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Abstract: Examinations of roll call voting have found issue salience affects the influences over roll call voting in different issue areas. However, it is unclear whether these findings can be extended to legislatures generally as studies have focused only on the U.S. congress or one U.S. state legislature. This article examines the influences over roll call voting in fifteen issue areas in five legislative chambers in four U.S. states. The results show the influences over roll call voting vary based on issue salience, but chamber variations suggest features in the political environment, such as party competition and the resources available to legislators, are just as important in understanding the factors that influence roll call voting.

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The idea that “policies determine politics” (Lowi 1964) was, for a long time, accepted wisdom in the political science literature and for good reason. A number of different studies documented the different politics surrounding different policy areas. This approach to understanding politics has also been applied to decision making in legislatures as scholars have argued that the mix of influences over roll call voting changes with the policy content of the issue at hand (Achen 1978; Clausen 1973; Erikson 1978; Francis 1967; Kuklinski 1978; Miller and Stokes 1963). One of the key findings that emerges from this literature is that the influences over roll call voting in salient issue areas are different from the influences over roll call voting in non-salient issue areas. However, these findings have never been confirmed in the U.S. using a comparative approach to studying legislatures. In fact, each of these studies looks either at Congress only or at one state legislature. As Squire and Hamm (2005) note, the true utility of a theory can only be determined when it is clear that it applies to multiple legislatures. Furthermore, more recent research challenges the notion that the influences over roll call voting vary based on policy area, arguing instead that roll call voting is largely unidimensional. Thus, only a comparative analysis can determine whether roll call voting is always unidimensional, whether the influences over different types of issues are the same in all legislatures or whether there is variation in dimensionality and influences from legislature to legislature. So for example, it is unknown whether party dominates voting on non-salient issues in all legislatures or if there are some settings where the personal beliefs of legislators play an important role in voting on these types of issues. Analyzing multiple legislative chambers allows for a determination of whether voting is unidimensional in some places and whether the policy-politics mapping is consistent everywhere or it is itself conditioned by the context within which the decision takes place.
In order to determine whether the salient/non-salient distinction applies across multiple legislatures, this article examines roll call voting in a number of different issue areas in five legislative chambers in four U.S. states. In general, the results reveal that roll call voting is not always unidimensional and confirm the conventional wisdom in that the influences over voting do vary with parties tending to play a more important role in non-salient issue areas and a myriad of influences emerging on salient issues. However, the results also show that these findings are not consistent across legislative chambers. While party is the dominant influence in non-salient issues areas, in some chambers, party is most important for salient issues areas as well. This suggests that contextual factors, such as party competition and the resources available to legislators, may be as important as issue salience in understanding roll call voting in legislatures.

**Legislative Decision Making in Different Issue Areas**

Many scholars have argued that relationships among various political actors are largely determined by the type of policy at stake; for different policy types, there is a distinctive set of political relationships associated with it. Early studies generally accepted the notion that the politics surrounding an issue are determined by policy type when applying these models to legislative behavior, arguing that the mix of influences over roll call voting for legislators changes with the policy content of the bill at hand (Clausen 1973). So for example, if constituents are particularly concerned with a specific issue, such as education, then legislators might be willing to buck their party on these issues. Thus, the key to understanding what factors influence roll call voting, according to this theory, is the issue type. More specifically, the critical distinction between different types of issues that emerges is the distinction between salient and non-salient issues. While different issues may be salient to different actors, in this
line of research, salience is typically taken to mean that the content of the bill itself is salient to constituents. Those issues that generally fall into the non-salient category, such as executive oversight or legislative organization, have similar influences, and these influences are in turn different from those over roll call voting in salient issue areas, such as health and education.

Studies that examine this question in the U.S. have generally confirmed the assumptions about the distinction between salient and non-salient issues (Achen 1978; Clausen 1973; Erikson 1978; Francis 1967; Kuklinski and Elling 1977; Miller and Stokes 1963). For example, partisan influences on voting are more pronounced on bills that directly affect party interests but that are not salient to constituents, such as election administration, and on non-salient issues such as state administration, appropriations, legislative organization, labor, and judicial and legal issues (Jewell 1955; LeBlanc 1969; Patterson 1996). While these issues may be salient to the party, they are less salient to the general public and so tend to be categorized as non-salient in the literature. Party influence may be greater on non-salient bills generally as constituency and legislator preferences are less intense or unknown. Additionally, the personal beliefs of congresspersons have been shown to have a varying impact on voting in different issue areas, with personal beliefs having a greater impact on salient issues (Miller and Stokes 1963). This may be because personal beliefs on these issues are strong or these personal beliefs serve as proxies for constituency opinion. Thus, in this context, these are defined as salient because they are important to either legislators themselves or to their constituents. A few studies at the U.S. state level have also found that the personal characteristics of legislators, taken to represent proxies for their personal beliefs, influence roll call voting on salient issues. For example, Witt and Moncrief (1993) and Day (1994) found the personal characteristics of legislators in Idaho
and Louisiana, such as religion and race, are significant predictors of their votes on abortion policies.

More recent research has questioned whether roll call voting is actually multidimensional. This line of research argues instead that roll-call voting is largely unidimensional and that a single liberal/conservative dimension explains much of the variance in the roll call voting records of legislators (Krehbiel 1998; Poole 1988; Poole and Daniels 1985; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). According to this model then, the influences over roll call voting do not vary according to the type of issue at hand; the influences are the same for all types of votes. But the unidimensional model assumes that the high correlation between voting scores and measures of ideology or party means that voting is only influenced by the personal beliefs of legislators or by partisanship. Given that party, ideology and constituency are highly, but not completely, correlated, saying that much of the variance in roll call voting can be explained by one dimension does not tell us whether the influences over voting in any given issue area are consistent. This analysis explicitly takes on the policy dimensions approach to understanding roll call voting, but at the same time, it offers a test of both the policy dimensions and the unidimensional approaches to understanding roll call voting. If voting is truly unidimensional, then there should be no variation in the influences over roll call voting from issue area to issue area. On the other hand, if the influences over voting do indeed vary based on the issue area, then the policy dimensions approach would be confirmed.

Because many now believe that roll call voting is unidimensional, little contemporary research examines roll call voting in different issue areas. Additionally, most research that does looks only at the U.S. Congress or a single U.S. state legislature, which impedes the ability to draw generalizations about the dimensionality and consistency of these influences in legislatures.
generally. In the U.S., state level research is a good vehicle for remedying the lack of comparative research, but most state legislative studies examine only one or two issues or one state, making it difficult to examine state legislative decision making comprehensively. Finally, almost none of these models, particularly at the state level, contain independent measures of ideology, due to difficulties in obtaining independent measures of legislator ideology. Typically, vote-based proxies are utilized instead which may lead to an overestimation of the impact of ideology and an underestimation of the importance of other factors (Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Jenkins 2006). Thus, the role of personal beliefs in influencing vote decisions in different issue areas in multiple legislatures is largely unknown.

As there is a growing body of evidence that the influences over roll call voting vary from state to state (Jenkins 2006; Wright and Schaffner 2002; Wright and Winburn 2002), let alone from country to country (see for example Carrey 2003), this is problematic. There are reasons to expect that the influences over roll call voting in similar issue areas will vary in different legislative settings and that these differences might not necessarily coincide with traditional salient/non-salient distinctions. Theoretically, the critical distinction would seem to be the resources available to various actors; when the balance of resources shifts, it may enhance or impede the ability of an actor to influence roll call votes. For example, party strength and activity are related to party competition, with higher levels of competition being related to greater party strength (Patterson and Calderia 1984). Where parties are competitive, parties may exert influence over both salient and non-salient issues due to increased strength, whereas in states where there is less competition and less strength, party influence may emerge only on non-salient issues or not at all. As Wright, Osborn and Winburn (2004, 21) note, party competition yields more cohesive and divided parties in the legislature as control of the legislature becomes
up for grabs and incentives to toe the party lie increase. Additionally, the resources available to party leaders in the legislature may affect the ability of party leaders to influence voting. In some states party leaders are provided staff, salaries and office space and have the power to assign committee membership and refer bills to committees, while in others they are provided none of these resources or powers. These resources are important as they can be used as carrots or sticks to pressure legislators to vote with the party.

Conversely, the resources available to legislators themselves may detract from or enhance the ability of parties to influence voting. For instance, in more professional legislatures where legislators work full-time and have staff and office space available to them, legislators may be less reliant on the party for information and support and better able to connect with constituents and run campaigns independent of parties. In these legislatures, they may be more willing to vote according to their conscience and constituents rather than with the party. In less professional legislatures, where legislators are part-time and lack staff and offices, they may be more reliant on the party for information for support and so may be more inclined to support the party on roll call votes, regardless of the issue area. Term limits may also serve to decrease the resources available to legislators, such as knowledge and expertise, and increase reliance on the party as legislators have little time to acclimate themselves to how the legislature works. In this situation, party organizations may become the leading mechanisms for structuring life in the legislature. Thus, factors such as party competition, the rules in a given legislature, legislative professionalism, and party resources among others impact the availability of resources to given actors and may all condition the nature of the influences over roll call voting. In order to see if the influences over roll call voting in different issues areas are consistent from chamber to
chamber or whether these contextual factors may also be important, the next sections analyze roll
call voting in fifteen issue areas in five legislative chambers in four U.S. states.

Data and Methods

The states selected for this analysis were Colorado, Florida, Missouri and Wisconsin due
to the fact that they were surveyed as part of the Election Dynamics Project (EDP). While these
states do not represent a random sample of all 50 states, they were selected because they do vary
on some key political variables. For example, when looking at party competition as measured by
Aistrup (1993) for the 1980-1985 period, the state average scores range from -0.3506 in Florida to
0.2290 in Colorado. In between these extremes, Missouri scores -0.2259, and Wisconsin -0.1066.
Few states fall closer to the lower extreme for this measure than Florida, and at the upper end,
only South Dakota, Idaho and Utah score higher than Colorado. In some of these chambers,
party leaders clearly have more resources; for example, in Colorado, party leaders had no salaries
and appointment powers were shared between the parties, while party leaders in the Florida
House made close to $10,000 per year. Finally, there is some variation in legislative
professionalism, with Colorado ranking the lowest at 21st and Wisconsin ranking the highest at
4th (Squire 2007). Although it would have been useful to look at other states in this analysis
(particularly those with lower levels of professionalism), the use of variables from the EDP
survey constrained the analysis to those states selected for the EDP survey. While these cases
may be those where party plays a stronger role (see for example Wright, Osborn and Winburn
2004), variation in the importance of roll call voting here would mean that there exists greater
variation in such influence in all of the state legislatures in the U.S.
All local party officials and state legislative candidates were surveyed as part of the EDP. This analysis focuses on a subset of survey respondents, namely those state legislative candidates who were elected to office and became state legislators. Of those who returned surveys in these states, 181 in 1996 were from winning candidates. Response rates ranged from a high of 57.1% in the Colorado Senate to a low of 28.3% in the Florida Senate; the average response rate across all chambers analyzed here was 45.1%. While the number of responses is some of these chambers is small, this is due primarily to the fact that these are small chambers. Due to a small number of respondents in the Florida, Missouri and Wisconsin upper houses (less than 20), these chambers were not included in this analysis. One sample T-tests were run comparing NOMINATE scores, partisan affiliation and the district demographics of survey respondents to the chamber at large. Out of 25 total tests, only one significant difference emerged (the survey respondents in the Wisconsin House represented more African Americans than the chamber at large) during these tests. Nor were there significant differences between the survey respondents and other legislators with respect to electoral competition. Thus, the sample seemed to be representative of the legislature as a whole and should provide a solid footing for drawing conclusions about the nature of legislative behavior in these chambers.

The dependent variables in these analyses are issue area scores; these scores were developed for the 1997-1998 legislative sessions in the all of the lower chambers and the Colorado Senate. These scores record the proportion of times a legislator voted liberally in a given issue area and serve as the dependent variables here. In order to create these scores, a number of steps were taken. First, an issue area coding scheme was developed. This scheme derives primarily from Congressional Quarterly’s categorization of congressional roll call votes although modifications to this scheme were undertaken to account for the differences in state
politics. The final coding scheme consisted of the following codes: abortion; agriculture; appropriations, budget and revenue; economic regulatory (banking, finance, business, communications and telecommunications); campaign finance, politics and elections; legislative affairs; crime and criminal justice; education; environment, recreation and parks; executive branch (appointments) and oversight; local government; gun control and hunting; health, welfare, family and children; labor and labor unions; law and judiciary; taxes and taxation; transportation; pensions, retirement and social security; procedural; and lottery and gambling.\(^1\)

After this, all bills voted on in the 1997-1998 session in each of these state legislatures were assigned an issue area code based on brief summaries of each bill provided by the state legislative journals or the official state legislature website. First, two coders, working independently, assigned a code to each bill. When these coders agreed on the issue area to be assigned to the bill, this was designated as the final code attached to the bill.\(^2\) When these coders disagreed, a third coder reviewed the bill and made a binding decision about the final code to be attached to the bill. The two primary coders agreed 77.2% of the time on the issue content of the bill in question for the issue areas examined in this analysis.

Once categories were assigned to the bills, the roll call files were examined for votes to be included as part of the issue area scores. In each of these legislatures, rules vary about the type of amendments that may be attached to a bill. While some of the legislatures allow only germane amendments to be attached, in at least one of the legislatures being studied, there is no such rule. Given that the text of amendments is generally unavailable for all of these legislatures, there was no way to ascertain whether a given amendment actually fell into the same issue area as the bill to which it was attached. As a result, all votes on amendments and any
motions regarding amendments were excluded from this analysis. All votes on the entire bill, whether in final form or at some earlier stage of the process, were included.

After the votes to be included in the analysis were identified, scores for each legislator in each issue area were developed. As these scores measure the proportion of times a legislator voted liberally in a given issue area, a “liberal” vote had to be identified. Given that many of these bills had a small number of dissenting votes, it was not entirely clear for each bill which side was a liberal vote and which side was a conservative vote. Therefore, all votes with less than 10% dissent were eliminated. In order to determine whether a yea vote or a nay vote on a given bill was a liberal vote, each vote was correlated with the NOMINATE scores generated for these legislators. As a high NOMINATE score was coded to mean a tendency to vote liberally, any bill that had a negative correlation with NOMINATE scores was recoded so that a yea vote on all bills represents a liberal vote. Each vote was also correlated with party identification and ideology scores in order to verify the NOMINATE correlation.

Finally, issue area scores were developed by dividing the number of liberal votes in a given area by the total number of votes a legislator cast in this issue area. In other words, missing votes (any votes recorded present or absent or recorded after the initial roll call) were not counted; so for example, a legislator who voted liberally 8 out of 10 times in a given issue area would have the same score as a legislator who voted liberally 4 out of 5 times.

Generally speaking, the number of votes included in each issue area varies from state to state and from chamber to chamber. As shown in Table 1, there is a great deal of variation in the number of votes that were included in each issue area in these states as well as variation in the number of issue areas included in the analysis. In this analysis, models were only created for those issues areas (on a chamber by chamber basis) where there were at least 10 votes in a given
issue area. Thus, while there were issue area codes for many types of issues, some were not included in the analysis below. So for example, there were votes on the budget in Wisconsin and Florida, but due to the fact there were fewer than 10 votes in this issue area, scores were not generated here. This rule was chosen in order to increase the reliability of the scores.

Table 1 About Here

The key independent variables in this analysis are party and ideology. The ideology measures come from the EDP survey where candidates were asked to place themselves on a seven-point liberal-conservative scale, ranging from strongly conservative (1) to strongly liberal (7). Party is simply measured as the legislators’ partisan identification, either Democrat (1) or Republican (0). Surprisingly, these variables are less correlated than one might think, as is shown in Table 2. While there is a statistically significant relationship between party and ideology, as indicated by the chi-square, the correlation between the two is .644, far from perfect. The Republicans are clearly more cohesive in terms of their ideology, over 13% are moderate or liberal; the Democrats are even less cohesive with 59% of them falling outside of the liberal categories. In approximately one third of the cases under examination here, there is conflict between ideology and partisanship; another 27% of the cases fall into somewhat liberal or conservative camps, which might also lead to conflict between party and ideology. Thus, while there is some overlap between these two variables, there is significant enough variation to allow for an examination of their relative impact on roll call voting.

Table 2 About Here

Finally, in order to control for constituency pressures, legislators were also matched to legislative district demographic data from the 1990 census taken from the Almanac of State Legislatures. Ideally, survey data on the opinions of constituents or district presidential vote
would be utilized. However, these data are not available at the state legislative district level. The only data available is demographic data. While the use of this data is less than ideal, demographic measures are the only measures available and will have to serve as proxies for constituency opinion. The demographics included are race, income and farm population. Race is operationalized as percent of African American constituents in a district, farm is operationalized as percent who farm for a living in a district and income is operationalized as average per capita income in a district. These three were chosen because they represent important dimensions of the constituency. These variables must be included as controls, but due to the fact that public opinion data is unavailable at this level, the impact of constituents in different issue areas must remain an open question until better data is available. Thus, the results will focus mainly on the relative impact of party and ideology in different issue areas.

Following past research, I expect party influence to be greatest on those issues that are not salient to the general public. For example, research has found partisan influences on voting are more pronounced in less salient issue areas such as election administration, state administration, appropriations, legislative organization, labor, and judicial and legal issues (Jewell 1955; LeBlanc 1969; Patterson 1991). Of the issue categories utilized in this study, six issue areas clearly fall into the non-salient category: executive, labor, law, local government, politics and procedural. As a result, party should be the dominant influence over voting in these issue areas.

\( H_1: \text{Party will be the strongest predictor of roll call voting for executive, labor, law, local government, politics and procedural votes.} \)

As noted above, previous research typically defines salient issue as those being important to legislators and the public. The EDP asked legislators to identify the issues on which it was
most important to take clear stances in order to win elections. This measure indicates which issues legislators thought were more salient to their constituents. The most commonly cited answers were (percent mentioning in parentheses): education (64.8%), taxes (48.2%), crime (44.0%), and health and welfare (37.2%). Public opinion polls from this time period can also be used to identify issues salient to the public. In a series of Gallup Polls taken in early 1996, voters identified the economy, crime, welfare, education and health care as the most important problems facing the country (Gallup Poll 1996). These two measures produce results that are consistent with previous research, confirming the validity of these measures. Thus, these issue areas will all be considered salient issues. I expect partisan influences to be less pronounced on these salient issues and the personal beliefs of legislators to be dominant. This may be due to the fact that legislators’ beliefs on these issues are strongly held or due to the fact that they believe their own personal beliefs are the best proxies for constituent opinion.

\[ H_2: \text{Ideology will be the strongest predictor of roll call voting for education, taxes, health and welfare, crime and economy votes.} \]

This leaves four issues areas in this study, the budget, environment, pensions and transportation, where neither the literature nor the survey is clear as to whether the issue is salient or not. Therefore, I hypothesize that, for these “mixed” salience issue areas, the dominant predictor of roll call voting will vary from chamber to chamber.

\[ H_3: \text{The strongest predictor of roll call voting for budget, environment, pension and transportation votes will vary from chamber to chamber.} \]

Results
Due to the large number of OLS regression models (46), the results are presented in summary format below. However, some summary of the models is in order first. Generally speaking, these models perform fairly well. The F statistics indicate the regression model is statistically significant in 43 of 46 models. The models explain from a low of 16.5 percent of the variance in law voting in Florida to a high of 99.7 percent of the variance in procedural votes in Wisconsin, with an average of 69.8% of the variance explained across all of the 46 models. These reasons for low R² in some models can be explained. For example, in Florida, the legislature votes on legal settlements state and local governments make with individual plaintiffs. For these votes, a small portion of the legislators consistently voted against these settlements, but there did not seem to be commonality between the legislators in this group. Such votes were coded in the law and judiciary category which is probably why only 16.5% of the variance was explained in this model. Also, two models with low R² come in the budget category (in the Colorado Senate and Florida House); it could be in these chambers that the budget process differs from those processes in other chambers, perhaps with important votes coming in committee or on amendments, leaving a relatively less contentious floor vote.

Additionally, in all of the models, the significant party and ideology coefficients are related to the dependent variables in the expected manner. Legislators who identify themselves as liberals and Democrats are more likely to vote liberally in every issue area, in every chamber. The constituency variables, on the other hand, are rarely related to roll call voting in these issue areas. However, while there were no hypotheses about the impact of constituency variables based on issue salience, they tend to have a significant influence on salient or mixed issues. Out of the eleven times these variables are significant, eight of these relationships come in salient or mixed issue areas. Interestingly, all of the significant constituency relationships come in two
chambers, the Colorado Senate and the Missouri House. The lack of significance generally for these variables may be due in part to measurement error; perhaps direct measures of public opinion in these districts would be more strongly related to roll call voting. Given that this data are unavailable at the state legislative district level, this is a question that must remain unanswered.

Table 3 shows a summary of the significant regression results. The results show that the influences over roll call voting are not consistent across all issues, contrary to the unidimensional theory. However, party does emerge as the dominant influence over roll call voting in all issue areas these chambers. Of the 46 models that were run, party was the most important variable in the model (as indicated by standardized regression coefficients) in 32 of these models, which is approximately 72% of all models. For example, in the Colorado House, party is the dominant influence on roll call voting in 11 of 13 issue areas. In the Missouri and Wisconsin Houses, party was the most important influence in all issue areas examined. Looking at the different issue types, Table 3 shows that the first hypothesis is supported in that party is the most important influence over roll call voting in non-salient issue areas. However, hypothesis two is not supported in that ideology is not the strongest predictor of roll call voting in salient issue areas. In fact, party is more frequently the dominant influence, as opposed to ideology, for salient issues. It also appears that hypothesis three is not supported in that party is the dominant influence in mixed issue areas as well, although there is some variation here, particularly in the Colorado Senate.

Table 3 About Here

Table 4 summarizes these regression results in a different manner, by showing the frequency of significant results across the states. Once again confirming hypothesis one, party
emerges as the dominant influence over non-salient roll call votes. It is the significant and the most important influence in 92.9% of these models. This is particularly noticeable for political, executive oversight and procedural votes—all non-salient issue areas. For these issues, party is the dominant influence across all chambers. However, party is also a significant influence over salient and mixed issues; it is significant in 94.7% of the salient models and 80% of the mixed models. But it is less frequently the most important influence in these areas as compared to non-salient issues; it is the most important influence in 68.4% of salient models and 70% of the mixed models. Nonetheless, it is important to note that for each of these types of issues, party is more frequently the most important influence over voting as compared to ideology.

Table 4 About Here

Turning to hypotheses two and three, Table 4 shows a bit more support than as previously thought. Ideology is the most important influence over roll call voting for salient issues 31.6% of the time and is significant more frequently in the salient models (78.9%) as compared to the mixed models (60%). For example, ideology is significantly related to education votes, a salient issue area, in all chambers where the issue is analyzed here. Yet ideology is only significant in 42.6% of the non-salient models and is the most important influence only 7.1% of the time. Clearly, ideology plays a stronger role in influencing salient roll call votes than it does mixed or non-salient votes. Thus, while ideology is not the dominant influence over roll call voting as predicted by hypothesis two, it is significant more frequently in these models. Again, the fact that ideology is significant in approximately one-third of all issue areas suggests the influences over roll call voting are more complex than the unidimensional theory suggests.

The same is true with respect to hypothesis three, in that the influences over the mixed models are more varied than the salient or non-salient models. For instance, while ideology
emerges as the most important influence over mixed issues at about the same rate as it does salient issues (30% vs. 31.6% respectively), it is not significant as frequently. Thus, while party is clearly the most important influence over roll call voting in these issue areas, there is some support for each of three hypotheses in the results presented here.

However, it is also important to note that despite the fact that there is some variation in the influences over roll call voting based on issue salience, there are clear patterns that emerge in comparing chambers that somewhat undermine it as well. To be sure, party is dominant in influencing non-salient issues. There is only one model where party is not the most important influence over voting for non-salient issues, and ideology is far less likely to emerge as a significant influence here. But for most of the salient and mixed issue areas examined here, there is at least one chamber where the dominant influence over voting in that area is different than it is in the other chambers. For example, for health and welfare votes, party was the dominant influence over roll call voting in the Colorado and Missouri Houses, but ideology was dominant in the Colorado Senate and Florida House.

Looking at the results from chamber to chamber, clear patterns emerge. Ideology emerges as an important influence in the Colorado Senate; it is the most important influence for half of the 12 issue areas examined there. In this chamber, the differences that emerge in the influences over roll call voting clearly coincide with the conventional wisdom about salient and non-salient issues. For example, ideology is more important in explaining crime, education, environment and health and welfare votes here—all issue areas that have been classified as salient or mixed. Furthermore, four of the five issues that the constituency characteristics are significantly related to are salient and mixed issues (education, environment, health and welfare and taxes). Party, on the other hand, is more important here for politics, executive and
procedural votes, all non-salient issues. But in other chambers, the distinction between salient and non-salient issues is less pronounced. For example, in the few issue areas examined in the Florida House, ideology plays a more prominent role in influencing roll call votes across almost all issue areas.7

In contrast, ideology plays a far less important role in the Colorado House, where party was dominant in 11 of 13 issue areas and ideology was dominant in only 2. Five of the issue areas where party is dominant are salient, whereas ideology is dominant for a mixed issue (transportation) and a non-salient issue (local government). In the Missouri and Wisconsin Houses, party dominates across all issue areas. Thus, the influences over roll call voting are affected not only by the issue salience, but also by the context within which the vote decision occurs.

Discussion

While the results presented here provide some support for the hypothesis that the influences over roll call voting are more mixed as the salience of the issue increases, they also reveal the problem with relying on one legislative chamber to draw conclusions about the nature of the influences over roll call voting in different issues areas. If the Colorado Senate were the only chamber examined here, then it would be tempting to say that the conventional wisdom was confirmed with party dominating the roll call process in non-salient issue areas and other influences emerging for salient issues. However, the results reveal that understanding roll call voting is more complex than that. Furthermore, because the factors that influence voting are so highly correlated, variations in the influences over roll call voting may be masked when only looking at the dimensionality of roll call voting. Voting patterns may be highly correlated with
partisanship, for example, but ideology is too, so without looking at votes more deeply, we cannot tell which is more important. This may seem to be a minor distinction, but it has profound implications for trying to influence policy outcomes as variation in the influences suggest different methods (working through party leaders versus lobbying legislators directly for instance) may be necessary for achieving the desired results.

While this analysis only examines 4 U.S. states and so is not definitive, there is variation across the chambers here, pointing to the fact that relying on only one legislative setting may produce misleading results. These analyses suggest that issue type is an important predictor of the factors that influence roll call voting, but the legislative setting within which the vote decision takes place is just as important. The fact that there are not consistent results for each issue areas (especially for salient and mixed issues) across chambers suggests that there is a need to look to other contextual factors to explain more clearly why the influences over roll call voting vary.

Thus, our understanding of the influences over roll call voting in different issue areas is incomplete; it must be expanded to incorporate the legislative context as well. While it would be ideal to systematically examine the influence of legislative context here, the small number of states here make that impossible. Additionally, the impact of term limits cannot be examined here; even though several of these states had enacted term limits during this time period, these limits had not yet kicked in for any of these legislatures. However, it is possible to discuss some possible explanations for these findings. The key seems to be the resources available to various actors. In some legislatures, such as the Colorado Senate and, as other research suggests, the U.S. Congress, issue saliency is key with party dominating voting in non-salient issue areas and party, constituency and ideology all playing a role for salient issues. In chambers with rules that
allow parties to have more control, parties may play a stronger role in influencing all kinds of votes. In Colorado, there are more relaxed rules in the Senate (Cronin and Levy 1993) which may explain why the influences over roll call voting are more varied. Thus, institutional rules are important resources for parties. In chambers where institutional rules make it more difficult for parties to exert strong control over the legislative process (as is true in Congress and in most state senates) or in smaller chambers where more collegial and informal rules apply (as in upper chambers as compared to lower chambers generally), then parties have fewer resources, and issue salience may be key.

However, ideology also plays a prominent role in the Florida House, so other contextual factors must play a role. While there is only some degree of variation in terms of measures of legislative professionalism in these lower houses, there is clear variation in the resources available to legislators, and this variation coincides with differences in the results. For example, the Florida legislature has the most resources available to individual legislators in all of the legislatures examined here. The legislature pays for personal and district staff and legislators have a monthly office expense allowance; in fact, the monthly budget for office expenses in Florida exceeds Colorado’s entire allocation for all resources for the session. Analysts have noted the lack of party discipline and low levels of partisanship in the Florida state legislature (Dye 1998; Jewell and Morehouse 2001); this appears to be due in some part to the fact that legislators in the Florida House have considerable resources not under control of the party leadership and so may have less to fear from shirking the party. In other chambers, where legislators have fewer resources, they appear to be more reliant on and therefore more supportive of the party. In the Colorado, Missouri and Wisconsin houses, where party dominates voting, legislators are given no allocations for district staff, and in Colorado, legislators do not have
personal staff either. The Wisconsin legislature has also been characterized by party dominance of the legislative process so much so that in 2001, state funding for the party caucuses was abolished due to a growing scandal over the extensive powers that party caucuses wielded at the expense of other influences in the legislature. Thus, professionalization, insofar as it provides resources to legislators, appears to be a key contextual factor in explaining variation in the influences over roll call voting.

Variation in party competition may also condition the relative impact of party and ideology over roll call voting. In more competitive states, parties are stronger and the incentives to toe the party line increase. For example, in Missouri, the Democratic party has dominated the legislature, but in the mid-1990s, the Republicans made significant inroads into this dominance and became a cohesive opposition party (Valentine 1995). This may explain the strong role for parties in that chamber. In fact, among the states examined here, Florida has the least amount of party competition (as measured by Aistrup); all of the other states are characterized by a fair amount of competition, confirming Wright, Osborn and Wiburn’s (2004) findings that party competition heightens the cleavages between the parties and leads to an increased role for party in roll call voting.

Thus, chamber type, party competition, and the resources available to legislators all affect the influences over roll call voting. Of course, there may be other contextual factors worth examining as well, such as party organizational strength and the personal power of party leaders. What is clear is that the amount of resources available to various actors is important. Due to the limited number of chambers examined here, it is not possible to more systematically examine the reasons for this variance. But it is critical that future research do so because while issue salience is important in understanding roll call voting in legislatures, contrary to the arguments of those
who see roll call voting as only unidimensional, so too is legislative context. Generally speaking, the traditional distinction of non-salient issues being dominated by party was true. However, party was also important in explaining salient issues and generally speaking, the influences over roll call voting in these areas is more complex. At the same time, clear chamber specific patterns emerged, tied not to issue salience but to legislator resources, party competition and chamber type. Thus, it is not only important to look at issue salience but to chamber, state and country level factors in explaining the influences over roll call voting.
Endnotes

1 Codes were also included for energy, science and technology, federal government, and miscellaneous resolutions but so few bills fell into these categories in these states (usually less than 2 in each state) that scores were not developed in these areas.

2 Each of the coders was allowed to assign 2 issue area codes to a bill: a primary code and a secondary code. The coders were defined as having agreed when the primary code of each coder was the same or when the primary code of one coder matched the secondary code of the other coder. However, only the primary codes were utilized in this analysis. In other words, each bill was assigned to one and only one category.

3 There are a number of reasons why this is the case that cannot be explored here due to space constraints. As an example though, in Florida, amendments need not be germane to the bill, so there is a tendency for representatives to attach proposals to bills that will definitely pass in order to ensure the success of their proposal (Dye 1988, 108). Given that amendments were not included here, this is part of the reason why there are more than 10 votes in only 5 issue areas in this state.

4 The question was open-ended in that it did not give legislators a list of choices, but it did contain three lines for legislators to list the three most important issues. Thus, the percentages add to more than 100% as legislators could mention up to three issues. There was a precipitous drop-off in frequency in mention from these issues to the next most commonly mentioned. The next two top issues were jobs (mentioned by 17.9%) and the role of government (mentioned by 16.5%). So there seems to be a clear distinction between the salient issues listed above and other issues in the minds of legislators.
While it would be ideal to have data on the salience of issues to constituents in each district, such data is unavailable as the state legislative district level. Thus, these measures are the best possible proxies for constituency opinion. The fact that they both support the same conclusions about issue salience lends support to the validity of such measures.

These models are available for viewing at: URL to be inserted later.

An examination of additional issue areas where there were fewer than ten votes in the Florida House (results not presented here) reveals that ideology tends to dominate voting in most issue areas in this legislative chamber. Thus, this result does not appear to be due to the issue areas chosen for analysis here.

Similar concerns might be raised about the reliance on a single point in time; however, other research has suggested that the interesting variations in state legislatures are from state to state rather than from year to year, at least in a short term time frame (Jenkins 2006). Nonetheless, these results do show that the influences over roll call voting are not the same the different issue areas in these chambers as the previous research suggested.
References


