



The Latest Research

This chapter has noted at various points the differences across legislatures that can make a difference. Term limits, partisanship and ideology, the sociodemographics of a legislature—all these can make a difference to legislative agendas, policy priorities, and whose political preferences do, or do not, get represented. Given the importance of these differences, it is not surprising that scholars are interested in their causes and consequences.

Below we summarize some of the latest research that employs the comparative method to explore how these legislative differences translate into power and policymaking.

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- **Birkhead, Nathaniel A.** “The Role of Ideology in State Legislative Elections.” Prepared for presentation at State Politics and Policy Conference, Iowa City, IA, May 23–25, 2013. <http://www.uiowa.edu/~stpols13/papers/Birkhead%20Ideology%20in%20State%20Legislative%20Elections.pdf>.

How much do ideology and voting records actually matter when incumbent state legislators are up for reelection? They may have other interests than those of their district in mind when they vote, such as currying favor with party leaders or interest groups. If a legislator's voting record ends up being more extreme than the views of her district, will she be punished? Incumbent ideological extremity is associated with decreased electoral vote share in congressional elections, but individual state legislators and their voting habits receive less attention. Examining some 1,500 state legislative contests, Birkhead finds that ideological extremity does not seem overall to have a statistically significant effect on incumbents' vote totals, although Republicans (but not Democrats) are rewarded to a minor extent by voters for moderation.

- **Cummins, Jeff.** “The Effects of Legislative Term Limits on State Fiscal Conditions.” *American Politics Research* 20 (2012): 1–26.

One of the themes running throughout this entire book, not just this chapter, is how battered state

finances continue to be a major influence on policy and politics. This study analyzes state budgets between 1983 and 2008 and finds that as legislative turnover increases, budgets are more likely to head toward the red. This happens for several reasons. More experienced legislators may be better equipped to handle fiscal crises, in the same fashion a veteran pilot is better prepared for in-air emergencies. Legislators who have short time horizons are less likely to take into account the long-term implications of policy. The findings of this study have particular resonance given that term limits were increasing legislative turnover during and after the Great Recession.

- **Gamm, Gerald, and Thad Kousser.** “Contingent Partisanship: When Party Labels Matter—and When They Don't—in the Distribution of Pork in American State Legislatures.” Paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Chicago, IL, 2013. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2300304.

Legislatures often have authority to guide spending projects toward particular areas in a state. Examining budget decisions in six states during the first half of the 20th century, the authors found that states where power was divided between the two major parties were more likely to make spending decisions on a statewide basis, while one-party legislatures were more likely to direct money to specific districts—with the majority, of course, taking a larger share of such spending. In states where there was less competition or polarization between the parties, partisan identity mattered less than seniority or members' voting near the ideological center of the legislature when it came to receiving funds for their districts.

- **Reingold, Beth, and Adrienne R. Smith.** “Legislative Leadership and Intersections of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the American States.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, August 26, 2014. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2487604.