

Position is Power: Systems, Structure, and Legislative Effectiveness

When one pictures a legislative body, one might envision a place where lengthy (if not necessarily learned) and wide-ranging debate takes place, where members look on tensely as closely decided votes on substantial legislation take place, or where politicians glad-hand and cajole their colleagues to advance their legislative agenda. However, one might also envision a place governed by firm parliamentary rules, where adherence to procedural correctness creates roadblocks to action, and where gatekeepers use their position to secure victories of their own while exercising near-perfect negative agenda control over their opposition. Even a cursory review of legislative bodies around the world and within the United States demonstrates that these two visions are both well represented. A better understanding of which vision predominates in a given setting provides an opportunity to better assess the productivity of the body as a whole and identify paths to legislative success. This project examines the Pennsylvania House of Representatives at the level of its individual members, using their organizational and personal attributes and relative rates of legislative success to assess whether sociability or structure better explains legislative effectiveness in the chamber. The results will demonstrate empirically that, while collegiality and sociability may be relevant as background features of the legislative process, the House is a place where position is both generally and particularly valuable.

Research Question & Hypotheses

There is no doubt that legislatures are important political institutions. It is academically interesting that research into them yields so few robust and generalizable findings. As the literature review that follows will demonstrate, while the general character and function of

legislative bodies is well understood individual chambers can be painfully idiosyncratic in both structure and function. This raises an important question which can be answered for any given legislative body, and which is applied to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in this case: What accounts for legislative effectiveness in this body? On one hand, legislatures are “clubs” of political elites, and therefore it could be expected that variables which capture concepts of sociability and community to be predictive of legislative effectiveness. On the other hand, legislatures are often majoritarian procedural cartels (as is the PA House) where meaningful action in committees and the chambers are controlled by the majority through its elected and/or selected chairs and leadership. Also, traditional discrimination may mute the effectiveness of individual members in either case.

The extent to which each of these is evident in each body can instruct us as to what the path to legislative effectiveness looks like. A body in which sociability is a prevalent and desirable norm incentivizes collegiality, with a likely byproduct being a greater degree of compromise and corresponding implications for the value of debate. A body in which the procedural cartel predominates (regardless of sociability, or applying such a standard to only its own caucus to the exclusion of others) incentivizes the pursuit of institutional power and control of a key node, such as a committee chair or a position as the majority leader or speaker. This study seeks to identify variables which bring both elements to bear, to see which win out. The net result may serve as a useful guide for agenda setting, expectation setting, and legislative behavior for those who observe and work within the study environment.

In terms of hypothesis building, there is a kind of “Schrodinger’s Hypothesis.” Either expectation may be met—or both, within the majority caucus—and so both are presented here, without preference or privilege, but merely to guide the analytical effort that will follow in the

Data Analysis and Discussion sections. It may also be the case that members may not accrue the same benefit from meeting the prevailing norm, due to gender-based or racial disadvantages. In Hypothesis 1A, the selected variables presume a body in which sociability is the prevailing and functional norm. In Hypothesis 1B, the selected variables presume a body in which majoritarian power is the prevailing and functional norm. Finally, Hypothesis 2 predicts the effects of traditionally disadvantageous demographic features. The hypotheses are as follows:

- H_{1A} : As years in office and number of cosponsored bills increases, legislative effectiveness increases.
- H_{1B} : Committee Chairs and Leaders exhibit higher rates of legislative effectiveness than rank-and-file members.
- H_2 : Women and people of color will have lower legislative effectiveness scores than comparable members who do not share their demographic attributes.

The dependent variable of “legislative effectiveness” is operationalized as follows:

Number of bills reported out of committee/Number of bills introduced by a given member.

An enhanced version of this variable (“legislative effectiveness plus”) will derive the same quotient but use as the numerator the number of bills that member had passed by the House. The maximum legislative effectiveness score is 1.00, indicating that all a member’s introduced bills were voted out of committee. This measure is consistent with others in the field, though rather more parsimonious than some (for example, Volden and Wiseman’s measure at the Center for Effective Lawmaking utilizes some fifteen variables, though the literature below indicates that such largesse is not especially effective at increasing the sensitivity of the measure).¹ For this initial, exploratory effort in the Pennsylvania House the simpler measure

captures at least a primitive and guiding snapshot, which is sufficient to the purpose of assessing the general character of the path to legislative effectiveness in the body.

The independent variables are construct measures, utilizing publicly accessible member data. Hypothesis 1A uses years in the chamber and number of cosponsored bills as measures of “sociability.” While not a perfect measure, it is logical that members who show interest in other members’ legislative efforts and support them with co-sponsorship will derive a reciprocal benefit in the form of support for their own legislation; it also follows that those with more experience in the chamber will have correspondingly wider networks, magnifying that effect. Hypothesis 1B relies on a simple measure of “structure,” privileging those with control of the gates of legislative progress. Last, Hypothesis 2 identifies demographic attributes that the literature (as noted below) suggests have corresponded with difficulties in advancing legislative priorities, either due to traditional discrimination or because of the districts that members of underrepresented groups are more likely to represent.

The question being set, hypotheses detailed, and operational variables defined and described, this paper will now review the relevant literature surrounding the topic of legislative character, behavior, leadership, and effectiveness.

Literature Review

In considering the question of legislative success there are two distinct literatures: that of political leadership, firstly, and secondly, that of legislative effectiveness. Without the first, the second is irrelevant (or random, which can largely be taken to be the same thing); without the second, the first is impotent. Both are necessary, and not only to appreciate the results found herein, but also to justify and contextualize the variables chosen for analysis. A brief overview of why (and how) these two bodies of literature are to be reviewed here follows.

Beginning with political leadership, the principal challenge is that political leadership is a particular brand of leadership that privileges certain metaphysical constructs in ways that are unique to it. While military or business leadership take into account elements of the subjective and the psychological but ultimately are still focused on motivation towards the accomplishment of practical tasks, political leadership may potentially (and safely, to a point) ignore the practical entirely and still be quite effective. In a representative democracy the measure of success is not necessarily the degree to which policy problems are alleviated or addressed; instead, persistent victory in popular elections is the primary measure of political success. One can argue, of course, that policy accomplishments contribute to the case for a candidate's election or reelection, but those effects are both small *and* diluted by other factors.² This subset of political leadership can be further divided an environmental factor, specifically what elements of political leadership are applicable in executive vs. legislative settings, as the exercise of political power and the incentive structure of each is distinct from the other. Thus, this review will focus on writings which are particularly relevant to a legislature.

The literature on legislative effectiveness builds on that of political leadership, and itself bifurcates into two veins of thinking and analysis. The impetus for this bifurcation is found in the consideration of whether legislative leadership is a question of capacity (control of key points in the legislative process) or society (interactions of individual members within the legislative caucus as a whole). Are effective legislators effective because they are super-empowered within their legislative bodies, or because their personal attributes contribute to their success (or lack thereof)? These literatures are not mutually exclusive, but there is significant tension between them. There is the challenge to generalizability noted earlier; legislative bodies defy

replicability, and the rules and norms of each are unique. Nevertheless, engaging with this literature provides valuable context to the findings discussed below.

Political Leadership

Classics from philosophy on the topics of political theory and leadership contribute to our understanding of legislative effectiveness, but obliquely. They often highlight elements of *executive* leadership quite well (this being a central point of discussion among Classical and Renaissance philosophers concerned with and surrounded by autocratic or oligarchic rulers), but their commentaries are not necessarily as valuable as the sociologists and economists who would follow them. Thus, it makes sense to contrast these classics with more recent writings that have (arguably) a more direct connection to legislatures in the twenty-first century.

The classical world had much to say about political leadership, and Plato's *Republic* is often seen as a natural "jumping off" point.³ Broadly concerned with identifying attributes of an ideal state—and, functionally, with good leaders—*Republic* frequently presents discussions of several virtues, cardinal among them being wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage. Augmenting this framework is Aristotle's *Politics*, which supplements the Platonic virtues with a discussion of the application of them in different governing structures (in both pure and corrupted forms).⁴ A cynical view of political leaders in a modern democracy (which Aristotle may well conclude is his corrupted form, not the "good-of-the-many" oriented polity) might indicate that they are unconcerned with such ideals, but that view is short-sighted and ignores the role of the subjective public in evaluating and choosing political leaders. After all, even if such virtues are not *prescriptive* to political leaders, they are *attractive* to them, since demonstrating adherence to them can make a better case for one's reelection or election to higher office. Complementing this view would be that of Lippmann, which notes that political actors at all

levels (but especially the individual voter) rely not on objective reality to make political choices, but instead the “pictures in our heads.”⁵ Voters who do not necessarily act with regard for virtues like justice or wisdom, or who do not practically hew to Aristotelian notions of acting on behalf of the polity, nevertheless are very likely to want to *feel* that they do. Effective political leaders, then, give their followers cues that create perceptual screens that let them service that desire.

A countervailing point can be found as we move forward into the Renaissance writings of Machiavelli. For all that we might consider the term “Machiavellian” well-suited to modern definitions of political leadership, it should be noted that *The Prince*, as its name indicates, is far more concerned with executive political leadership rather than legislative.⁶ Indeed, many of the lessons and themes of *The Prince* run counter to those found in modern political science literature on legislative leadership. For example, the concept of ends justifying means may “work” for a prince, but such an orientation is risky in a legislative setting where one’s transactional partners change slowly, if at all. What is often considered the definitive work on legislative leadership in the American Congress makes a robust empirical case for the power of institutional culture and folkways to define paths to legislative success, as opposed to a more ruthless and entrepreneurial (or even simply progressive) politics.⁷

Subsequent research differentiates between executive and legislative leadership typologies,⁸ with cooperative (and even passive) actors performing effectively in legislatures in ways that would be wholly incompatible with executive leadership as viewed by Machiavelli and later thinkers.⁹ Burns’ writings on transformational leadership vs. transactional leadership highlight this distinction,¹⁰ though perhaps not in the manner intended: effective political leadership in a legislature very likely depends more on good *transactional* leadership.

Transactional leaders tend to exhibit high levels of conformity to institutional and group norms, which is a hallmark of success in at least one chamber of the American Congress.¹¹

Transformative leaders—in either a procedural cartel or a folkways-dominated “club”—face resistance to their efforts. Such a result is unsurprising, since legislative leaders are not leading employees—they are working with peers. Thus, the transactional model, with its emphasis on bargaining and mutual benefit, is simply more applicable to that setting. Continuing in this vein, we may consider the role and character of leaders as discussed by Kant in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*.¹² Kant’s argument that good leaders promote a sense of efficacy in those who follow them is consistent with leaders working in an environment made up not of employees but of nominal-equals.

This transactional approach is also compatible with much of the discussion and debate around theories of behavior (notably, game theory and rational choice theory) in political settings. Game theory proposes that simple calculations are poorly suited to explaining or predicting decision-making in groups, since individual actors are interactive and interdependent.¹³ Those decisions, Downs and others (including Enlightenment-era writers like Adam Smith) argue, are rooted in calculations of utility whereby actors seek to maximize their individual or (in the case of collective rationality) group benefit.¹⁴ Elaborations by economists like John Nash¹⁵ and Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein¹⁶ add cooperative and psychological elements to these models. It should be noted here that there is significant disagreement within the literature and individual fields of study on the utility and applicability of these models, but there is little disagreement with the notion that no one approach—purely rational or purely psychological—contains enough explanatory power to dismiss the others, and that decision-

making is a complex hybrid of several factors, of which the actions of political leaders are one variable.

The literature on political leadership is predictably deep and broad, as befits its position as a central preoccupation of civil society since its inception. A shift away from considerations of the various/virtuous attributes of an autocratic philosopher-king or enlightened despot is—to borrow a phrase—rational, considering the proliferation of democratic and near-democratic systems on the world stage. As the discussion in the literature moves away from the debate over the best system of government and more towards the choices of the actors within those systems, more emphasis is placed on the specialized study of behavior in a legislature.

Legislative Effectiveness

Legislative effectiveness is defined in a variety of ways in the literature, but the prevailing view is that it consists of success at advancing one's bills as far as possible in the legislative process, from introduction, through committee review and reporting out, to adoption by the full chamber (and possibly as far as presentation to the executive). Definitions that incorporate other markers of legislative success are available, but rarely show greater diagnostic sensitivity than this more basic (and easily tracked) metric.¹⁷ There is much less agreement, however, on the most accurate model of legislative effectiveness and the contributing member attributes that may aid it. For that reason, this review will present several theories of legislative effectiveness and examine individual-level political and demographic variables that may impact it such as policy competence, education, race, and gender.

Theories and Structural Contributors to Legislative Effectiveness

Several institution-level features may contribute to legislative effectiveness, and there are competing theories that frame those features. Whether a legislature is fundamentally a social-

choice institution or a game-theoretic institution is a matter of long (and ongoing) debate. Game theorists presume that rational choice utility-seeking will define members' interactions as they seek to advance their strategic goals; social choice theorists, on the other hand, note that legislators are heavily social actors who trade votes and engage in collaboration at the committee or caucus level in ways that may confound a strict rational choice analysis.¹⁸

On the social-choice side, Matthews identifies institutional culture as a prospective macro feature, using as his example the US Senate. The Senate is a place where what are typically considered "social" rules are highly valued, even over more rigid parliamentary rules. Effectiveness, then, is a function of social competence within the body, as reported by its own members in Matthews' study. "You can't be effective unless you are respected," and that respect hinges on personal affability and trust: "[I]f the other senators know and like you, it increases your effectiveness."¹⁹ Courtesy, commitment to the Senate, reasonability, and lack of ideological entrenchment are valued. This makes life easier for conservatives compared to liberals, who are under partisan pressure to "reform"; this also calls into question whether those who pursue novel and cutting-edge approaches to policy are as capable of legislative success in a body with strong social trust guardrails. Recent scholarship confirms that the Senate remains much more egalitarian than other legislative bodies, with fewer hierarchical controls.²⁰

Game theorists can point to conditions other than the social culture of the body, such as the position of the party and/or individuals within it. Where interparty competition is higher (and a majority is therefore at risk of losing its majority), party cohesion becomes more important.²¹ This may reduce the ability of individual members to bargain, especially with members from across the aisle, and increase the power of the leadership and committee chairs. Likewise, other rational choice models propose the idea (rather obvious, though not necessarily explanatory!)

that some policies are better than others, some members are better at formulating policy, and that some members are better at advancing their policy agendas than others. However, the authors also note that this can be a difficult variable to operationalize, and the more parsimonious approach that relies on “fundamentals” (like time in office, committee chairs held, etc.) seem to be essentially as effective at assessing efficiency.²²

Individual Contributors to Legislative Effectiveness

The literature around member-level variables and their relationship to legislative effectiveness is quite broad, with extensive research into the differences in effectiveness among members with differentiating characteristics. These include predictable demographic differences such as race and gender, but also include measures of political acumen such as personal networks, fundraising ability, interpersonal lobbying.

Researchers consistently find that race predicts disparities in legislative effectiveness. Specifically, they find that white representatives are more likely than their African American colleagues to see their legislation acted upon. This has been found at both the state level²³ and federal level.²⁴ When examining the effectiveness of legislative black caucuses in Virginia and Georgia, scholars find that they are generally successful at winning some policy victories, but usually at a lower rate and often with concession towards other groups’ considerations.²⁵ One notable example is found in the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC), which successfully pursued state recognition of the contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr. but only in a bill that also recognized Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.²⁶ Some of the noted disparities have other contributing factors such as ideological distance from the majority, but the most significant factor is the relative affluence of white-represented districts vs. non-white represented districts: there is a well-established “affluence bias” in agenda setting, and it is likely at work here.²⁷

Even accounting for these other variables, the persistent and consistent finding of racial disparity in legislative effectiveness is troubling and merits further investigation (in this study, and others) to assess its status in the present day.

Gender likewise represents a predictive variable in legislative effectiveness, though here there is more variability and under some circumstances gender differences disappear entirely. There are mixed results on the general question of whether women are more or less effective, legislatively, than men. Some find no consistent differences in effectiveness when gender is the test variable²⁸ and find that women are as or more successful than men when the policy area is perceived to be related to women, children, or families, such as education and healthcare.²⁹ Also, gender-stereotypical approaches in self-reported descriptions of individual legislative styles shows that “feminist” leadership styles that stress compromise, consensus-building, and honesty are the norm regardless of the gender of the respondent.³⁰ These positive notes, though, are not the end of the story (and one wonders whether the finding in Reingold is questionable given that it was elicited by interviews, which may indicate an interactivity bias at work). Other studies note that bills sponsored by women receive more negative scrutiny than those introduced by men, and committee action that tables or amends bills substantially is more likely to be male-initiated.³¹ Additionally, the position of the party within the legislature matters: minority party women tend to be more effective, while majority party women introduce more bills but have less success at advancing them.³² The long-term effects of this are costly for majority party women, as the agenda setting effects of party polarization makes them less effective than their minority party counterparts.

There are several other individual-level variables that may contribute to legislative effectiveness. One interesting negative finding is that levels of formal education do not correlate

to legislative effectiveness.³³ Education as a proxy for skill level is a common feature in the government literature. However, using a cross-national sample that includes American legislators, education level is not a significant variable in legislative effectiveness. This is not to say that policy development skill is not rewarded: a study of policy entrepreneurs (legislators who introduce a policy proposal that has not previously been introduced in that chamber) and policy opportunists (legislators who have not exhibited expertise and persistence necessary for policy entrepreneurship but who are associated with salient issues whose "policy window" has opened) both demonstrate greater legislative effectiveness, but policy entrepreneurs benefit more than their opportunistic peers.³⁴ Finally, network effects may also contribute to legislative effectiveness: members who mention well-known and well-connected interest groups in their "Dear Colleague" letters attract more cosponsors to their legislation and it is more likely to advance, and members that share electoral resources (both funds and fundraising lists) are more likely to see their legislation supported by those colleagues.³⁵

Ultimately, the literature provides many useful guideposts for an examination of the legislature in question, and also demonstrates why such an examination is necessary. It is not so much the case that there are specific lacunae in the literature, nor that there are irreconcilable contradictions in the empirical findings (such differences in results are often entirely understandable), but rather that (as has been previously and repeatedly noted) legislatures are different, and those differences yield empirical observations and conclusions that are accurate for that body but not necessarily for popular legislatures as a whole, nor even for different houses of the same legislative chamber (see, for example, the differences between the US Senate and US House in Matthews³⁶ and David Olson and Cynthia Nonidez,³⁷ respectively). This is all the more reason to engage in a rigorous review of the social and/or structural markers for

effectiveness in individual bodies like the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, using such variables as are clearly measurable and applicable.

Methodology & Data Collection

This project benefits from the robust tracking data available via the Pennsylvania General Assembly website and supporting databases. The decision to utilize the written record was undertaken both due to the convenience of access as well as to promote the validity (both internal and external) of the results. Member demographic and individual history data has shown that it is a reliable measure of legislative effectiveness, even taking into consideration additional potential diagnostic sensitivity from more detailed and discrete data. The research reviewed in the Literature Review shows that such additional detail is negligibly valuable in assessing legislative effectiveness. Additionally, use of interviews or surveys invites members to introduce bias into the results, potentially providing responses that reflect aspirations more than reality, and adding an additional coding step to the process as well. Finally, the data used to assess the Pennsylvania House in this project is readily available for most state legislatures (and the federal legislature), so any future studies of the same or comparable institutions can utilize the same variables, empowering comparison of the results across time.

Data collection was accomplished by basic transcription from official internet sources. Using the current member roster³⁸ to access individual official House websites, every member's name, party, committee chair status, and sponsored and co-sponsored legislation was noted. For the purposes of this analysis, only sponsored/cosponsored Appropriations Bills, General Bills, and Joint Resolutions were counted; Simple and Concurrent Resolutions, generally considered to be non-controversial and bearing no weight in terms of policymaking ("time bills" recognizing a day of awareness, for example) were not included in the counts. To measure legislative output,

committee websites were accessed via the House committee portal³⁹ and their votes noted to track bills that were “reported out” (sent back to the full chamber for further consideration). Finally, roll call votes were reviewed from the official House calendar page⁴⁰ to note which bills were voted on for final approval. The prime sponsor of a bill reported out and then voted on for final consideration is noted on its roll call record, and that information was transferred to the tracking spreadsheet used to aggregate the legislative effectiveness data. Finally, external websites were used to identify the time in office for each member,⁴¹ members of each party’s leadership team in the House,⁴² and members of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus,⁴³ and those members’ status was noted on the same tracking spreadsheet.

The data window includes the 2021-22 legislative session, from its commencement on January 1, 2021 through July 29, 2022, when this study entered its review phase. It should be noted that the House has completed the bulk of its legislative activity for the two-year 2021-22 term: the House is in recess until September 2022 and will pass very few bills before the 2022 election on November 8. Where applicable (party, gender, PLBC membership, committee chair, and leadership) variables were coded as binary/dummy variables (“1” when applicable, “0” when not). Other variables (years in office, number of bills sponsored, number of bills cosponsored, number of bills reported out of committee, number of bills approved by the full House) were coded as discrete variables counting by ones. Finally, two measures of legislative effectiveness were created using the existing data. “EffectivenessRatio” is the quotient of the sum of a member’s number of sponsored bills reported out of committee plus the number approved by the full House divided by the total number of that member’s prime sponsored bills.

“EffectivenessPlusRatio” is the same measure comprised solely of bills that received a vote in

the full House; it is a more stringent measure, including only those sponsored bills that were approved by the House.

Data Analysis

The data were imported into SPSS and processed in a variety of ways, as reported below. These statistical treatments form the basis for the hypothesis testing and discussion found in the next section. First, baseline measures of legislative effectiveness were completed for the chamber as a whole. Mean legislative effectiveness was 0.35 across all members, who introduced an average of 12.8 bills and cosponsored 180. The average member saw 3.85 bills reported out of committee successfully, and 2.1 approved by the full House. The average time in office is 7.8 years. It should be noted that effectiveness (and, by extension, number of bills reported out and passed by the House) is strongly impacted by party membership, with majority members enjoying significantly greater success than majority members, as noted below in Figure 1.

Next, a series of comparisons of means were generated, with an Independent Samples t-test applied to each binary pair to determine whether the difference in means was statistically significant. The results are noted in Figure 1, below. Five pairs exhibited statistically significant differences in mean Legislative Effectiveness scores, specifically:

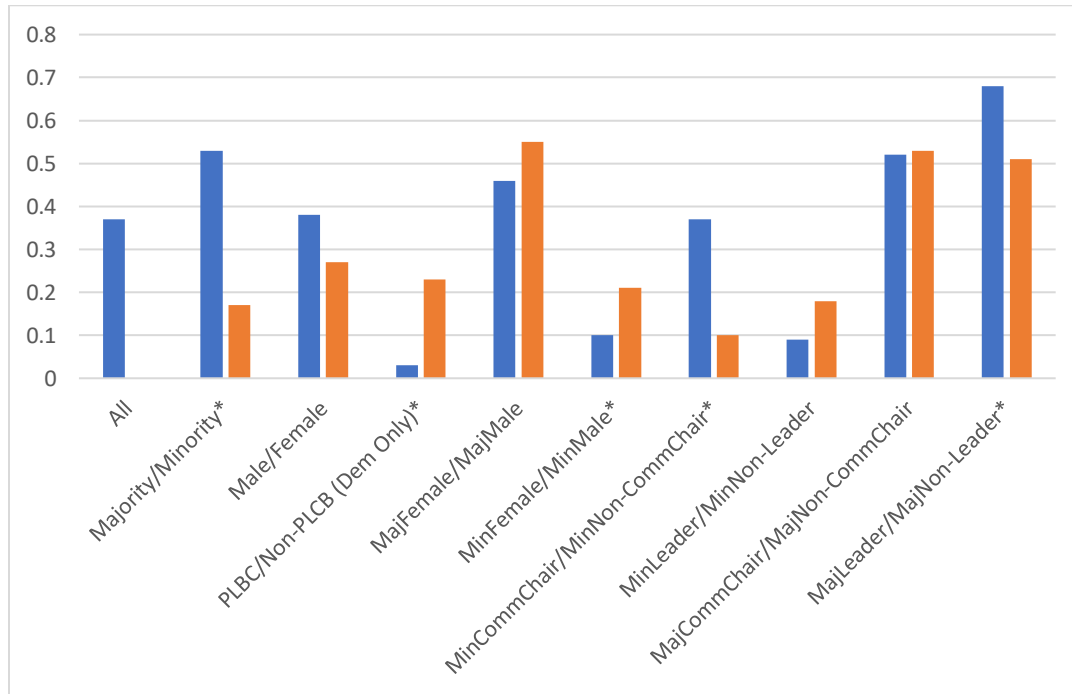
- Majority vs. Minority party members
- African American members vs. non-African American members (comparison limited to the Minority caucus since all but one Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus member is a Democrat)
- Minority party male v. female members
- Minority party committee chairs v. non-committee chairs

- Majority leadership v. Majority rank-and-file

The most effective cohort are members of the majority leadership team (0.68), while the least effective cohort are PLBC members (0.03).

Figure 1

Legislative Effectiveness Means by Independent Sample Cohort



Note: Statistically significant t-test pairs are noted with an asterisk (*)

A multivariate linear regression generated the results in Table 1 below. This OLS regression identified several significant variables: party membership (PartyR), membership in the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus (PLBC), membership in the majority leadership (RLeadership), and number of sponsored bills (Sponsored). Of these, party membership was by far the most impactful, with a standardized coefficient of 0.55. The model yielded a robust r-squared value of 0.419, which was significant to the 0.001 level.

Table 1***Multivariate Regression Model for all test variables, All Members***

Model Summary		
R Square	Adjusted R Square	Significance
0.419	0.389	<.001
Coefficients		
	Standardized Coefficient	Significance
PartyR	0.550	<.001
Tenure	-0.039	0.681
GenderM	0.076	0.197
PLBC	-0.113	0.076
DCommChair	0.090	0.29
DLeadership	-0.005	0.932
RCommChair	0.024	0.764
Rleadership	0.107	0.082
Sponsored	-0.142	0.014
Cosponsored	-0.008	0.891

Targeted regressions within each caucus in the two domains described in the hypotheses are summarized in Table 2. The “Sociability” model incorporates the Tenure and Co-sponsorship variables regressed on the Legislative Effectiveness variable, while the “Structure” model incorporates the Committee Chair and Leadership variables. Regressions were done at the caucus level in order to capture differences in behavior in a majority versus minority caucus. In the Majority Caucus, only Leadership membership was statistically significant, with a modest positive coefficient. For the Minority Caucus, time in office was a significant and positive variable, but the Committee Chair role was more predictive (and robustly positive) of legislative effectiveness.

Table 2***Linear Regression of Sociability and Structure Models, by Caucus***

	Majority Caucus	Minority Caucus
<i>Sociability Model, r-squared value</i>	0.001	0.021
Tenure	0.034	0.176*
# of Cosponsored Bills	-0.021	-0.089
<i>Structure Model, r-squared value</i>	0.023	0.059*
Committee Chair	-0.012	0.239**
Leadership	0.153*	-0.032

* $p < 0.1$

** $p < 0.05$

Correlation coefficients between the test variables and the dependent variable (Legislative Effectiveness) were broadly consistent with the coefficients noted in the regression analyses, and were significant and in the same direction for all variables except Tenure, which was insignificant.

Discussion

The data support several conclusions, both in general and regarding the hypotheses proposed, and we will begin by reviewing some general findings. First, and unsurprisingly, *party is king*. Majority party membership greatly increases legislative effectiveness, which is entirely consistent with the realities of life in even the most collegial and bipartisan legislative bodies: simply put, the majority will always privilege its own members' legislation, either out of ideological consonance or electoral incentive. This picture becomes even more stark when the dependent variable is shifted to the "Effectiveness Plus" measure described previously (bills that not only were reported out of committee but were passed by the House). The PA House approved 433 general bills in the session window reviewed, and of those 416 (just over 96

percent) were sponsored by the majority. Also telling is that *no* bills put up for vote by the full House were defeated. This is a strong indicator of majoritarian procedural cartel behavior, and it foreshadows the findings noted as we move to examination of the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1A, our Sociability Hypothesis, can be safely rejected. In only one test does it find any indication of support, when Tenure was significant for the Minority Caucus regression analysis. Even this is very likely an artifact: committee chairs in the Democratic caucus of the PA House of Representatives are determined by seniority, and as we will see in a moment Minority committee chairs were able to leverage their positions to achieve some success at moving bills out of their own committees, so it is likely that Tenure is really showing a shadow of that Committee Chair effect. In the broader multivariate regression, Tenure has a negative coefficient, and “number of Co-sponsorships” is similarly negative (and decidedly insignificant in substantive and statistical terms). Whatever else it might be, the Pennsylvania House does not appear to be a fertile ground for relationship-building and/or logrolling, either within each caucus or generally within the chamber.

Hypothesis 1B finds much more robust support, however. While we see different manifestations of structural advantage/use of power, the data demonstrate the advantages of position and role in the chamber. Beginning with the comparisons of means in the Independent Sample t-tests, we find significant advantages in legislative effectiveness scores for two leadership groups: Minority Caucus Committee Chairs and Majority Caucus Leadership. These advantages are mirrored in the regression analysis. The different “faces” of structural power are interesting, reflecting some difference in how legislative power is manifested in each caucus. The Republican/Majority caucus committee chairs are not powerless—far from it, in fact, since their average effectiveness score is over 50 percent—but the general partisan advantage of being

a member of the majority means that even non-committee chairs see much of their legislation approved. By comparison, the Democratic/Minority caucus not only sees no advantage for their leadership in terms of legislative effectiveness, membership in the leadership is a starkly *negative* influence on effectiveness. There are at least two prospective reasons for this. First, it is entirely possible that the Majority leadership/caucus are especially hostile to legislation proposed by the Minority leadership and bottle it up as a means of limiting those members' political influence or salience. Second, it is intuitively plausible that the Minority caucus leadership end up quarterbacking especially ideological, broad, and/or impactful legislation that is unlikely to receive the approval of a partisan-weighted committee.⁴⁴ However, Minority committee chairs seem to enjoy some success in legislative effectiveness terms, indicating that they are able to lobby their Majority counterpart and/or committee members to advance at least some of their legislation (though as noted previously, these bills almost never reach the calendar for a floor vote). These data support Hypothesis 1B and suggest that structural/organizational power is a more useful tool in the House.

The results for Hypothesis 2 represent a mixed bag. On the encouraging side of the ledger, gender does not appear to be a significant barrier to legislative effectiveness in the PA House. Within the majority, members of any gender have comparable Legislative Effectiveness scores (in fact, the Legislative Effectiveness Plus averages for Male and Female legislators are virtually identical at 0.34 and 0.33, respectively). Gender is a significant variable in the Independent Sample t-test within the Minority caucus, but weakly. Where Hypothesis 2 receives support is in examining Legislative Effectiveness scores for members of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus (PLBC). PLBC members were compared to non-PLBC members in the Democratic caucus (since all but one PLBC member is a Democrat), and the difference was

stark. PLBC members have an average Legislative Effectiveness score of 0.03, compared to 0.23 for non-PLBC Democrats. The works noted in the Literature Review provide some explanations for why this may be evident: members of color generally represent lower-income districts,⁴⁵ and public policy often showcases an “affluence” bias.⁴⁶ Additionally, two PLBC members are also members of the Democratic leadership team in the chamber (in fact, the Minority Leader and the Minority Whip, the two highest positions), which has already been identified as a group with low levels of effectiveness overall. Nevertheless, this finding suggests that racial barriers to effective legislating may still exist.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide substantial evidence that the Pennsylvania House of Representatives is “leaning into” its majority cartel features. This is not to say that sociability and collegiality are not useful in specific cases, but as general features they are either broadly ineffectual (minimal) or not empirically visible in the variables selected for analysis here (fugitive). As a guide to legislative success for current and prospective representatives, members who are serious about advancing substantively significant policies would be best advised to pursue majority control (valuable for its own sake as a general feature of caucus-level legislative effectiveness), and further to obtain a leadership post in that Majority caucus. From the Minority caucus perspective, a committee chairmanship in an area relevant to one’s primary policy agenda item would appear to be the most useful position, though that member should be well aware of the unlikelihood of any advanced legislation being scheduled for floor action. The PA House appears to function as a near-perfect procedural cartel.

These results have important implications for the House’s political legitimacy in the commonwealth. Democrats and Republicans running for the House received approximately the

same number of votes, statewide, in the 2020 election and Pennsylvania is very much a “purple” state in both outcomes of statewide races and party registration numbers. However, more than 96 percent of the legislation voted upon by the House was sponsored by Republicans. This seems likely to strike the median voter as a representational challenge at best, and undemocratic abuse of rulemaking at worst. If minority members are not able to advance legislative proposals—or can do so only on a sliver of issues which are noncontroversial—the body as a whole may face accusations of failing to represent the people of the state. Legislatures matter. They are not necessarily significant as lawmaking or policymaking bodies, but where they are, they contribute to stability of other democratic institutions. Where they are dysfunctional, though, they still matter, in that they can exacerbate political disorder by their ineffectiveness and perceived corruption or impotence.⁴⁷ The majority in the House—whichever party it represents—should bear this in mind as it considers its procedural rules, norms, and behaviors.

ENDNOTES

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