole in terms of voting tendencies, partisan affiliation, and district demographics. In other words, these respondents accurately reflected the composition of the legislative body as a whole and seemed to provide solid footing for drawing conclusions about the nature of legislative behavior in the states.

The dependent variables were NOMINATE scores generated from data collected from the Colorado, Florida, Missouri, and Wisconsin state legislative journals and from the *Almanac of Illinois Politics* (Joens and Kleppner 1998; Roberts and Kleppner 1994, 1996) for Illinois.² For Colorado, Florida, Missouri, and Wisconsin, I included all recorded roll-call votes (including procedural votes).³ For Illinois, the *Almanac* selected important votes for each legislative session; I used all of these important votes in this analysis.⁴ Because the states have different rules on voting, such as present votes, absent votes, and changing votes after the roll-call, I only included yes or no votes recorded at the time of the initial vote. When generating NOMINATE scores, I set parameters in all states so that votes with at least 2.5% minority voting were included and every legislator who cast at least 25 votes was included.⁵ Because NOMINATE cannot identify a pole with a particular label (in other words, it can only determine which legislators' voting records fall near the extremes, not what the extremes represent), I examined all NOMINATE scores and recoded them so that a positive score represents a tendency to vote liberally and a negative score represents a tendency to vote conservatively.

I pooled the votes for each year into two-year sessions. For instance, I pooled roll-call data for the 1993 Colorado House with roll-call data for the 1994 Colorado House and then generated NOMINATE scores. Additionally, because the underlying votes that make up the NOMINATE scores are different from state to state, year to year, and chamber to chamber (although presumably some votes were similar in a given house and senate in a particular session), I kept each session and chamber separate rather than pooling them together.⁶ The unit of analysis here was legislator-session. NOMINATE scores range from -1 to +1, and in each session, high NOMINATE scores represent a tendency to vote liberally.⁷

Table 1 shows the goodness-of-fit statistics for the NOMINATE scores. The fourth column shows the percent of all votes cast that were

TABLE 1
NOMINATE Statistics

Legislature	Number of Legislators	Number of Roll Calls	Percent Correctly Classified	Avg	Min	Max	APRE	GMP
CO House 1993–94	65	1,018	87.0	.143	–.968	.985	.422	.703
CO House 1995–96	65	1,032	88.6	.011	–.983	.955	.478	.720
CO House 1997–98	65	945	87.4	.080	–.935	.987	.376	.727
CO Senate 1995–96	35	285	90.2	–.171	–.937	.997	.528	.769
CO Senate 1997–98	36	677	89.1	.025	–.962	.992	.442	.754
FL House 1993–94	121	285	88.0	.081	–.990	.963	.515	.716
FL House 1995–96	121	309	86.9	–.130	–.977	.950	.456	.723
FL House 1997–98	123	364	88.6	–.124	–.947	.987	.581	.746
FL Senate 1993–94	40	251	87.2	–.022	–.994	.967	.288	.679
IL House 1993–94	117	199	84.1	.035	–.960	.978	.489	.695
IL House 1995–96	117	158	90.3	–.018	–1.000	.952	.679	.793
IL House 1997–98	119	189	84.6	–.011	–.955	.982	.305	.675
IL Senate 1993–94	58	196	87.8	–.259	–.970	.943	.596	.749
IL Senate 1995–96	59	165	88.6	–.258	–.970	.997	.645	.768
IL Senate 1997–98	59	149	87.8	–.145	–.999	.954	.336	.705
MO House 1995–96	163	417	87.2	.078	–.999	.965	.430	.720
MO House 1997–98	166	934	88.4	.197	–.996	.967	.486	.725
MO Senate 1995–96	34	254	88.0	.283	–.994	.994	.291	.686
WI House 1993–94	101	531	87.2	–.023	–.992	.959	.616	.732
WI House 1995–96	100	886	91.7	–.094	–.998	.973	.766	.798
WI House 1997–98	101	501	90.2	–.140	–.970	.950	.699	.775
WI Senate 1995–96	35	529	91.2	–.103	–.982	.965	.746	.796
WI Senate 1997–98	34	296	91.3	.019	–.999	.991	.713	.789

Note: “Number of Legislators” represents the number of legislators for whom NOMINATE scores were generated. NOMINATE scores were generated for all legislators in a given session (not only those who responded to the Election Dynamics Project) in order to enhance the validity of these scores.

correctly classified, the eighth column shows the aggregate proportional reduction in error (APRE) and the final column shows the geometric mean probability (GMP).⁸ Over 84% of the cases are correctly predicted in each legislative session, and the average percent of votes correctly predicted across all sessions is 88.32%. Additionally, the mean APRE across these sessions is .517 and the mean GMP is .737. All of the goodness-of-fit measures are on par with those reported for the U.S. House and Senate by Poole and Rosenthal (1997). There are a

few cases in which the APRE is slightly less than it would be for Congress, but in all cases, the GMP is higher than the average GMP for Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 28). Clearly, the NOMINATE scores generated for this analysis are as valid and accurate as the NOMINATE scores produced for Congress. As such, they provide a sound basis for analyzing roll-call voting in these states.

The first independent variable in this analysis was *Legislator Ideology*. The data for this measure came from the EDP, which included information on the ideology of candidates. For the ideology measure, candidates were asked to place themselves on a seven-point liberal-conservative scale, ranging from strongly conservative (1) to strongly liberal (7). Specifically, candidates were instructed, "Below is a scale on which the political views people might hold are listed. Where would you place yourself on this scale? Please mark the point that best describes you." This question immediately follows a heading that states, "Finally, we would like to ask you a few questions about yourself." From the heading and the text of the question itself, it seems clear that this measure is intended to gauge the personal beliefs of the candidate, not his or her public ideology. Respondents to this survey were guaranteed confidentiality, and the responses to these surveys were never made public. Hence, unlike other recent measures of ideology, such as Project Vote Smart surveys, there should be less concern that this measure represents the public ideology of legislative candidates rather than their own personal, political beliefs.⁹

Table 2 shows descriptive information for this variable. In each legislative session examined here, the average value for the ideology variable falls between "somewhat conservative" (3) and "moderate, middle of the road" (4). This slight skew toward the conservative end of the spectrum is also reflected in the range for each session, shown in columns five and six. There were only five sessions in which no "very conservative" (1) response was recorded, while there were seven sessions in which no "very liberal" (7) responses were recorded, and two sessions in which the maximum score was "somewhat liberal" (5). For the most part, the average response in these legislative sessions falls near the middle of the scale. The standard deviation for this measure is fairly consistent across legislative sessions as well, ranging from a low of .86 in the Florida Senate in the 1993–94 session to a high of 1.60 in the Colorado Senate in 1997–98 and the Florida House in 1995–96. The average standard deviation across all sessions is 1.41. Thus, the responses tend to cluster around the middle of the scale. Finally, the last column in Table 2 shows the correlations between the ideology and party identification variables. These variables tend to be

TABLE 2
Ideology Statistics

Legislature	EDP Response Rate	Number of Responses	Avg	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Correlation with PID
CO House 1993–94	60.0%	39	3.79	1	7	1.56	.622***
CO House 1995–96	52.3%	34	3.09	1	7	1.51	.716***
CO House 1997–98	50.8%	33	3.52	1	6	1.28	.574***
CO Senate 1995–96	51.4%	18	3.22	2	7	1.40	.405
CO Senate 1997–98	57.1%	20	3.15	1	7	1.60	.602***
FL House 1993–94	46.7%	54	3.89	1	7	1.30	.544***
FL House 1995–96	40.0%	47	3.19	1	7	1.60	.615***
FL House 1997–98	28.3%	31	3.16	1	7	1.59	.470***
FL Senate 1993–94	37.5%	15	3.80	2	5	.86	.131
IL House 1993–94	55.9%	64	3.81	1	7	1.54	.551***
IL House 1995–96	55.9%	64	3.61	1	7	1.28	.603***
IL House 1997–98	40.7%	45	3.69	2	6	1.18	.636***
IL Senate 1993–94	49.2%	27	3.48	2	6	1.22	.634***
IL Senate 1995–96	47.5%	27	3.48	2	6	1.22	.634***
IL Senate 1997–98	50.8%	29	3.45	1	6	1.27	.744***
MO House 1995–96	53.4%	86	3.34	1	7	1.45	.698***
MO House 1997–98	39.9%	65	3.48	1	7	1.58	.784***
MO Senate 1995–96	58.8%	19	3.47	1	5	1.35	.714***
WI House 1993–94	58.6%	57	3.61	1	7	1.47	.602***
WI House 1995–96	59.6%	57	3.32	1	7	1.53	.677***
WI House 1997–98	49.5%	49	3.37	1	7	1.58	.655***
WI Senate 1995–96	60.6%	19	3.58	1	6	1.47	.576*
WI Senate 1997–98	51.5%	16	3.44	1	6	1.55	.751**

Note: Entries in last column are Pearsons Product Moment Correlations. PID stands for party identification.

*** Significant at .001 level; ** Significant at .01 level; *Significant at .05 level.

fairly highly correlated, although perhaps not as highly as one might have expected. No correlation is above .8: The maximum correlation recorded here is .784 in the Missouri House in the 1997–98 session, and the lowest correlation (.131) is in the Florida Senate in the 1993–94 session. All of these correlations are significant with the exception of 2 of the 23 legislative sessions. While these correlations are robust, they are not strong enough to preclude an examination of the independent impact of both the ideology and party identification variables on voting tendencies.

For this analysis, I included only state legislators (winning candidates) from each state in the analysis. I matched the NOMINATE scores to surveys of state legislators collected from the previous election year; thus, 1992 election surveys were matched to the 1993–94 legislative session, 1994 surveys were matched to the 1995–96 legislative session, and 1996 surveys were matched to the 1997–98 legislative session. To simplify the presentation of results, I listed the legislative session years in all tables.

To control for constituency opinion, I also matched candidates to legislative district demographic data from the 1990 census taken from the *Almanac of State Legislatures*. Ideally, one would use survey data on the opinions of constituents matched with individual legislators, but these data are not available at the state legislative district level. Oftentimes, the district presidential vote is used as a proxy for the personal beliefs of constituents at the congressional level, but, once again, these data are not available at the state legislative district level. The only data available at the state legislative district level is demographic data. Although the use of these data is less than ideal, controls for the opinion of constituents must be included in the model. Because, arguably, preferences are to a significant degree a function of social and economic characteristics, demographics will serve as a proxy measure of those preferences.

I included the demographics *Race*, *Income*, and *Farm Population*. I operationalized *Race* as the percent of African American constituents in a district, *Income* as average per capita income in thousands of dollars in a district, and *Farm Population* as the percent of constituents who farm for a living in a district. There were a number of other variables I could have included, but collinearity was quite high, and I chose these three because they represent important dimensions of the constituency and were the most consistently related to the dependent variable in a bivariate analysis (results not presented here).¹⁰ The addition of other demographic variables typically had the effect of reducing adjusted R² values because of the lost degrees of freedom coupled with a failure to explain additional variance. Finally, I measured *Party* simply as the legislator's partisan identification, either Democrat (1) or Republican (0).

Modeling Legislative Decision Making

Table 3 presents the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression results. In general, the model performed very well in each of these sessions: The F statistics indicate that the regression model is statistically significant in all 23 cases. Additionally, Table 3 indicates

that these equations do a good job of explaining the variance in roll-call voting. On average, they explain about 91.25% of the variance in NOMINATE scores. The R^2 scores range from a high of .993 in the Wisconsin House in the 1995–96 session to a low of .649 in the Florida Senate in the 1993–94 session.

The constituency characteristics are rarely significant in the multivariate analysis. There are only 10 instances in which any of the constituency characteristics are significant in any of these models. It is important to note, however, that the lack of significance for these constituency variables may be due to measurement error; perhaps direct measures of public opinion in these districts would be more strongly related to roll-call voting.

As for the influence of party over roll-call voting, there is a strong, positive relationship between party affiliation and NOMINATE scores in every case and this relationship is significant in all sessions. Democrats vote more liberally and Republicans vote more conservatively, even when I control for the influence of personal beliefs and constituency characteristics. The coefficients range from a high of 1.535 in the Wisconsin House in the 1995–96 session to a low of .546 in the Illinois House in the 1997–98 session. On average, across all sessions, the difference between Democrat and Republican NOMINATE scores is 1.009. Given that NOMINATE scores range from -1 to 1 , one can see this is a very large impact. Thus, although some scholars have suggested that the relationship between party and vote decisions is spurious, it seems clear that party does indeed play an important role in influencing vote decisions above and beyond mere ideological agreement among caucus members. In almost every legislative session examined here, not only is party important, it is the most important factor in predicting roll-call votes, even while controlling for the personal beliefs of these legislators. If the pivotal or median voter determined the outcome of votes in a legislative body, then we could expect party to play little to no role in influencing roll-call voting records. Yet just the opposite occurs: party plays a significant role in determining legislators' voting records.

The differences in the unstandardized coefficients seem to suggest the influence of party varies from state to state. For example, the average impact of party affiliation on NOMINATE scores in Wisconsin is 1.378, whereas the average impact in Colorado is .823, a difference of .555. These findings point to the need for us to examine the context of the decision-making process in order to understand why party has more of an impact in some states than in others.

As for the ideology variable, ideology clearly exerts a strong influence over roll-call voting. Ideology is positively related to

TABLE 3
OLS Regression Results: Predicting NOMINATE Scores

Variables	Colorado House			Colorado Senate			Florida House			Florida Senate		
	93-94	95-96	97-98	95-96	97-98	93-94	95-96	97-98	93-94	95-96	97-98	93-94
Party Identification	.916*** (.095) .730	.962*** (.135) .709	.905*** (.091) .754	.649*** (.105) .602	.683*** (.137) .569	1.007*** (.064) .756	.954*** (.085) .709	.669*** (.110) .544	1.062** (.316) .790			
Ideology	.120*** (.029) .288	.119* (.044) .265	.150*** (.036) .317	.201*** (.039) .536	.194** (.047) .529	.152*** (.022) .299	.131*** (.024) .311	.206*** (.038) .526	.249 (.132) .315			
Income (in thousands)	-.001 (.004) -.021	-.004 (.004) -.068	-.002 (.004) -.036	-.007 (.006) -.131	-.018* (.007) -.278	-.002 (.022) -.017	.006 (.004) .064	.003 (.007) .041	-.001 (.021) -.011			
Farm	.003 (.009) .022	-.005 (.014) -.024	.009 (.010) .059	-.002 (.011) -.024	.006 (.011) .051	-.017 (.010) -.062	.008 (.013) .030	-.005 (.013) -.034	-.121 (.074) -.331			
Black	.003 (.005) .042	-.001 (.005) -.106	-.001 (.004) -.012	.003 (.011) .030	-.008 (.006) -.155	.003 (.002) .067	.004 (.003) .080	.001 (.004) .030	.007 (.009) .153			
Constant	-.825 .885	-.560 .860	-.775 .899	-.767 .886	-.192 .868	-1.026 .933	-1.255 .921	-1.267 .847	-1.191 .649			
Adj. R ²	58.04***	41.56***	57.80***	27.42***	26.03***	149.11***	106.53***	34.21***	6.18**			
F	38	34	33	18	20	54	46	31	15			
N												

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TABLE 3
OLS Regression Results: Predicting NOMINATE Scores
(continued)

Variables	Illinois House			Illinois Senate			Missouri House			Missouri Senate		
	93-94	95-96	97-98	93-94	95-96	97-98	95-96	97-98	95-96	97-98	95-96	95-96
Party Identification	1.075*** (.049) .807	.903*** (.036) .801	.546*** (.088) .506	1.214*** (.063) .842	1.278*** (.069) .869	.793*** (.102) .642	.762*** (.055) .634	.936*** (.066) .733	1.006*** (.205) .728			
Ideology	.055** (.016) .128	.052** (.015) .117	.142** (.038) .312	.118*** (.024) .208	.102** (.027) .177	.203*** (.047) .425	.144*** (.020) .350	.100*** (.022) .255	.117 (.071) .226			
Income (in thousands)	-.003 (.002) -.072	-.003** (.001) -.093	-.002 (.002) -.057	.002 (.024) -.208	.000 (.002) .010	.003 (.004) .074	-.003 (.002) -.067	.007** (.003) .111	-.008 (.009) -.134			
Farm	-.013 (.007) -.069	.004 (.005) .026	-.024 (.013) -.138	.001 (.014) .005	.001 (.014) .003	.001 (.020) .006	-.007 (.005) -.055	.001 (.006) .007	-.026 (.036) -.097			
Black	.004** (.001) .128	.004*** (.001) .148	.006** (.002) .235	.001 (.002) .029	.000 (.002) .002	-.001 (.002) -.027	.003 (.002) .063	.002 (.001) .058	-.002 (.004) -.052			
Constant	-.687 .948	-.603 .964	-.817 .829	-1.181 .977	-1.063 .976	-1.326 .925	-.699 .920	-.987 .939	-.312 .860			
Adj. R ²	224.83***	334.83***	42.75***	225.46***	205.31***	67.85***	191.43***	195.21***	23.08***			
F	63	63	44	27	26	28	84	64	19			
N												

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TABLE 3
 OLS Regression Results: Predicting NOMINATE Scores
 (continued)

Variables	Wisconsin House			Wisconsin Senate		
	93-94	95-96	97-98	95-96	97-98	97-98
Party Identification	1.156*** (.042) .850	1.535*** (.028) .935	1.305*** (.032) .896	1.484*** (.089) .872	1.408*** (.111) .898	
Ideology	.063*** (.012) .136	.040*** (.009) .073	.055*** (.010) .118	.086* (.029) .145	.054 (.036) .104	
Income (in thousands)	-.004 (.002) -.054	-.002 (.001) -.023	-.000 (.002) -.004	.010 (.007) .087	.002 (.008) .014	
Farm	-.007* (.003) -.058	-.000 (.003) -.001	.000 (.003) .002	.010 (.010) .053	.009 (.011) .056	
Black	.004* (.002) .054	.002 (.002) .011	.008* (.004) .042	.007* (.003) .159	.004 (.003) .084	
Constant	-.678 .977	-.887 .993	-.926 .988	-1.624 .973	-1.015 .970	
Adj. R ²	443.96***	1,550.59***	747.37***	129.93***	90.86***	
F	54	56	48	19	15	
N						

Note: The first number in each triad is the unstandardized regression coefficient. Standard errors are in parentheses, and standardized regression coefficients are in italics.
 *** Significant at .001 level; ** Significant at .01 level; * Significant at .05 level.

NOMINATE scores in all cases and is statistically significant in 20 out of 23 sessions. Even after controlling for the effects of party affiliation and constituency characteristics, I find that legislators who identify themselves as liberal vote more liberally and those who identify themselves as conservative vote more conservatively. Coefficients range from a high of .249 in the Florida Senate, 1993–94, to a low of .040 in the Wisconsin House, 1995–96. The average impact of the ideology variable on NOMINATE scores across all sessions is .124. The average difference in NOMINATE scores between a legislator who identifies him- or herself as very conservative and one who self-identifies as very liberal is therefore .744. These results demonstrate that the impact of ideology on voting tendencies is large. The personal beliefs of legislators, then, play a significant role in determining how they will vote.

Interestingly, as with the influence of party, the magnitude of the influence of ideology on NOMINATE scores seems to vary by state. For example, the average impact of ideology on NOMINATE scores in the Wisconsin House across all sessions is .053, whereas the average impact in the Florida House across all sessions is .163, a difference of .110. This disparity may be due in part to the fact that party has such a large influence over voting in Wisconsin but has less of an impact in Florida, suggesting a trade-off between the relative impact of party and ideology. Perhaps when parties exert significant efforts to whip party members into voting the party line and are successful in doing so, the personal beliefs of legislators accordingly take a less prominent role in influencing voting decisions.

Finally, Table 3 also displays the standardized regression coefficients. Instead of ideology being the most important factor in explaining NOMINATE scores and party being the second most important factor—as the pivotal politics theory would hold—in almost every case, the standardized coefficients for the party variable are much greater than those for the ideology variable. For instance, in the Colorado House in the 1995–96 session, the beta for the party variable is .709, but the beta for the ideology variable is .265. In a few cases, such as the 1995–96 Florida House, the 1997–98 Illinois Senate, and the 1995–96 and 1997–98 Colorado Senates, the betas for the ideology variable approach that of the party variable, but this is the exception rather than the rule. These results indicate that although both ideology and party are important in explaining variation in NOMINATE scores, party exerts a more significant influence over roll-call voting than does ideology. Clearly then, those scholars arguing that party does not play a significant role in influencing vote decisions are wrong. Party *does* influence voting, and the magnitude of this impact is greater than the impact of personal beliefs.

Discussion

Numerous questions about legislative behavior remain, but several significant conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of roll-call voting in state legislatures. First, these findings suggest that care must be taken when using NOMINATE scores as surrogate measures of personal ideology in analyses. Using NOMINATE scores in this manner tends to bias results. Because NOMINATE scores capture the influence of political parties and constituency preferences as well as the personal beliefs of legislators, using them as measures of ideology leads to an overestimation of the importance of ideology in predicting roll-call voting and an underestimation of the importance of party and constituency, just as interest group ratings do.

Second, these results help clarify the outcomes of numerous studies of legislative behavior conducted over the past few decades. This study utilizes an independent measure of ideology and examines a number of different states and both upper and lower chambers at different points in time. The findings suggest that both political parties and the personal beliefs of legislators exert a significant influence over voting. These results at the state level confirm the findings of those who have sought to counter the pivotal politics argument at the national level. In state legislatures, political parties clearly matter.

Next, political parties play a large role in influencing vote decisions, but legislators will sometimes ignore the demands of party to vote according to their own beliefs. Interestingly, although both party and ideology exert significant influence over roll-call voting in these sessions, the variance in the impact of these variables suggests a trade-off between the influence of party and of ideology. When the influence of party decreases, the influence of ideology increases, and vice versa.

Finally, the variation in the influence of these factors points to the last, and perhaps most important, finding of this analysis. The influence of party and ideology over roll-call voting varies according to place, time, and chamber. Certainly, the influence of party and ideology over legislative behavior is generally consistent: Democrats and liberals vote more liberally and Republicans and conservatives vote more conservatively. Nevertheless, the magnitude of these variables' impact varies. The most important variations here seem to be across the states.

To explain some of the differences in the impact of party and ideology on voting, I would posit, as before, that there is a trade-off between the impact of each of these variables. The key seems to be

identifying the situations under which party has the greatest impact, or explaining the variance in the magnitude of the party variable in this analysis. There are several potential explanations that we can briefly examine here.

First, if there is a trade-off between the influence of party and ideology over roll-call voting, then so too might there be a trade-off between the influence of interest groups and parties over voting. Where interest groups have more influence, parties will have less, since legislators may be able to turn to groups to provide many of the resources that parties often do. Next, the level of professionalization in the legislature may affect the ability of parties to influence voting. In more-professional legislatures, legislators will presumably have more resources at their disposal and so will be better able to resist the demands of party leaders.¹¹

The resources and activities of political parties may explain variation in party influence. When parties are more active and have more resources at their disposal, they will have more influence over voting. More resources, such as salaries for party leaders, should lead to greater influence. Additionally, party competition in elections may affect the ability of parties to influence roll-call voting: as party competition increases, politicians may become more reliant on the resources that the party provides. The sweeping victories in state legislatures by the Republican party in the 1994 election cycle might pose another test of this hypothesis. Increased activity in the electoral arena during this election cycle may have led to increased party influence during the next legislative session.

Next, parties may play a larger role in influencing vote decisions under unified government control, since they will be more likely to see their platforms enacted into policy. In these situations, party members may be more willing to toe the party line.

Finally, the type of members serving in the legislature may have an impact on the ability of parties to influence voting. When there are more first-term legislators, party influence may be greater; such legislators would seemingly be less knowledgeable about the legislative process and hence more reliant on political parties. A full test of the conditional party government theory is not possible here, but the supposition that party members will cede more power to parties when members are ideologically homogeneous and distinct might suggest that when there are more ideologically extreme members, parties will have more influence.

To consider these hypotheses, Table 4 shows the correlations between the party coefficient and beta from the equations in Table 3 and a number of different variables.¹² Given the small number of cases

TABLE 4
Correlation Results: Predicting Party Influence

Variables	Party Coefficient	Party Beta
Interest Group Impact	-.201	-.188
Professionalization	-.327	-.227
Party Leader Salary	-.221	-.164
Party Competition	.528**	.505*
1994 Dummy	.152	.104
Unified Control of Government	.301	.277
% of First-Year Legislators	-.196	-.044
% of Ideologically Extreme Legislators	-.072	-.160

N = 23

Note: Entries represent Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficients.

*** Significant at .001 level; ** Significant at .01 level; * Significant at .05 level.

included here (23), it should not be surprising that few of the variables attain significance. Many of the correlations are moderately strong, however, and are in the expected direction. Only *Party Leader Salary* and the percent of *First-Year Legislators* and *Ideologically Extreme Legislators* are in the opposite direction of what was expected. All of these variables have a negative correlation with party influence, although none of them are significant. *Interest Group Impact*, *Professionalization*, *Unified Control of Government*, and *1994 Dummy* are all correlated in the expected manner, although they too are not significant. *Professionalization* and *Unified Control* are modestly robust, however. Perhaps the inclusion of more cases would reveal a significant relationship. The professionalization variable suggests that parties will have less influence where individual legislators have more resources at their disposal. Conversely, parties will have more influence when they control all branches of government. Finally, the party competition variable is significantly related to both the party coefficient and the party beta. Where there is more competition for legislative seats, parties will have more influence.

These last two variables, taken together, seem to suggest that the role parties play in the electoral arena is key to understanding the variation in influence. When there is more competition for seats, legislators may become more reliant on party resources to help secure

victory, and hence, they may be more susceptible to party influence when voting. Additionally, when one party controls government, legislators may feel that their party will be held accountable come election time for the state of the state, and so they may be more willing to give in to the demands of party leaders. Thus, it seems from this preliminary analysis where parties play a greater role in the electoral arena, they have greater influence over voting.

To be sure, there are many other factors that may impact the ability of parties to influence voting—such as the nature of the issues under consideration and the types of constituents represented by each party—that are beyond the scope of this analysis. But the results do suggest that party activity in the electoral arena may be key to understanding how large a role parties play in influencing vote decisions. When parties are active electorally and they succeed in winning control of government, they may have the greatest influence over voting.

These findings clearly point to the need to look at the larger context of the decision-making process in order to understand what factors are most important in explaining this variance. The factors that influence legislative behavior in Illinois are different than the factors that influence legislative behavior in Colorado. These factors are in turn different from the factors that influence congressional voting. Further studies, such as those of Wright and Schaffner (2002) and Wright and Winburn (2002), which examine the context of legislative decision making and reasons for these variations are necessary. This also suggests that care needs to be taken when pooling states in analyses of legislative behavior. All states are not alike.

What are the key influences over roll-call voting? The answer seems to be, “It depends.” For example, if we wish to know whether party or ideology influences roll-call voting, then we can safely say party does matter in the situations examined here, but in *other* settings (for example, in a unicameral or nonpartisan legislature at the local level, or in a country where political parties have even less power than here in the United States), party may be less relevant for influencing vote decisions. These results suggest one important condition for enhanced party influence over voting: party activity in the electoral arena. Identifying other conditions for party influence is the primary task for scholars of legislative politics.

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NOTES

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1. In each state, the entire house was up for reelection in each of the election cycles and so surveys were sent to all legislators. The response rate therefore represents the percentage of all legislators who responded. Not all senators stood for reelection in each state in these election cycles, and therefore not all districts were surveyed. The response rate for the senate thus represents both the number of senators who responded in the given election cycle plus the number of senators who responded in the previous election cycle but did not stand for reelection.

2. One of the key reasons I chose NOMINATE scores for this analysis was because the software for generating NOMINATE scores was the most readily available. For many other measures of voting tendencies, scores have only been generated for the U.S. Congress. Since the scores used here were specifically generated for this analysis, the program for generating such scores needed to be readily available, and the NOMINATE software was the only program that fit this description. Also, some procedures, such as Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder's (1999) adjusted ADA scores, depend on the availability of interest group ratings, and such ratings are available only intermittently at the state level. Additionally, the DW-NOMINATE procedure was not feasible, because such scores do not exist for these state legislative chambers, and the DW-NOMINATE procedure is not available for generating them. Furthermore, even if the procedure were available, it is only appropriate to use DW-NOMINATE if information is available for five or more legislative sessions, and that is not the case here.

3. Data are missing from some sessions. The 1993–95 Missouri House and Senate journals and the 1996 journals of the Colorado Senate were unavailable.

4. Although there are votes missing from the Illinois sessions and some of the other sessions, these NOMINATE scores should still be accurate. Battista (2000) ran tests to assess the difference in NOMINATE scores produced when using a subset of roll-call votes versus all roll-call votes for a given state legislative session and found there was no substantive difference between the two sets of scores.

5. The values chosen here are those parameters used by Poole and Rosenthal (1997) in their estimations for the U.S. Congress. These parameters seem to produce the most accurate results across all three dimensions that the NOMINATE estimation produces.

6. Maintaining this separation has the added advantage of allowing for multiple tests of the hypotheses. If there are consistent effects across states, then the individual session results will reveal them. If, however, the relative influence of party and ideology vary from state to state and chamber to chamber, then such variations might be masked in an analysis that pools all legislators. Separate analyses allow us to test for state or chamber effects. Another reason I did not pool these NOMINATE scores is that it is inappropriate to pool D-NOMINATE scores, and, as previously noted, these were the only types of scores that could be readily generated for this analysis.

7. It is important to note that the D-NOMINATE scores are not comparable across chambers.

8. The APRE measures the aggregate proportional reduction in error when classifying votes. The geometric mean probability is an alternative measure of fit that gives more weight to errors that are far from the cutting point than to errors close to the cutting point (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 30). For example, an error that has an extremely liberal legislator incorrectly predicted to vote conservatively would count for more than an error that has a moderate legislator incorrectly predicted to vote conservatively. See Poole and Rosenthal 1997 for a detailed explanation of these statistics.

9. This scale may be affected by the environment in which the respondent resides. In other words, two legislators in different states might give different responses to this measure even though their beliefs are similar. Yet all variables under examination here are probably subject to such influence. For example, the parties in each state will have different positions, given the state political environment. But this should not affect the results because the key question here is, within each environment, what factors are most important in influencing vote choice? Thus, although the environment in Wisconsin may be more liberal than the environment in Colorado, within each of these environments, the question of the relative impact of party and ideology may still be examined.

10. Rather than choosing the demographic variables separately for each state according to the relationships I found in the bivariate analysis, I chose the set of demographics for all states by looking at the entire set of results. I could then use the same model in each multivariate analysis, with the hopes of increasing comparability across states, chambers, and sessions. To determine if this decision affected the results of the analysis, I ran additional regressions to verify the results presented here. First, I ran the regressions with the inclusion of any demographics significantly correlated with voting in the bivariate analysis, along with *income*, *race*, and *farm*. Next, I ran the regressions with only the variables that were significantly related to voting. There were substantially similar results in most sessions. Thus, the choice of including only *income*, *race*, and *farm* seemed to have little impact on the general conclusions drawn about the relationship between the independent variables and voting in these state legislatures.

11. Increased professionalization may instead lead to *more* party influence, because party leaders presumably also have more resources at their disposal. Thus, the expected relationship between professionalization and party influence is not clear.

12. The variable *Interest Group Impact* comes from Thomas and Hrebener's (1996) update of their 1994 study. In theory, scores range from 0, representing a subordinate impact of groups on the political system, to 4, representing a dominant impact on the system. For the states included here, scores range from 2, meaning a complementary impact, to 4. *Professionalization* comes from Squire 1992, and *Party Competition* comes from Holbrook and Van Dunk 1993.

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