



Washington State Legislative Service Project: Legislators 2012

Full Report – Winter 2012

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The Legislative Service Project examines the views of key individuals involved in the Washington State Legislative process to determine how developments to this process have affected legislative civility. Study participants include state-wide elected official; legislative and agency staff, members of the media, lobbyists and legislators who served during the 1990 to 2012 legislative sessions. Participant responses provide insight into the legislative process, changes affecting this process, and the dynamics of legislative civility from the perspectives of 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 political leaders for public service in the Evergreen State.

Legislative Service Project – Legislators 2012

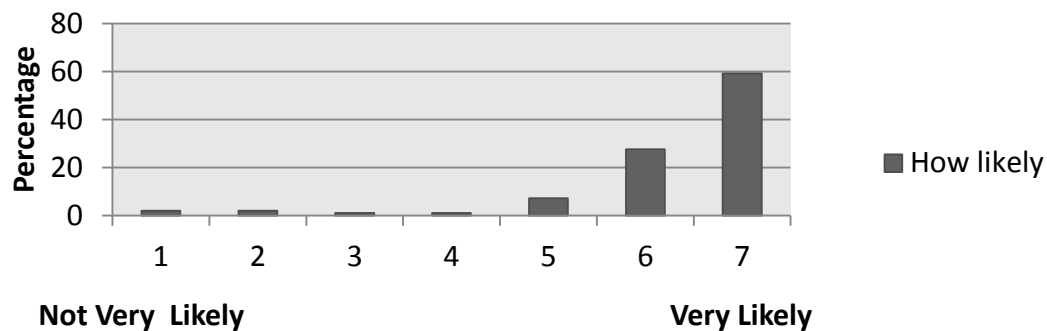
Survey questions posed to Washington legislators who served over the course of the past two decades included the areas of: legislative service preparation, legislative public image, civility and bipartisanship, work/sleep performance effects, and leadership/management effectiveness. Of the 484 legislators who served during this 20+-year period, current addresses were determined for 376 presently serving and past legislators. Survey questionnaires were mailed during the spring of 2012, and two follow-up mailings were sent to those who did not respond to the initial mailing. Responses were received from 112 currently serving and past legislators, with 110 participating and 2 declining to participate. A rate of response of 30% was achieved of a combination of current and past legislators responding. Legislators who took part in the survey represented a broad range of attributes with respect to party affiliation, political viewpoints, gender, legislative districts, and state geography.

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 indicated that community support and involvement, education, and previous*

experience best prepared them for serving in the legislature. The amount of legislative workload has increased for most legislators, and legislators report working on legislative matters more than full time during session and over half-time outside of session. State legislators managed their workload by prioritization, specialization, working long hours, and hiring able staff. The most effective ways for constituents to influence legislators involve building personal relationships prior to session, building collaborations with other groups to support issues of interest to them, and communicating concisely and personally one's stance on issues coming before legislators to decide.

If you had the opportunity to go back in time and re-live your life, how likely would you be to once again choose to serve in the Washington state legislature? [7-point scale] Average 6.27



Upon reflection, please list two things you believe *best prepared* you to serve as a legislator?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Involvement in community
- Support of family, core supporters, and community
- Formal education
- Previous elected experience
- Private business experience
- Legislative process experience
- Political party and campaign experience

Do you feel the legislative *workload increased* over the time you served as a legislator?

	Yes	No
During session	84.3%	15.7%
Outside of session	86.2%	13.8%

How many hours as a legislator did you devote in a *typical* week?

During session average:	63.2 hours
Outside of session average:	28.5 hours

What are the things you did to manage your legislative workload?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Prioritized workload and energy
- Focused energy only on issues related to committee assignments
- Trusted the work of the other committees
- Didn't procrastinate
- Was selective in accepting meeting requests
- Worked long hours
- Hired a good LA and staff who could be trusted and handle delegated work

In your opinion, what are the *most effective ways for home district constituents to influence their own legislators?*

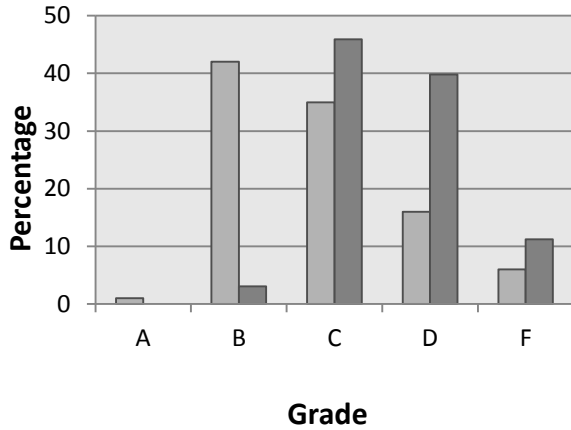
Most frequently mentioned:

- Build a personal relationship with the legislators prior to session
 - Help them on their campaign
 - Get to know what is important to the legislator
 - Meet with them outside of session
 - Attend in-district events
 - Be available to the legislator
 - Invite them to your business, group, or events
- When you contact them on an issue
 - Have a clear understanding of the issue
 - "Problem solve" - offer solutions, not just complaints
 - Make your contact personal
 - No form letters or hotline calls; personal letter and e-mail is good
 - Face to face is best
- Relate how the legislation affects you personally
- Be concise and succinct in your communication
- Kept the tone friendly
- Reach out and build collaboration with grass roots and other groups on issues

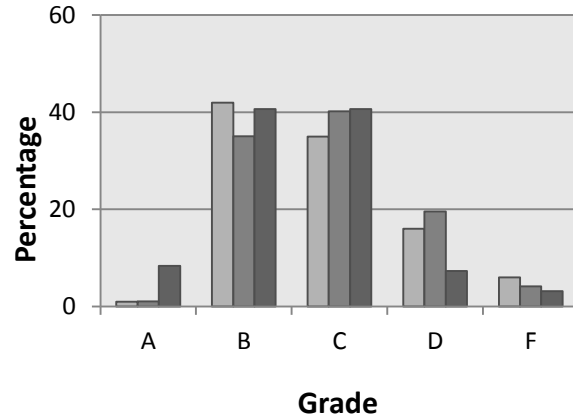
Public perception of government

Legislators graded their performance higher than how they expected citizens to grade the legislature. The aspects of the legislative process which legislators feel are most favorable to citizens include constituent services, interaction and communication with citizens, having a good work ethic, and being civil. The aspects which are least favored in their view include incivility in public conduct, appearance of unethical or unduly influenced behavior, and waste. Legislators felt that the legislature could improve its image through collaboration, working for what is best for the state, statesmanship, and communication. Ideas for improving legislative efficiency included session schedule changes, working across the aisle, reducing the number of bills, making the legislature full-time, modernizing the rules, and increased training for legislators.

If you were to evaluate how the following groups have performed over the last ten years, what **LETTER GRADE** would you assign? What grade do you think the average citizen would assign to how the legislature has performed over the last ten years?



- Legislature - C (2.16)
- Citizen Grade of Legislature - D+ (1.41)



- Legislature - C (2.16)
- State Agencies - C (2.09)
- State Agency Staff - C+ (2.44)

What aspects of the work of the Washington state legislature do you think *contribute most to a favorable reputation* among citizens?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Constituent services
 - Investment of time in constituent issues and responding quickly
 - Making time to listen to constituents regardless of party affiliation
- Being active in your district
 - Meeting with individuals and groups
 - Focusing on people not the party
- Communicating often with constituents
- Having a good work ethic
 - Working hard
 - Don't miss votes
 - Maintain a reputation for being ethical, truthful, and positive in outlook
- Demonstrating civility with other legislators and the other party
 - Be willing to listen to other view points
 - Keep communication in newsletters and newspapers focused on issues and not putting another legislator or party in a negative light
- Focusing on major issues first
- Having friendly staff

What aspects of the work of the Washington state legislature do you think *contribute most to an unfavorable reputation* among citizens?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Partisan agendas which include mudslinging, gridlock, and unwillingness to compromise
- The appearance of undue influence of interest groups
- Budgets and funding with the appearance of waste, back room deals, and a lack of transparency
- When there is an appearance that the focus is on pet projects rather than improving the state
- When the press reports the legislature in a bad light
- When there is appearance of unethical behavior
- Incivility between legislators and within and between parties
- When there is the appearance that a legislator is not making time for constituent needs
- Responding with form letters

In your view, what would be two actions the Washington state legislature can take to *improve its image among citizens*?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Increase collaboration and cooperation between parties
- Focus on working together for the good of the state and not personal or partisan agendas
- Increase civility and reduced partisanship
- Treat legislators in a professional manner – demonstrate statesmanship
- Increase understanding of what is happening
 - Improve citizen education and understanding of the legislative process
 - Improve communication and participation opportunities of citizens
- Get done on time (avoid special sessions)

In your view, what are two changes in the operations of the legislature that you believe would likely improve its *overall effectiveness*?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Session schedule
 - Reduce the hours spent each day in session
 - Increase the session length
 - Build in a week break in the middle of the session
- Bipartisanship/collaboration
 - Encourage working cooperatively across the aisle
 - Bring back legislative dining rooms so legislators will take time to eat with other party members
- Committees
 - Reduce the number of committees and how many committees a legislator can serve on
 - Have the joint conference committees meet all session
- Pay and Working Conditions/Support
 - Legislative pay should increase to reflect the full time work being done.
- Rules Changes
 - Review the rules for ways to modernize them

- Some legislators wanted to streamline and speed up the rule timelines others wanted to slow down and lengthen the timelines
- Limit the number of bills a legislator can introduce
- Professional Staff
 - Increase legislative nonpartisan professional staff and their resources
- Training
 - Have newly elected from both parties receive their training together
 - Increase training on process, time management, and staff utilization

Civility

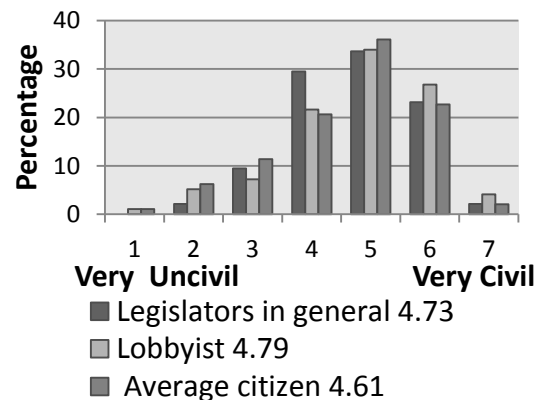
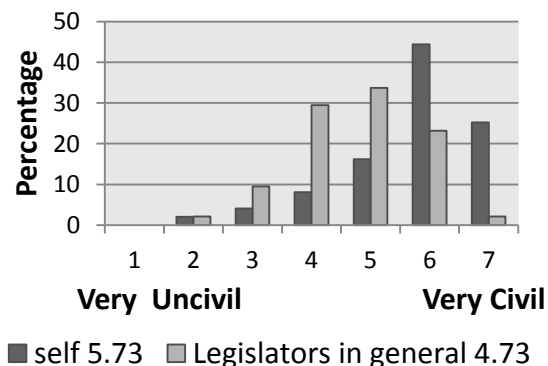
Legislators defined civility to include respect, working with people with whom you disagree, protecting bridges, statesmanship, professionalism, and listening. In general, legislators felt that they were more civil than most other legislators. They also tend to feel that a legislator should be held to a higher civility standard than the average citizen, and that civility is on a decline. This decline in civility has resulted in some legislators avoiding uncivil legislators, worrying about incivility, and decreasing their legislative work effectiveness and commitment as a consequence of incivility. Legislators tend to feel that part of the legislative incivility problem is due to increased campaign costs, special interest groups, and ideologically driven media outlets and constituents. The majority of legislators feel that the polarization happening in Washington D.C. and other states is also happening in Washington State.

How would you define legislative civility?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Respect of other people and their opinions
- Willingness to work with someone with whom you disagree
- Not burning bridges
- Being an example of a statesman
- Keeping professional and not taking things personally
- Willingness to listen to all sides of an argument

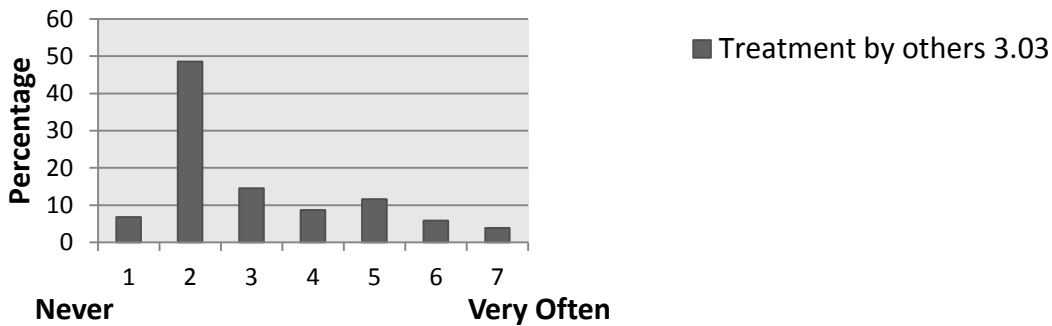
Based on your own definition of civility, how civil do you feel each of the following were when you were a legislator: [7-point scale]



In your view, what *standards of civility* are appropriate for state legislators?

- 83.9% Legislators should be held to higher civility standards than their constituents
- 16.1% Pretty much the same civility standards apply to legislators and constituents

Over the course of your legislative career, how often have legislators from the other party treated you uncivilly? [7-point scale]



If you have been treated uncivilly by another legislator, what examples can you provide of such treatment?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Incivility can happens between legislators of the same and different parties
- Misrepresentations and lies concerning where a person stands on an issue, what they will do, or have done
- Personal attacks which may involve name calling, rude comments, attacks on integrity, and a raised tone or screaming
- Being restricted from participating in a conversation or meeting
- Having a person’s character attacked

Over the last ten years, in your opinion how has civility in the Washington state legislature changed?

- 4.1% Civility has increased
- 35.1% Civility has stayed the same
- 60.8% Civility has declined

If you feel that change has occurred, WHY do you feel this change is taking place?

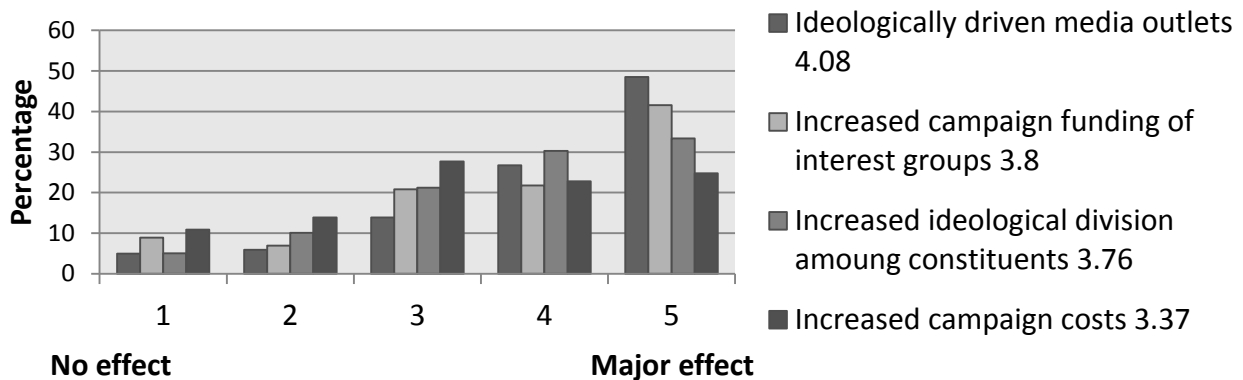
Most frequented:

- Lack of interest in understanding other legislators’ perspectives
- Prolonged one-party rule increases incivility
- Political parties’ (focus on partisanship) and lobbyists’ (focus on special interest) influence
- The media promotes conflict
- Increased uncivil campaigns lead to increase incivility during session
- Focus on maintaining or obtaining majority status rather than what is best for the state
- Economy has reduced available money and increased conflict over how money is allocated
- It is encouraged and allowed by leadership

Has legislative incivility *affected you* in any of the following ways?

	No	Yes
Caused you to avoid certain uncivil legislators	22.8%	77.2%
Caused you to worry about incivility	46.1%	53.9%
Decreased your work effectiveness	64.4%	35.6%
Decreased your commitment to the legislature	77.2%	22.8%
Decreased your legislative work effort	85.1%	14.9%

Civility research on Congress suggests that there may be external factors influencing legislative civility. To what extent do you feel the following factors affect civility in the Washington state legislature? [5-point scale]



Congress has been characterized as being so highly politically polarized that bipartisanship is seldom achieved. Compared to other state legislatures, to what extent do you feel this type of polarization is also taking place in the Washington state legislature?

24.7%	More polarized
51.8%	Same as other states
23.5%	Less polarized

Legislative relationships

Legislators overwhelmingly agreed that cross-party legislative interactions improve the working relationships of legislators, and more than half of the legislators opined that more cross-party legislative interactions should take place. Many legislators provided suggestions for legislators to get to know each other; most frequently noted were: through meals and social functions which are limited to legislators; by visiting other legislators in their home districts; by working on joint projects with other legislators; and, by integrating seating and office assignments during legislative sessions. Legislative leadership and the media support will be critical in the implementation of these changes.

How do you think the following interactions generally affected your *working relationships* with other legislators?

Decreases	No effect	Improves	
1.9%	11.7%	86.4%	Interacting socially with other legislators
4.8%	15.4%	79.8%	Interacting in bipartisan committees and study groups
2.9%	18.4%	78.6%	Interacting socially with legislators from other parts of the state on committee visits during informal periods
2.0%	38.0%	60.0%	Interacting socially in events which include spouses/significant others
11.0%	41.0%	48.0%	Interacting in party caucus sessions

Based on when you were a legislator, how do you feel about the amount of cross-party legislative interactions?

0%	Too many
40%	The amount was about right
60%	Too few

Based on your experience as a legislator, what do you think are two practical ways Washington state legislators of either party could *get to know each other better*?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Have social functions which only include legislators
- Eat meals with other legislators (house and senate lunch room)
- Encourage bipartisanship and collaboration
- Spend time with other legislators outside of session and visit other legislative districts
- Work together on joint projects
- Change seating and office assignments so that the parties are not separated

What might be two things that could be done to enhance Washington state *legislators' willingness to work with their colleagues from across the aisle*?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Governor and leadership lead and encourage civility and bipartisanship
- Social functions and retreats which cross the aisle
- Free up schedule to provide time for legislators to meet together
- Change seating and office assignments so that the parties are not separated
- Work with the press to highlight positive relationships
- Promote understanding that the majority/minority roles over time can swap

Legislative campaigns

Almost 90% of the legislators feel that campaign hostility (incivility) affects legislative working relationships adversely, and three-fourths of the legislators believe that campaign hostility is increasing. The reasons for the increase in campaign hostility include increased campaign funding, the

influence of national campaigns, belief that hostile campaigns are effective, media delights in the coverage of incivility, and the expectancies of special interest groups. To repair legislative relationships affected by hostile campaigns requires professional attitudes, thick skin, leadership involvement, and one-on-one meetings.

Do you feel legislative campaign hostility (incivility) affects the working relationships of Washington state legislators?

88.1% Yes 11.9% No

Over the last ten years, in your opinion how has campaign hostility (incivility) in the Washington state legislative races changed?

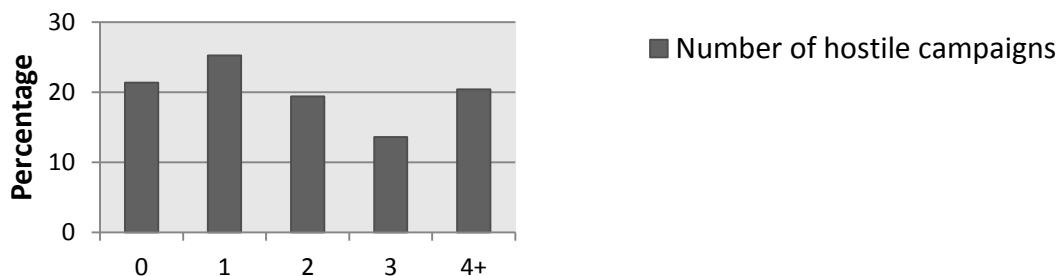
75%	Hostility has increased
25%	Stayed the same
0%	Hostility has declined

If you feel that change has occurred, WHY do you feel this change is taking place?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Increased money spent on campaigns
- Increased influence of national campaigns
- Belief in/acceptance of negative campaigning – ad hominem attacks and distortion of facts works (i.e., is effective in winning campaigns)
- Media willingness to report negative campaigning
- Special interest groups promote and expect it
- Political consultants encourage it as normal and effective
- Voters respond to it – reaches constituent’s shorter attention spans
- Increased competitive races and atmosphere

Based on your campaign experience, in how many elections did you experience a hostile (uncivil) campaign from candidates from another party?



How would you recommend repairing legislative relationships adversely affected by campaign hostility?

Most frequently mentioned:

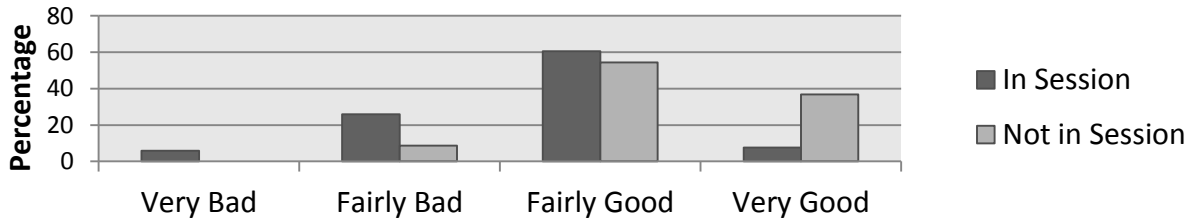
- Most importantly, avoid being hostile. It is difficult to “unring” a bell
- Change state law to require truth in advertising and campaigning

- If you have been attacked, get over it – have a thick skin and forgiving heart
- Leadership take the lead to repair relationships
- During the campaign, run ads by opponent prior to release
- Have opponents meet one-on-one after the campaign
- Joint freshman orientations which involve both parties
- This is an issue which affects between and within party races

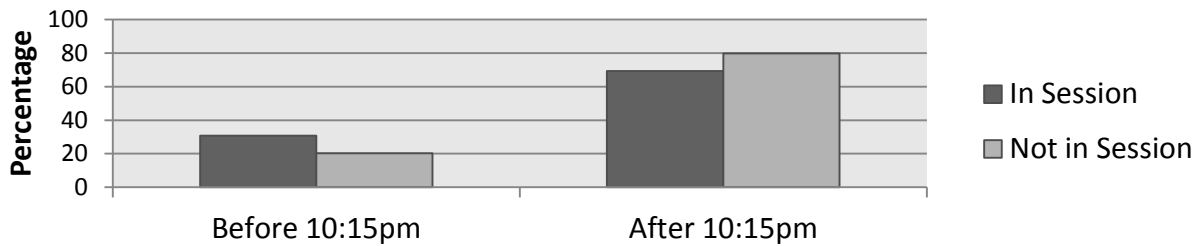
Legislative work/sleep performance

When comparing sleep habits during session to out of session, Legislators’ quality of sleep is reported to be worse during session. During session, legislators get tired sooner, go to bed later, take longer to fall asleep, wake up more often at night, sleep fewer hours, get up earlier, and have a harder time getting up. Three-fourths of the legislators feel the best time for them to make decisions is between 8am and 1pm.

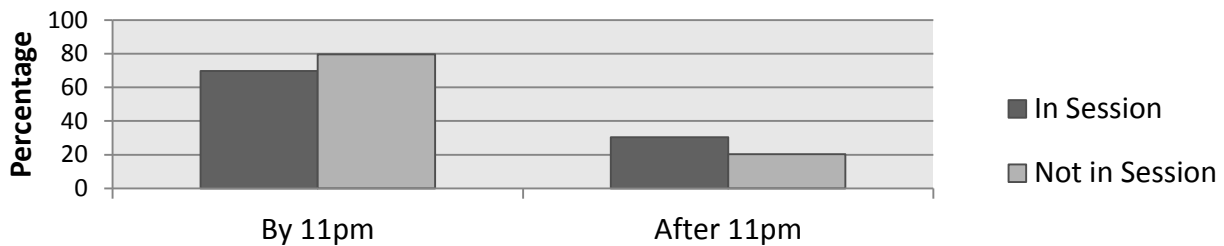
For the following questions: *While you were a legislator...*
 ...how would you rate your overall quality of sleep?



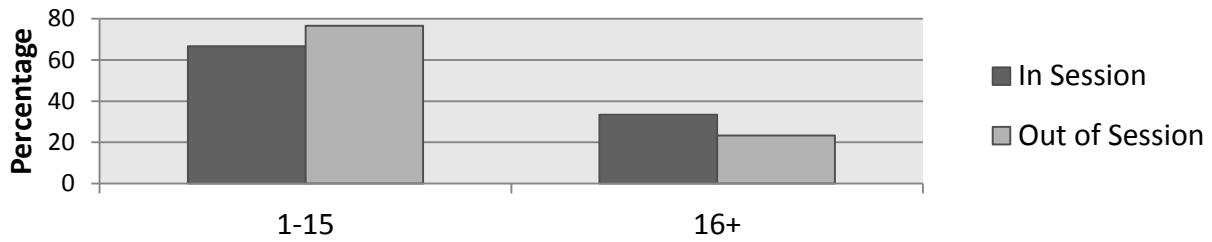
...at what time in the evening did you feel tired and in need of sleep?



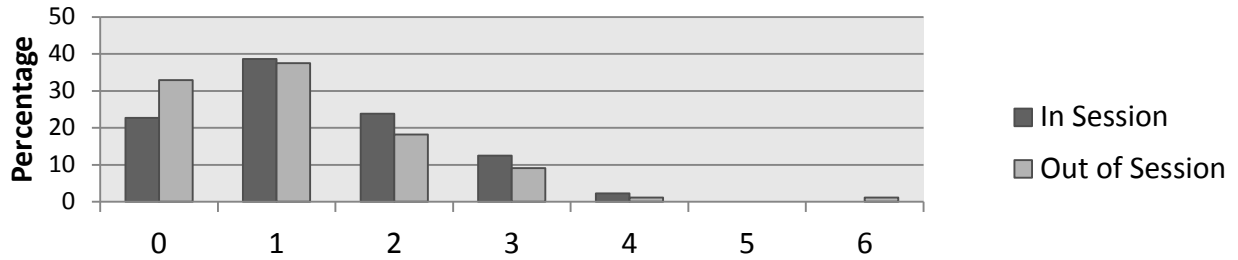
What time did you usually go to bed?



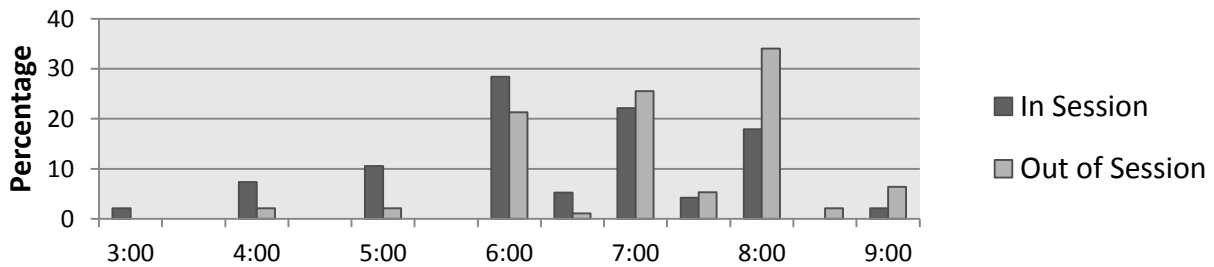
How long (in minutes) did it usually take you to fall asleep?



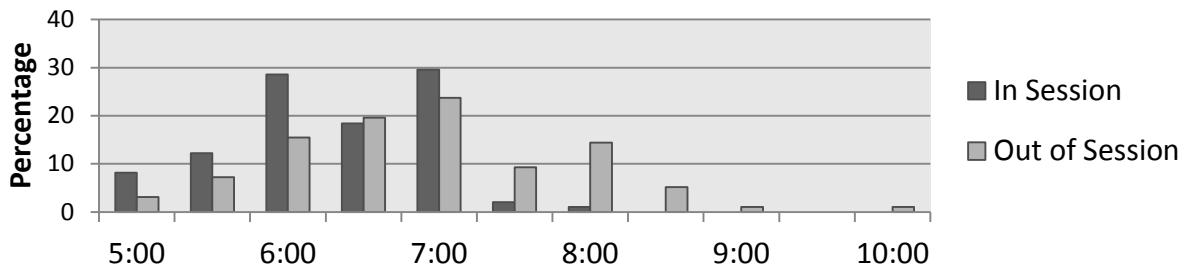
How many times did you wake up each night?



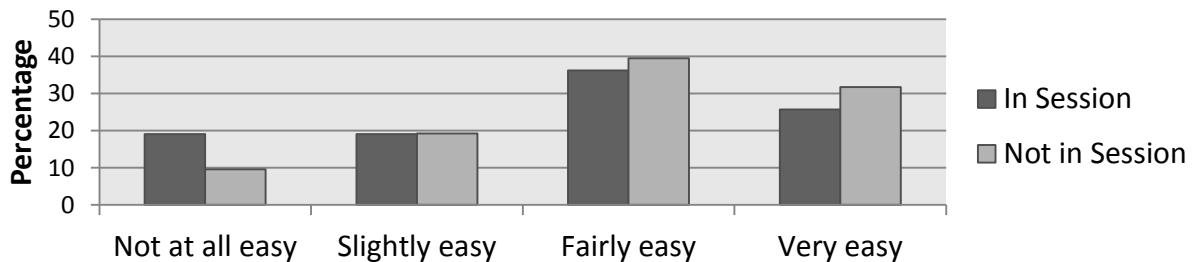
How many hours of actual sleep did you get at night?



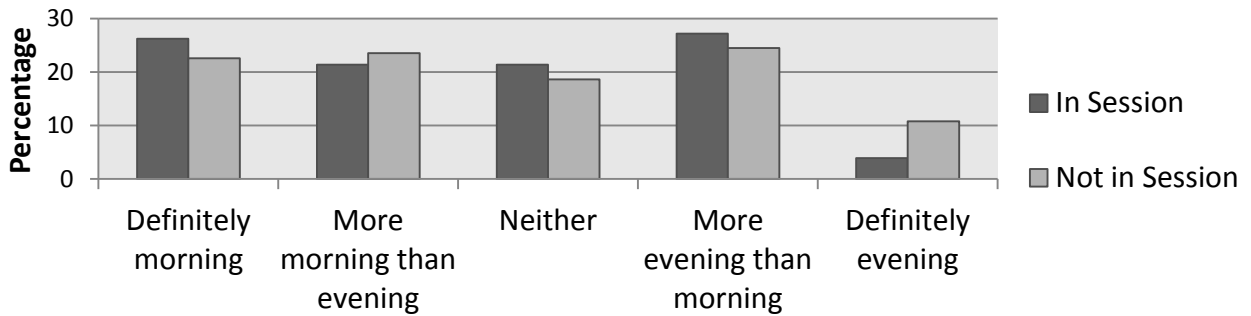
What time did you usually get up?



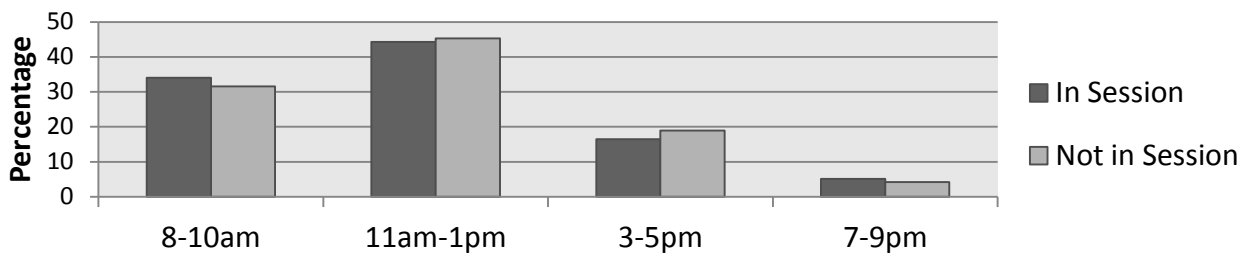
...how easy did you find getting up in the morning?



...did you consider yourself to be a “morning” or “evening” person?



...at what time were you at your peak performance for making important decisions?



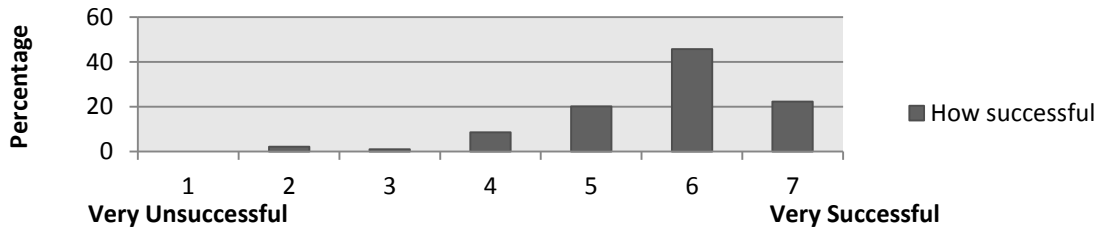
Legislative leadership and management styles

Legislators feel they are most likely to use an office leadership style which emphasizes teamwork and working together for setting a vision, but allowing staff ample freedom in the implementation. The management style which legislators feel they most likely use is one which involves listening to the staff and helping them reach their goals, or that of delegating decision making ability to the staff. Legislators self-identified their personalities to be slightly more likely to focus on people over projects, express openness to explore new information, and prefer a planned and stable life. Two-thirds of the legislators feel they make decisions based on logic as opposed to values or personal beliefs.

Which of the following best described your own legislative office leadership style?

never	sometimes	nearly always	
4.0%	24.0%	72.0%	Emphasized teamwork and working together in harmony
5.9%	31.7%	62.4%	Set the end vision and allowed staff considerable freedom in how they got there
10.9%	32.7%	56.4%	Set high performance standards which all team members were expected to achieve
4.0%	52.5%	43.6%	Focused on developing staff members (e.g., improving their performance, achieving their career)
71.7%	24.2%	4.0%	Used Military (directive) style of leadership based on my official position of authority and my experience

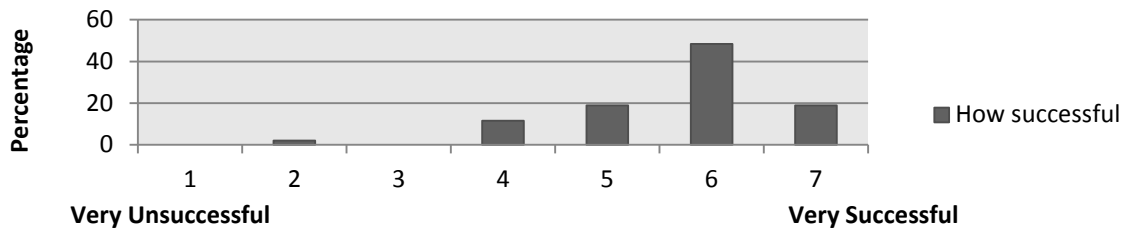
How successful do you feel your legislative office *leadership* style was? [7-point scale]



Which of the following best described your own legislative office management style?

never	sometimes	nearly always	
3.0%	50.0%	47.0%	<i>I focused on proactive listening to staff and making the staff successful in their legislative careers</i>
8.8%	49.0%	42.2%	<i>My legislative assistant had great flexibility in making decisions on my behalf</i>
8.8%	62.7%	28.4%	<i>Decisions were cleared by me for nearly everything</i>
27.7%	56.4%	15.8%	<i>Decisions were made based on office group consensus</i>

How successful do you feel your legislative office *management* style was? [7-point scale]



For the following questions: As a legislator, for the most part...

... where did you prefer to *direct your time and energy* with respect to people and projects?

61.4%	Interacting with people
38.6%	Focusing on ideas underlying legislative projects

... how did you prefer to *process information*?

38.2%	Rely heavily on facts and what is known as fairly certain
61.8%	Open to the exploration for potential new insights

... how did you prefer to *make decisions*?

67.7%	Based primarily on objective logic
32.3%	Based primarily on values and/or personal beliefs

... how did you prefer to *organize your life*?

51.9%	Prefer planned, stable and organized life style
48.1%	Prefer flexible and spontaneous life style