



## *Washington State Legislative Service Project: Legislators*

### Full Report – Spring 2010

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The *Legislative Service Project* examines the views of key individuals involved in the Washington State legislative process and seeks to determine how changes to this process have affected legislative civility. Study participants include legislative interns from the last ten years, legislative staff, members of the media, lobbyists and **legislators** who served during the 1990 to 2009 legislative sessions. Participant responses provide insight into the legislative process, changes affecting this process, and the dynamics of legislative civility and bipartisanship from the perspectives of student interns, staff, media, lobbyists and legislators. The ultimate goal of the *Legislative Service Project* is to improve the current Washington State legislative process and better prepare the next generation of leaders for public service in the Evergreen State.

### **Legislative Service Project - Legislators**

The legislator portion of the *Legislative Service Project* focuses on Washington State legislators who served during legislative sessions held in the period 1990-2009. Survey questions included the areas of: legislative preparation and experiences, legislative interns, elements of the legislative process, partisanship, bipartisan collaboration, civility, election experiences, interaction with other legislators, the effect of televising the legislative process, the effect of technology on the legislative process, and personal background.

#### **Response rate**

*Of the 458 legislators who served during this twenty-year period, current addresses were determined for 374 present and past legislators. Survey questionnaires were mailed during the fall of 2009, and a follow-up mailing was sent to those who did not respond to the initial mailing. Responses were received from 145 current and past legislators, with 141 participating and 4 choosing to not participate. A rate of response of 38% was achieved of both current and past legislators responding.*

#### **Legislator Demographics**

*Legislators who responded represented a broad range of attributes with respect to party affiliation, political viewpoints, gender, legislative districts, state geography, urban and rural jurisdictions, background prior to serving in the state legislature, whether they served in the house\senate\both, the number of years serving as a legislator, when they served, and the types of jurisdictions (competitive/safe, single party delegation or mixed) represented.*

<b>Number who served in House\Senate\Both</b>	All	Responded
House	365	116
Senate	154	50
Both (served in House and Senate)	61	27

<b>Average years service</b>	All	Responded
House	5.29	5.43
Senate	6.38	7.20
Both (served in House and Senate)	6.36	7.12

<b>Number of years served</b>	All	Responded
1-2	112	30
3-4	77	20
5-8	142	42
9-12	66	25
13-20	61	22

<b>Legislator party at end of last term</b>	All	Responded
Democrat	248	81
Republican	210	58

Six legislators changed party    4 D → R        2 R → D  
 Five of the six legislators who changed parties responded to the survey

#### **Service time period**

	Served during (All)	served during (responded)
1990	149	40
1991-94	204	66
1995-98	195	67
1999-02	174	61
2003-06	173	60
2007-09	173	54

<b>Current/Past Legislator</b>	All	Responded
Current	147	49
Past	311	90

<b>Gender</b>	All	Responded
Female	142	54
Male	316	85

## District Demographics

*The legislators who responded provided a very good representation based on the district in which they served, whether they served in an urban/rural, east/west side of the state or a high/low turnover legislative district.*

### District turnover

Number of continuous legislative terms            549    [Ave. = 11.2 continuous legislative terms /district]  
 District count of continuous legislative terms    Lowest – 7 and Highest - 16

Number of unique legislators serving in a district            465    [Ave. = 9.49 unique legislators/district]

- A legislator serving in the house and the senate of the same district is only counted once
- 7 legislators served in more than one district

District count of unique legislators serving in a district  
 Lowest – 6 and Highest - 14

### While the legislator was in office, were all the district's legislators from the same party or was the delegation mixed?

		All	Responded
Legislative District Legislators all the same party -	Single Party	232	74
Legislative District Legislators from more than one party -	Multi Party	226	65

Urban/Rural	All	Responded
Urban	313	100
Rural	145	39

East/West side of state	All	Responded
East	126	30
West	332	109

### House and Senate Demographics

*The legislators who responded provided a very good representation based on party and whether they served in the majority/minority or a mix.*

### Did the legislator serve while his party was in the majority/ minority/ mix of majority and minority

	All		Responded
Majority	144	(D-114 , R-30)	40
Minority	94	(D-24 , R-70)	26
Mix (included tie)	220	(D-110 , R-110)	73

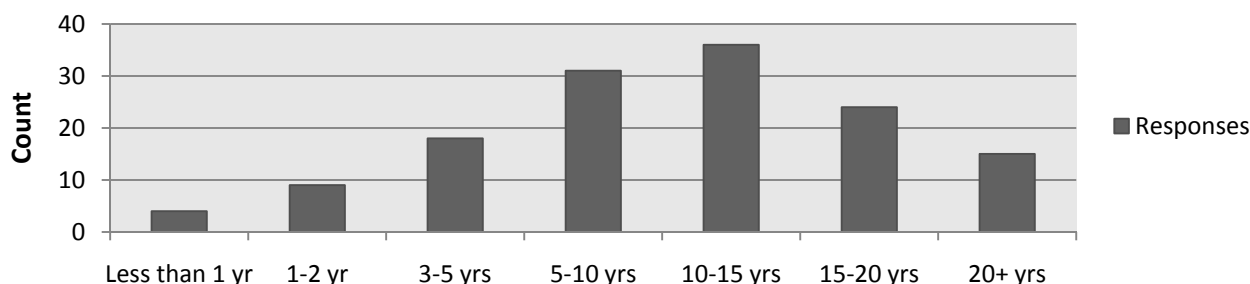
## Personal background of responding legislators

Legislators who responded had a mix of previous experiences, including some who were legislative or government staff, lobbyists and held other elected positions. Legislative experience ranged from less than a year to 20+ years. Outside of session, legislators devoted an average of 28 hours per week to their legislative duties. Approximately 20% of the legislators commuted daily from home during session.

### Prior to your legislative service, did you participate in the legislative process as a: (the number indicates how many legislators selected the area)

4	YMCA Youth Legislature	25	Elected City Official
5	Legislative Page	10	Elected County Official
13	Student Intern	20	Elected Special Purpose District Official
14	Partisan Legislative Staff	13	Lobbyist
12	Non Partisan Legislative Staff	41	Other
10	State Executive Branch Staff (e.g. Governor, state agency)		
20	Local Government Executive Branch Staff (e.g., city or county govt.)		
8	Congressional Staff		

### How long have you been involved in the legislative process?



### When you are not in session, how many hours do you devote in a typical week to your legislative position?

Ave. = 26.70 hours

### During the legislative session, where do you live?

9	My permanent residence is in the Olympia area
107	I have a temporary/ secondary residence in the Olympia area
20	My permanent residence is outside the Olympia area; I commute to Olympia.

### During the legislative session, how often do you return to your home district?

22	Daily	91	Most weekends
6	Almost daily	17	Occasionally

### During the legislative session, how often does your spouse/partner join you in Olympia?

19	Comes for whole session	63	1-2 days a month
1	4 -6 days a week	36	Never
9	1 -3 days a week		

### Were your parents involved in the legislative process?

18	Yes (13.1%)	119	No (86.9%)
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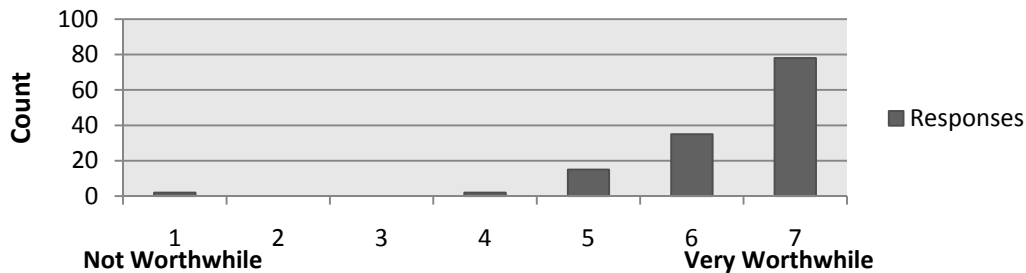
### Also if so, how did your parents' involvement influence you toward future public service?

Negatively (1) ----- [7-point scale] ----- Positively (7) Ave. = 5.81

## Overview of legislator responses on Significance of the Legislative Service Experience

Legislators tend to feel that their legislative experience is/was very worthwhile, and if they had the opportunity to go back in time they would very likely choose to serve again in the Washington State Legislature. Legislators found benefit in being a legislator in that they were able to represent and help constituents, learn the legislative process in-depth, influence the crafting of legislation, have access to important policy influencers, and grow professionally. At the same time, legislators found a number of challenges associated with being a legislator. These included separation from family, short election cycle, tight schedule, high degree of partisanship, disrespect and incivility, and poor public policy outcomes.

**In light of the many demands and stresses of service in legislative office, how worthwhile to you is your service in the Washington State Legislature? [7-point scale] Ave. = 6.37**



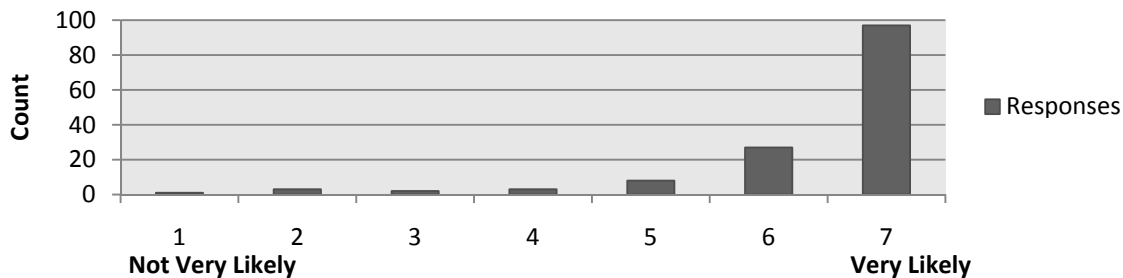
**List your two most worthwhile aspects of legislative service.** [Ranked by frequency of mention]

- Representing and helping constituents
- Being involved in influencing legislation, solving problems and crafting good legislation
- Access to and working with those involved in the legislative process
- Learning the legislative process
- Passing specific laws
- Professional development and leadership opportunities

**List your two most trying aspects of legislative service.** [Ranked by frequency of mention]

- Amount of travel, time away from family, low pay
- The 2 year election cycle, campaigning and fundraising is always a focus
- Schedule – late nights, not enough time to do everything, or sufficiently prepare
- Partisanship - legislators not always being willing to work together or for a common good
- The few dishonest legislators
- Relating with lobbyists/ special interest groups/ and disrespectful public
- The process is slow and doesn't always produce good policy

**If you had the opportunity to go back in time and live your life again, would you once more choose to serve in the Washington State Legislature? [7-point scale] Ave. = 6.43**



### Contact and interaction with other legislators

Legislators have more informal contact with other legislators during session than outside of session. During session most legislators met informally at least a couple times a week to daily. Outside of session most legislators met informally less than once a month.

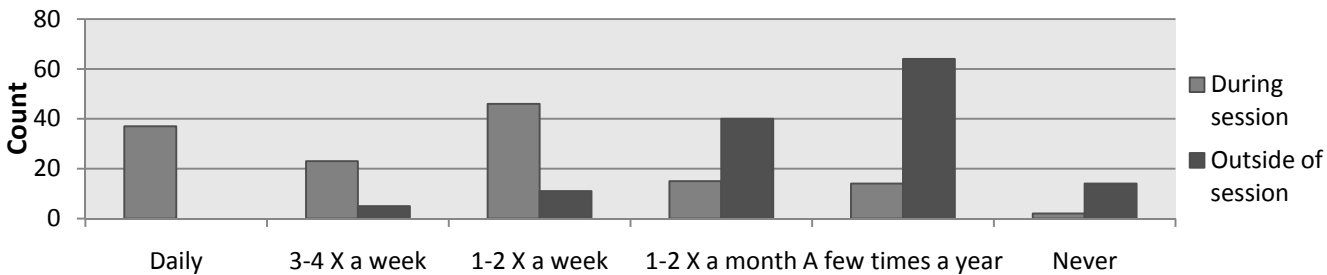
Legislators indicated how they related to other legislators in terms of the number they had met, the proportion of members they respect, the proportion of members they consider a friend, etc. Legislators were most likely to have met many other legislators, but not very likely to confide in many other legislators.

The order of items relating to **networking among legislators**, from most to least, was as follows:



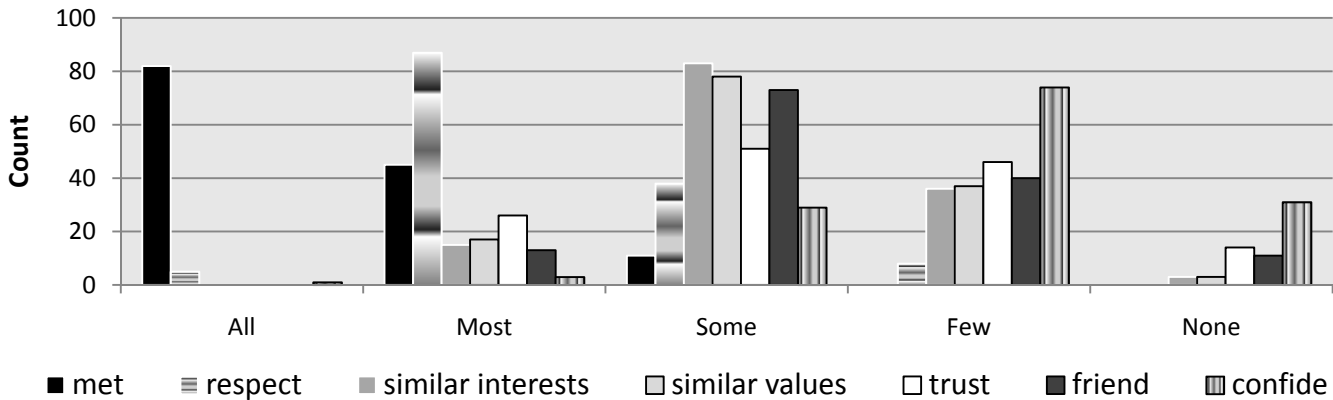
The following questions are to be answered in the context of your relationship with legislators from the other political party.

How often do you interact informally (socialize) with legislators from the other political party:



#### Comparison of Levels of Networking Items for Connections to Legislators from the "Other Party"

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| How many have you met?                    | How many do you trust?                  |
| How many do you respect?                  | How many would you consider a friend?   |
| How many have similar interests to yours? | How many are you willing to confide in? |
| How many have values similar to yours?    |   |



## Bipartisanship

*Virtually all of the legislators taking part in the survey (94.8%) feel that **bipartisan collaboration** improves the effectiveness of the legislative process. The legislators also felt that since they became involved in the Washington State legislature the legislative process has become **more partisan** and **less bipartisan collaboration** is taking place than was the case in the past.*

*When comparing themselves to other legislators, most legislators felt they themselves individually work in a more bipartisan fashion than their peers. They felt that legislators in general work in a more partisan fashion than they do. [a case of **pluralistic misperception**]*

*Legislators felt that bipartisan agreement ranged from agreement on no issues to agreement on most issues. Issues with the greatest bipartisan agreement included: education, transportation and criminal justice/ public safety. Issues with the least bipartisan agreement included: budget, social issues and taxes. A common sentiment was that there are a number of issues which the legislators don't disagree over the problem – just the solution.*

*Hindrances to legislative bipartisan collaboration included: party and caucus leadership influence, pressure from lobbyists/ special interest groups on issues and legislators focusing on re-election. Legislative bipartisan collaboration is encouraged by: legislators developing personal relationships with other legislators, legislators maintaining mutual respect/ courtesy/ civility and by working in committees and study groups.*

**There is a great deal of discussion about the importance of bi-partisanship. How would you describe bipartisanship?**

- Admitting, talking about, and respecting differences while civilly working for a common good
- Focusing on good policy rather than party position or reelection
- Willingness to look beyond differences and party affiliation to find common ground
- Recognition that both the minority and majority party legislators need to be included in the process
- Willingness to listen to other legislators without filtering based on party
- Not seeing the aisle as a separator
- With current structure, it isn't able to be achieved

**List the two issues upon which legislators have the greatest bipartisan agreement.**

[Ranked by frequency of mention]

- Education
- Transportation
- Criminal Justice/ Public Safety
- Capital budget
- Rules/Procedures/ technical corrections
- Natural Resources

Answers ranged from agreement on no issues to agreement on most issues

**List the two issues upon which legislators have the least bipartisan agreement.**

[Ranked by frequency of mention]

Budget  
 Social issues – abortion/woman’s choice, gay rights/civil unions  
 Taxes  
 Health care  
 Labor vs. Management  
 Human Services  
 Environment  
 Education

**List two issues which you would consider to be non-partisan.**

[Ranked by frequency of mention]

Education  
 Transportation  
 Capital Budget  
 Criminal Justice/ public safety  
 Economic Development  
 Technical corrections/joint resolutions

A number of responses highlighted:

Since the legislature is elected in a partisan way, nothing is non-partisan.

There are a number of issues which the legislators don’t disagree over the problem – just the solution.

Issues which are in the media headlines or threaten the whole state receive greater joint legislative support.

**Do you believe bipartisan collaboration improves the effectiveness of the legislative process?**

*Yes – 109 (94.8%)      No – 6 (5.6%)*

**What aspects of legislative service most greatly hinder legislative bipartisan collaboration?**

[Ranked by frequency of mention]

Party and caucus leadership influence  
 Pressure from lobbyists/ special interest groups on issues  
 Focusing on re-election  
 Majority vs. Minority (especially with super majorities)  
 Differences in party ideology and perspective  
 Lack of personal relationships between legislators  
 Not working in a professional way/ lack of respect for other legislators  
 Focusing on making the other party look bad

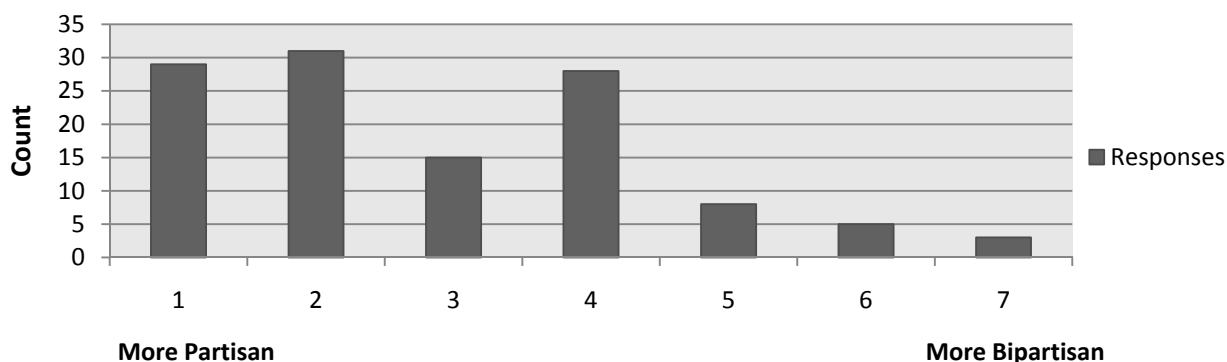


**What aspects of legislative service most greatly encourage legislative bipartisan collaboration?**

[Ranked by frequency of mention]

- Developing personal relationships with other legislators
- Maintaining mutual respect/ courtesy/ civility
- Working in committees and study groups
- When the vote separation between majority and minority is small
- Crisis/ disasters
- Leadership who are inclusive of both parties
- Legislators who focus on making a difference in their community and state

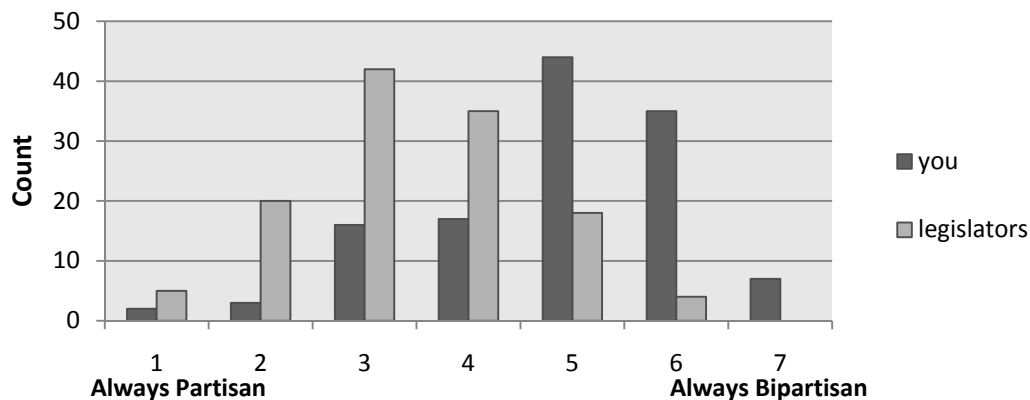
**Compared to when you first became involved in the Washington State Legislative process, has the legislative process become more partisan or more bipartisan? [7-point scale] Ave. = 2.85**



**In general, did you tend to work in a bipartisan or partisan fashion? [7-point scale] Ave. = 4.86**

**In general, did legislators tend to work in a bipartisan or partisan fashion? [7-point scale] Ave. = 3.43**

**Graphic Display of Pluralistic Misperception**



## Collaboration

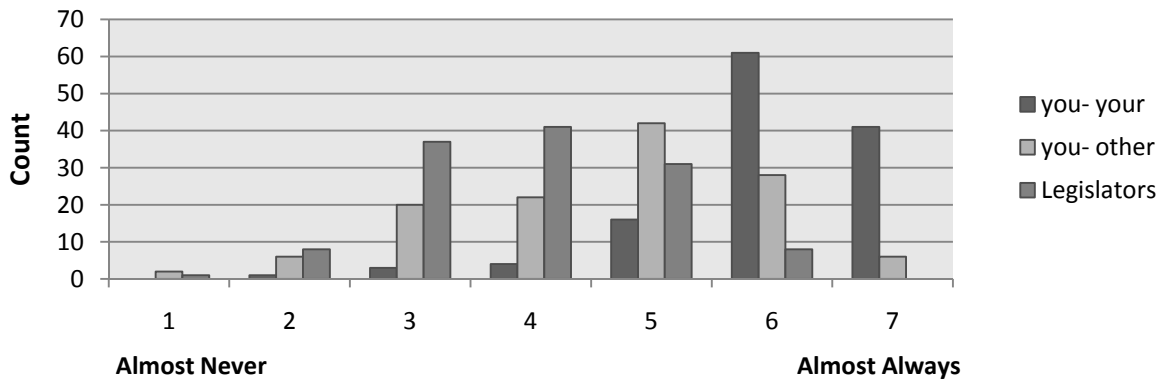
Legislators were more likely to collaborate with legislators from their own party than with legislators from opposing parties. They indicated that in general they themselves were more likely than not to collaborate with legislators from the other party. They felt, however, that other legislators are not inclined to collaborate with legislators from parties other than their own. [Another case of pluralistic misperception]

Legislators indicated that dialogue and deliberation with members of the other party was **very important** to the legislative process.

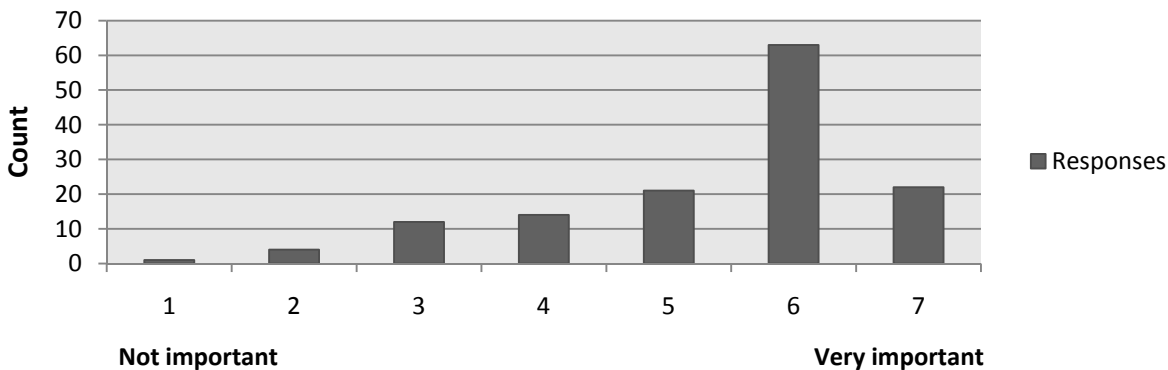
How often did you collaborate with legislators from your political party? [7-point scale] Ave = 6.03

How often did you collaborate with legislators from other political parties? [7-point scale] Ave = 4.62

How often did legislators collaborate with legislators from another party? [7-point scale] Ave = 3.93



How important, in the legislative process, is it for you to dialogue and deliberate with members of the other party? [7-point scale] Ave. = 5.39



## Civility

Legislators feel very strongly that civility in legislative discourse and debate is important in fostering bipartisanship and producing good policy outcomes. Legislators differed a good deal, however, on the matter of the level of civility they experienced during their period of service. They also differed on whether the level of civility was increasing, remaining constant, or declining.

The findings in these areas are displayed here, and **comparative profiles** of legislators who accord low, moderate and high marks on civility are presented.

**How important is civility in legislative discourse and debate to fostering bipartisanship?**

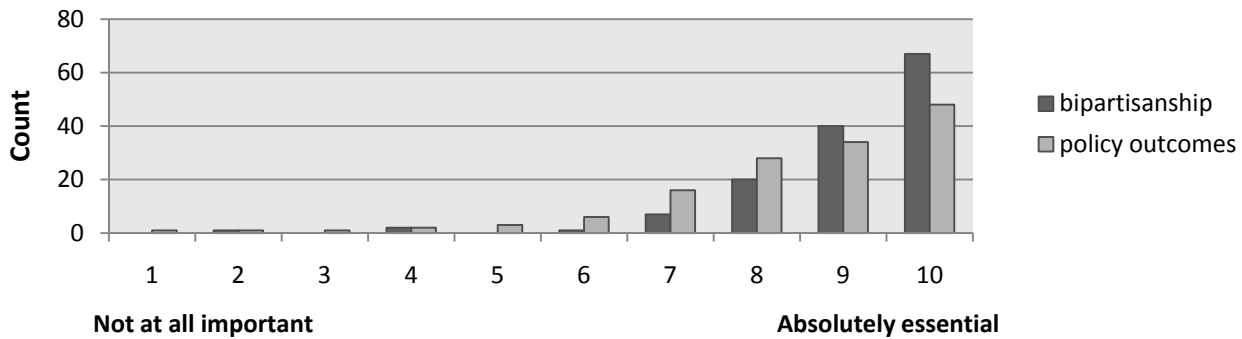
[10-point scale]

Ave. = 9.09

**How important is civility in legislative discourse and debate to producing good policy outcomes?**

[10-point scale]

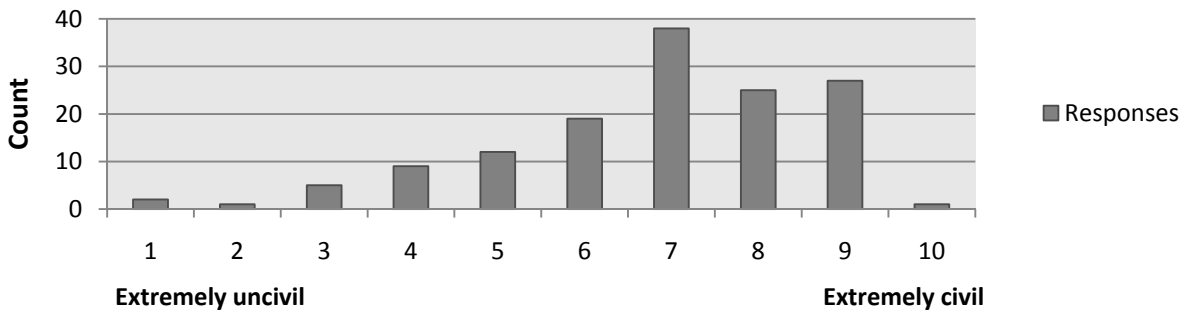
Ave. = 8.48



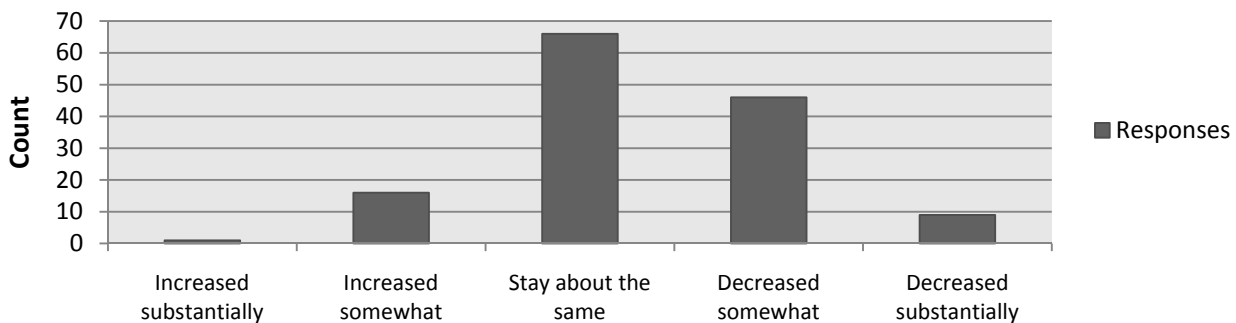
**How civil has the legislature been during your tenure?**

[10-point scale]

Ave. = 6.82



**During your time in the legislature has the level of civility:**



## Student Intern Program

Seven-in-ten of the legislators responding to their survey had experience with student interns, and over 85% of the current legislators who had worked with interns want one again. Students responding to their survey found the intern experience to be of great benefit. The main reasons given for participation in an internship were to gain political/legislative experience, enhance resumes, expand networking contacts, supplement classroom experience, and “for the challenge.” The intern experience not only increased the interns’ understanding of the legislative process, but also provided an opportunity for them to contribute to the legislative process. The internship provided networking opportunities, enhanced job skills, and provided the opportunity to assist constituents and people in need of the state’s attention.

The interns and the legislators both felt legislative interns vary widely in the degree of their preparation for the experience. Interns identified the following areas which would have improved their preparation: study of legislative procedures and improving their clerical, writing, presentation and networking skills. Legislators listed the following areas as important for intern preparation: better knowledge of legislative district issues, meeting the legislator prior to session, touring the district, constituent casework experience, and knowing and communicating what the student wants out of the intern experience.

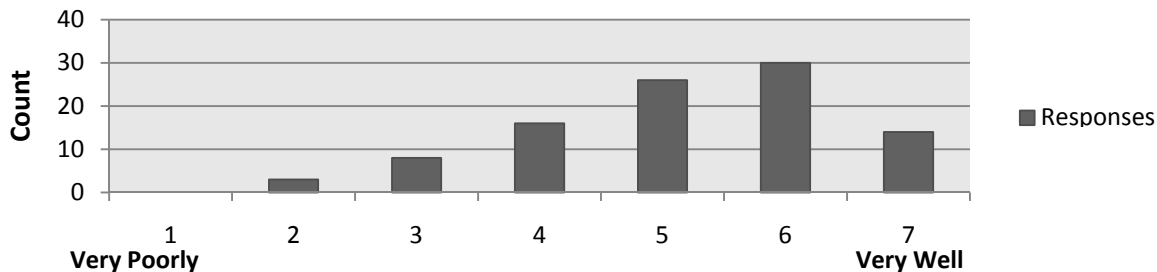
### Do you have or have you previously had a student intern(s) working in your office?

Yes – 97 (70.1%) [41-current legislator, 54-past legislator]      No – 40 (29.9%)

### If so, how prepared was/were the intern(s) for their job?

[7-point scale]

Ave. = 5.18



### If you have/had a student intern, list one thing that would have helped your intern’s preparation.

[Ranked by frequency of mention]

- Better research, report writing and computer skills
- Better understanding of the legislative process, public policy and party system
- Better knowledge of district and issues/ Previously meeting the legislator and touring the district
- Better training/orientation/ time to acclimate to the process
- Experience working constituent casework/ Ability to work well with people and represent legislator
- Knowing what the student wants out of the intern experience
- Desire to learn, work hard and ethically / Ability to multitask / Ability to separate ideology from work

### If you have/had a student intern, list one thing that would have helped your own preparation to make good use of the intern’s assistance. [Ranked by frequency of mention]

- Knowing the interests, motives, goals and skills of the intern
- Planning ahead, having projects for the intern/ matching projects to their skills
- Scheduling more time with the intern

### Are you interested in having a student intern in your office in the future? (current legislators only)

35 of the 41 current legislators (85.4%) who previously had an intern would want one again.

## Campaign Experience

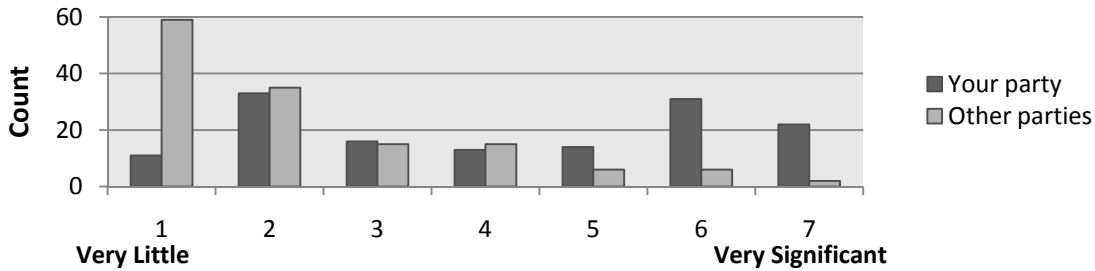
*Prior to running for election, legislators had a varying degree of contact with their political party. Most, however, had very little contact with the other political party. Most legislators experienced the extremes of either little or significant election competition. Overall, legislators experienced more competition from other party candidates than from candidates from their own party. During elections, legislators were treated more civilly by competitors from their party. Treatment by competitors from the other party was fairly evenly distributed over the full spectrum of civility to hostility.*

**How much contact did you have with your political party prior to running for election?**

[7-point scale] Ave. = 4.19

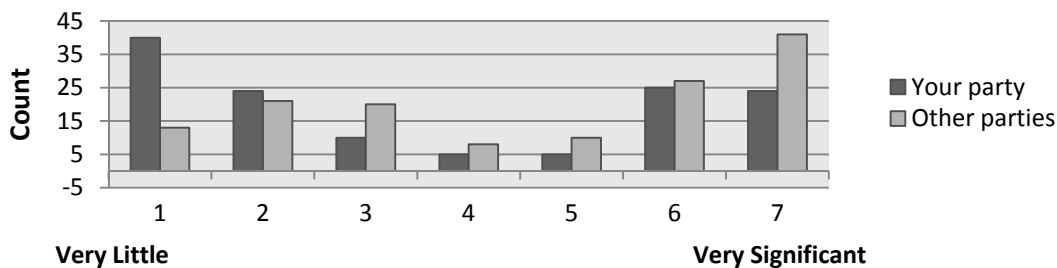
**How much contact did you have with other political parties prior to running for election?**

[7-point scale] Ave. = 2.28



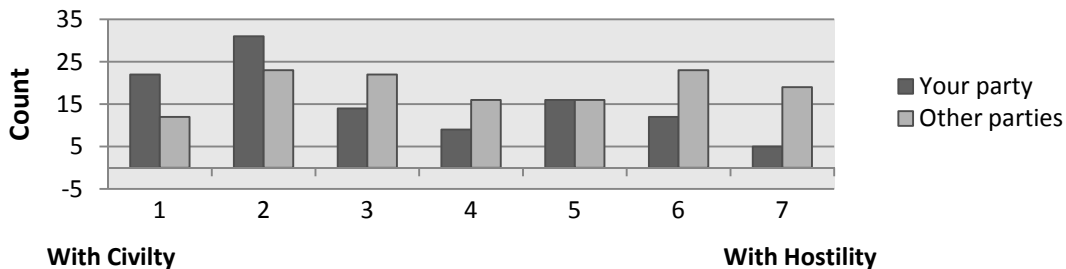
**On average, how much competition did you experience from other candidates in your party who were campaigning for the same legislative seat?** [7-point scale] Ave. = 3.62

**How much competition did you experience from other political party candidates?** [7-point scale] Ave. = 4.61



**How did your competitors (candidates from your party) treat you during the election?** [7-point scale] Ave. = 3.20

**How did your competitors (candidates from other parties) treat you during the election?** [7-point scale] Ave. = 4.11



## Televising the Legislative Process

*The televising of legislative proceedings has caused legislators to split their speaking focus. Even with this change in focus, the people present in the meeting still receive the majority of legislator’s focus. Legislators felt the impact of televising the legislative process was mostly positive. They felt it has increased the openness and public awareness of the process and slightly increased the ethical conduct of legislators. At the same time, it has slightly decreased the candidness of legislators and their willingness to work in a bipartisan fashion. Legislators felt televising the proceedings have resulted in legislators relating to each other in a slightly more formal fashion.*

### Was the legislative process televised while you were a legislator? (Past only)

No - 15      Yes-part of the time - 56      Yes-the whole time - 19

### While in committee meetings or on the “floor,” what percentage of time is spent speaking to the people present and what percentage is spent speaking to the “televised audience” by:

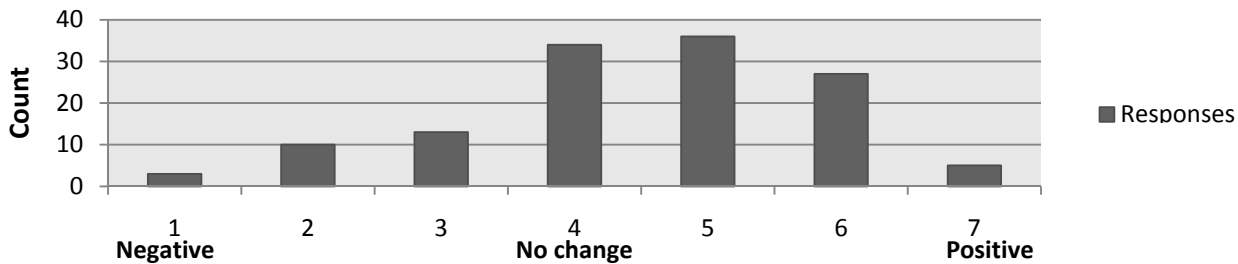
	<i>People Present</i>	<i>Televised Audience</i>	
You	<u>84.1%</u>	<u>15.9%</u>	(should equal 100%)
Legislators in general	<u>71%</u>	<u>29%</u>	(should equal 100%)

### What effect does the introduction of televised proceedings in the legislative process have on:

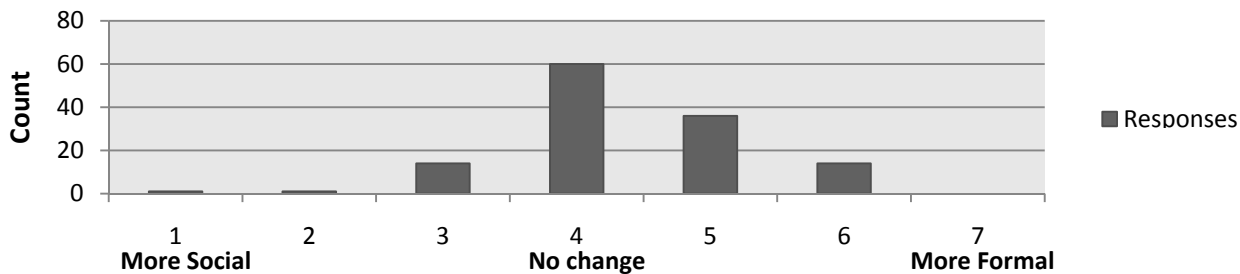
[7-point scale]      Decreased (1) ----- No change (4) ----- Increased (7)

Public awareness of legislative process	<b>Ave. = 5.47</b>
Openness of legislative process	<b>Ave. = 4.85</b>
Ethical conduct of legislators	<b>Ave. = 4.38</b>
Legislators’ willingness to work in a bipartisan fashion	<b>Ave. = 3.69</b>
Candidness of legislators	<b>Ave. = 3.38</b>

### Impact on legislative process [7-point scale] Ave. = 4.49



### How legislators relate with members from other party [7-point scale] Ave. = 4.36



## Changes in Technology

*Changes in technology have dramatically affected the work of the legislators. Legislators admit that use of technology has reduced legislators' attention and increased distractions in meetings. This, however, is offset by increases in legislators' and legislators' staff work efficiency, constituent access to legislators, legislators' interaction with other legislators and legislators' access to bill information.*

**What percentage of your time as a legislator do you spend using communication and information technology?**

Ave. = 38 %                      Current = 50%   Past = 32%

**While in committee meetings or on the "floor", what percentage of time are you using technology while participating in the legislative process?**

Ave. = 28 %                      Current = 44%   Past = 19%

**While in committee meetings or on the "floor", what percentage of time are legislators in general using technology while participating in the legislative process?**

Ave. = 40 %                      Current = 60%   Past = 28%

**What effect does the use of technology (computer, blackberry, text messaging and internet use) during meetings have on:**

	[7-point scale]	Decreased (1) ----- No change (4) ----- Increased (7)
<b>Legislators' access to bill information during debate</b>		<b>Ave. = 5.90</b>
<b>Constituent access to legislators</b>		<b>Ave. = 5.70</b>
<b>Legislators' staff work efficiency</b>		<b>Ave. = 5.68</b>
<b>Legislators' work efficiency</b>		<b>Ave. = 5.02</b>
<b>Distracting meetings</b>		<b>Ave. = 4.73</b>
<b>Legislators' interaction with other legislators</b>		<b>Ave. = 4.69</b>
<b>Legislator's willingness to work in a bipartisan fashion</b>		<b>Ave. = 4.03</b>
<b>Legislators' attention in meetings</b>		<b>Ave. = 2.69</b>