

# The Value of State Legislative Committee Seats\*

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## Abstract

There is significant research on the value of congressional committee seats because of its implications for theories of legislative organization. Results demonstrate that members of Congress value some committees more than others because of the electoral benefits those committees supply. Specifically, distributive and policy oriented committees are the most sought after in the House and Senate. How well does the congressional view of committee seat value apply to the states? There are reasons to be skeptical that members of state legislatures prize certain committees over others. First, many state legislators are non-professional, serving part-time and with less policy expertise. This makes them less reelection-oriented and thus, less likely to have strong preferences over committee seats. Second, many state legislatures impose term limits on members, making committee transfers costly. If members have a limited time horizon, they may be less willing to leave committees. In this paper, we leverage a new dataset which tracks nearly all state legislature committee assignments from 2007-2014. We find that legislative professionalism increases the amount of committee transferring, but so do term limits. We also find preliminary evidence that policy committees are more valued in states than distributive committees, contra the findings in Congress.

Standing committees in the U.S. Congress and state legislatures serve the key role in developing legislation, while providing benefits to members, parties, and the chamber. Not all committees are created equally however, and lawmakers have preferences about those they serve on. As legislators move onto and off committees over time, through transfers, they indicate which seats are most valuable to them by assisting their electoral prospects, enhancing their policymaking ability, or increasing their power within the chamber (Fenno 1973). Using a new dataset on committee assignments in all state legislatures from 1996 through 2014, we create committee values for all state legislative chambers. In so doing, we answer two substantive questions about the operation and organization of state legislatures. First, do lower levels of legislative professionalism cause fewer transfers between committees, thereby reducing differences in committee values within a chamber? Legislators in non-professionalized chambers are citizen-lawmakers who are not as driven by the reelection motive as members of Congress or those in more professional state legislatures, and as a result, may not have strong preferences over their committee assignments. Second, do term limits also reduce the number of transfers between committees and have a similar compression effect on committee values? Or, do the vacancies created by term limits ensure more open committee seats and produce a greater differentiation in committee values as members have more opportunities to seek favorable assignments? Term limits may discourage transferring because of the limited time horizon of legislators and the costliness of switching, or they may encourage transferring because open seats on favored committees occur more frequently.

We find that legislative professionalism and term limits create countervailing dynamics: lower levels of legislative professionalism compress committee values, making it harder to differentiate between valuable committees and burdensome committees. Term limits, conversely, produce *more* transferring, and despite members' short time horizons, they seek seats on better committees. This has important normative implications for the capacity of term-limited legislatures to govern; not only do term limits reduce memory and knowledge within the institution (Kousser 2005), but they further reduce it within committees as well, the primary lawmaking apparatus in legislatures.

The state legislature committee value data developed here can be used to answer a variety of questions about state legislative politics, such as whether committee exclusivity and policy congruence enhance reelection prospects (Broockman & Butler 2015, Hogan 2008), which types of committees interest groups target (Romer & Snyder 1994), whether

parties reward loyal members with better committee assignments (Leighton & Lopez 2002), and whether parties stack powerful committees (Kanthak 2009, Overby & Kazee 2000, Overby, Thomas, Kazee & Prince 2004). The data also inform the relationship between elected officials and their constituents, and more broadly, the foundations of lawmaking power in the states, allowing for generalizations about the relative values of spending and distributive-oriented committees, partisan committees, and policymaking committees within the states.<sup>1</sup>

## The Value of Committee Seats in Context

Representatives have long been seen as reelection oriented (Mayhew 1974) and as a result, seek out those committees that benefit themselves and their constituencies by allowing for specialization in an issue area and the delivery of particularized distributive benefits to their district (Adler & Lapinski 1997, Masters 1961, Shepsle 1978, Shepsle & Weingast 1987, Weingast & Marshall 1988).<sup>2</sup> Members also seem to seek out committees that do not provide direct benefits to a constituency, such as Foreign Affairs or Judiciary. Rather than promoting district-level spending, these committees are policy-based and allow the member out-sized influence within the policy area, assisting reelection goals indirectly by increasing the public profile of the member (Frisch & Kelly 2004). Alternatively, these committees may appeal to lawmakers for more diffuse reasons, such as personal interest (Frisch & Kelly 2006).

The extant literature attempts to verify the claim that valuable committees promote electoral and policy goals. Substantial indirect evidence exists that certain committees confer benefits to their members. Congressional institutions changed to protect committee rights once voters gained the ability to punish representatives (Katz & Sala 1996), and as committees grow in size, their seats become less valuable (Munger 1988). Members of valuable committees also attract more money from interest groups (Grier & Munger 1991, Grier & Munger 1993, Romer & Snyder 1994). Surprisingly, there is less direct evidence that preferred committees generate higher vote shares for their seat-holders.

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<sup>1</sup>In the congressional literature, members of the House and Senate have similar preferences about committee assignments, with taxing and spending committees most preferred followed by committees with distributive goals such as Energy and Commerce, Armed Services, and Agriculture. The most overtly partisan committee in the House of Representatives, Rules, is also one of the most valued (Groseclose & Stewart 1998).

<sup>2</sup>There is some debate about whether outlying committees differ in a systematic way from the preferences of the chamber, see Groseclose 1994a for a summary.

Milyo (1997) shows that institutional reforms which reduced the power of the Appropriations Committee led to lower vote share for its members, Grimmer & Powell (2013) demonstrate that members who are “exiled” from valuable committees focus more of their attention on district activities to avoid negative electoral effects, while Crain & Sullivan (1997) claim that committees with exclusive jurisdictions increase seat-holders’ vote share. Conversely, committee assignments may not be as important as national factors, or district marginality in securing reelection (Broockman & Butler 2015, Bullock 1972, Fowler, Douglass & Clark 1980). Whether or not preferred committees actually enhance reelection or policymaking prospects, members believe they do, reporting that district-orientation and reelection are foremost among the reasons to prefer a certain committee, and when given the opportunity, they transfer to better committees (Bullock 1976, Kellermann & Shepsle 2009, Smith & Deering 1983).

There have been only limited efforts to analyze the committee composition of state legislatures, with most research focusing on committee partisanship (Battista 2004, Hamm, Hedlund & Post 2011, Hedlund, Coombs, Martorano & Hamm 2009, Overby & Kazee 2000, Overby et al. 2004, Prince & Overby 2005, Richman 2008). The states are a source of rich institutional variation, but there has not been sufficient data to track committee membership in a large number of states across a sufficient timespan. This research represents a first step in understanding how committees are valued in the states, with a focus on the effects of legislative professionalism and term limits, two institutional factors that may change how legislators see their committee assignments.

## **Legislative Professionalism and Committee Values**

No state legislature is as professionalized as the U.S. Congress. Some, like California, provide similar resources for lawmakers, while others, like New Hampshire, are composed of part-time legislators with relatively few available resources. The concept of legislative professionalism in the states was developed using Congress as a baseline and is composed of three components: salary and benefits, time demands of service, and staff and resources (Squire 2007). An increase in each promotes a more professional legislature, and one that more closely resembles Congress. Briefly, Squire (2007) notes that higher salary and benefits allow the legislator to pursue lawmaking activities exclusively and obviate the need for outside employment. As the time demands of service increase, legislators must spend more time invested in lawmaking activities, but also

have more time developing legislative skills. Finally, greater staff size and resources promote access to information, a greater ability to independently develop legislation, and a greater ability to communicate with, and address constituent concerns, enhancing reelection prospects. Legislative professionalism has been shown to have a wide variety of effects on state policy outcomes. With more professionalism, a state legislature becomes a more equal partner with the governor and other political actors (e.g., lobbyists and staffers) in the policymaking process (Kousser & Phillips 2009). Conversely, less professionalized legislatures are made up of citizen-legislators who have limited information about policy problems and possible solutions and are less reelection-oriented (Berry, Berkman & Schneiderman 2000, Berkman 2001).

As described above, committees serve electoral and policymaking goals, but part-time citizen-legislators are not as concerned about developing policy, are less career oriented, and spend less time and energy working for reelection (Cox & Morgenstern 1993, Carey, Niemi & Powell 2000). Though incumbents in low professionalism states are less likely to face an opponent, they also receive, on average, lower vote shares when challenged (Hogan 2004, Hogan 2008). State legislatures with low professionalism are less responsive to voter preferences (Lax & Phillips 2012), and are more dependent on national economic conditions and the coattails of co-partisans when running for reelection (Berry, Berkman & Schneiderman 2000). Further, are more able and willing to deal with complex issues, resulting in a drop in public approval, especially from ideological conservatives who favor limited government (Kelleher & Wolak 2007, Richardson Jr., Konisky & Milyo 2012).

As a result, citizen-legislators, who are not professional politicians and have little incentive to increase their reelection prospects and should have weaker preferences on which committee they serve. This will lead to fewer transfers between committees and less distinction about which committees best serve electoral needs. Because there are fewer transfers and less sorting between committees, we expect differentiation between committees to be weaker than in high professionalism states. As committee values measure the degree to which some committees are preferred to others, we expect there to be less variation in values between preferred committees and “burden” committees.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Evidence from Congress finds that undesirable committees exist. These include committees on the District of Columbia, the Post Office, Small Business, and others (Bullock 1976, Fenno 1973, Groseclose & Stewart 1998). These committees share specialized jurisdictions that members are not likely to find interesting, and serve little constituent purpose. Many (though not all) members assigned to these committees seek to move off them as soon as possible, and few members are observed transferring from other committees onto these.

*H1: Lower levels of legislative professionalism will reduce variation in committee values within a state-chamber.*

## **Term Limits and Committee Value**

In addition to legislative professionalism, term limits create a substantially different institutional environment in many states as compared to Congress, affecting how lawmakers view committee service. There is substantial evidence that term limits have pernicious effects on lawmaking effectiveness through two major mechanisms. First, term limits reduce institutional memory and knowledge which may cause poorer performing public policy (Kousser 2005) and second, make the legislature politically weaker relative to other political actors, especially the governor (Carey, Niemi, Powell & Moncrief 2006, Kousser & Phillips 2009, Moncrief & Thompson 2001, Mooney 2009).

Term limits change representational style of legislators during their lame duck term. Because the electoral connection no longer exists for most members (excepting those who plan on running for higher office), there is evidence that legislators become less concerned with their constituents (Carey et al. 2006). This “Burkean” shift, reduces the power of majority party leaders and committee chairs because the leadership loses its ability to use sticks and carrots with rank-and-file members. Individual legislators are not likely to value particularized benefits or policy expertise from other members because their tenure as a member of the body has an expiration date (as do the leaders).

Thus, term limits would seem to promote committee stasis and reduce the number of transfers and the variation between committee values. Members not closely tied to their constituents because of the temporary nature of their position are less likely to seek out more attractive committees. Perhaps more importantly, term limits reduce the time horizon of members, reducing the attractiveness of switching committees. Bullock (1973) notes that leaving a committee means losing seniority, reestablishing relationships with committee staffers and having to develop expertise in a new policy area. Indeed, members of Congress are sometimes unwilling to change committees because of the loss of accumulated seniority, and ambivalence about whether the new committee offer superior benefits (Gertzog 1976). These issues are exacerbated in states with term limits because of the shortened opportunity to develop expertise and specialization within the new committee’s policy area and the lack of time to accrue significant electoral benefits from the member’s new assignment.

However, term limits present significant opportunities for committee switching because term-limited members are forced off favorable committees. In Congress, committee seats are assigned largely on the basis of seniority (Katz & Sala 1996, Lawrence, Maltzman & Wahlbeck 2001, Masters 1961), or on party loyalty (Aldrich & Rohde 1997). Because the House is highly institutionalized and turnover is low (Polsby 1968), plum committee seats are relatively rare, absent a change in majority control. In states, a significant number of seats will open following every election, and by virtue of the fact that those term-limited out are the most senior legislators, open seats will be on the most valued committees. Thus, term limits may *increase* transfers and promote greater differentiation between valuable and burden committees if legislators have clear preferences over the most valuable committees.

Both theoretical claims are consistent with findings from the extant literature, despite their contradictory empirical predictions. The committee values data developed here for all states from 1996-2014 allow us to adjudicate between these competing claims and determine whether the reelection and policymaking incentives of higher rated committees are powerful enough to encourage term-limited members to switch or whether the costs to policy expertise and influence from switching discourage transferring. Hypotheses 2a and 2b express these conflicting empirical predictions.

*H2a: Term limits will **reduce** variation in committee values within a state-chamber.*

*H2b: Term limits will **increase** variation in committee values within a state-chamber.*

## Calculating Committee Values

Using a unique dataset of committee membership, we are able to draw inferences across states and across time on the amount members seek new committees and which seats hold the most value. Finding individual committee value scores requires transfer data across multiple years to determine which committees members consistently move onto, and which members consistently move off of (the “undesired”). Data from all 50 states allows for the incorporation of variation on the factors which should reduce electoral incentives and affect committee value within chambers. To our knowledge, this is the most extensive data of state legislature committee data compiled.

Our data are drawn from Leadership Directories’ *State Yellow Books*. The books contain contact information on all state officials, leadership information, and committee assignments for each year. Through the identification of member names and using the



committee assignment data in the *Yellow Books*, we are able to track members' committee assignments across a number of years. We currently have data on committee assignments for all states from 2007-2014 and are working to expand the sample to include all years from 1996-2014.

The technique used to track committee transfers is similar to that used in previous research, and generates a "net transfer" score for each committee (Bullock 1973). For each year a member of the state legislature is involved in the committee system, a transfer off a committee occurs when a member no longer serves on a committee she served on in the previous year. A transfer onto a committee occurs when a member serves on a committee she did not serve on in the previous year. Aggregating the transfers of all members, a net committee transfer score for each committee can be found by taking the total transfers onto the committee divided by the total number of transfers involving the committee (transfers off plus transfers on). The most valuable committees are those with the largest net transfer score (Bullock & Sprague 1969, Bullock 1973).<sup>4</sup>

Talk about restructuring jurisdictions, and what it means: Many state standing committees are relatively temporary, lasting for a only a few years at a time as new majorities eliminate committees, restructure their jurisdictions, or create new committees.

In order to measure the value of individual-level appointment portfolios, we turn to a comprehensive data source on all state committee memberships from 2007-2014. Our data are drawn from Leadership Directories' *State Yellow Books*. The books contain contact information on all state officials, leadership information, and committee assignments for each year. We obtained digital copies of these directories from the publisher and used the legislator-level data to track committee assignments and how members within a state-chamber move onto, and off of, standing committees. Quantifying committee values has a long and rich history in the congressional literature, but ours is the first attempt that we are aware of to calculate values for all states across many years.

The original formulation of committee values was by calculating a "net transfer score", simply the number of transfers onto the committee divided by the total number of transfers onto and off of the committee. The basic intuition is that those committees which members tend to move onto over time are more valuable than those committees which

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<sup>4</sup>Groseclose and Stewart (1998) and Stewart and Groseclose (1999) calculate a committee value coefficient that is superior to the net transfer score. We plan to implement the Groseclose and Stewart method in future iterations of this paper. For the time being however, net transfer score is an appropriate measure to test our hypotheses.

see members exit over time (Bullock & Sprague 1969, Bullock 1973). Groseclose and Stewart (1998) and Stewart and Groseclose (1999) implement a more sophisticated measure of committee values for the U.S. House and Senate, and their scores are now the most commonly used<sup>5</sup> Here, we replicate the Groseclose and Stewart method using state legislative committees to find committee values.

The method assumes that if a member transfers from committee  $j$  to committee  $k$ , it has a preference for committee  $k$  as compared to committee  $j$ . Additionally, transfers from more valuable committees are worth more to the value of the transferring committee than transfers from a lower value committee. That is, committees are evaluated with respect to the values of the other committees so that pairs of committees represent a “match-up” between the two, and more value is received for a committee when it “defeats” a higher value committee. Committee values are estimated with a probit model where each transfer onto a committee is coded as a one, each transfer off as -1, and zero if the committee was not involved in the transfer.

One complication with the state data bears mentioning. In Congress, standing committees are relatively permanent, and committee values can be calculated for each committee over the entire study period (for Groseclose and Stewart, 1947-1991). This is decidedly not the case at the state level. Many state standing committees are relatively temporary, lasting for a only a few years at a time as new majorities eliminate committees, restructure their jurisdictions, or create new committees. Because committees are “matched-up” with other committees, only complete sets of committees can be included for any given time period during which committee values are to be calculated. In other words, committees cannot be missing (by entering and exiting and entering the dataset) for a given time period. As a result, it is necessary for us to make decisions about what constitutes a valid study time period. If for example, we created a study time period spanning the entirety of our data (2007-2014), we could only include those committees which existed during that entire period, and committees which did not exist for even one year would not be included. Clearly, this standard seems too strict as relatively few committees exist across the entire sample, and it would miss newly established, but important committees.

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<sup>5</sup>To cite only a few examples, their committee scores have been used to examine the effects of party loyalty and party power (Clark 2015, ?, Jenkins & Monroe 2012, Monroe, Roberts & Rohde 2009, Yoshinaka 2005), representation style (Leighton & Lopez 2002), and the structure of the Senate committee system (Canon & Stewart III 2002).

Thus, we calculate committee values for four year blocks under the assumption that committees which exist for less than four years are too transient to be deemed a standing committee. Further, four years ensures that at least three years of transfers are observed for the committee,<sup>6</sup> and includes two terms of a two-year legislature, or one term of a four-year legislature. This also means that committee values overlap in that a committee which exists from 2007 to 2014, for example, will have a separate committee value for the 2007 to 2010 period, the 2008 to 2011 period, the 2009 to 2012 period, etc. To create an overall value, we take first, the average committee value across these four-year period blocks for each committee to produce a single average committee value. We also create a weighted committee value that scales a committees value by the number of four-year blocks in which the committee exists, where the average value is multiplied by  $\frac{\text{number of four-year blocks present in data}}{\text{total number of four-year blocks}}$ , using the intuition that committees which exist for longer periods of time are inherently more important to the operation of the legislature and its members than shorter-lived committees.

The results are average committee scores and weighted average committee scores. Within each four-year block, the committee values are cardinal values, consistent with the Groseclose and Stewart scores, so that committee values can be directly compared to each other. Caution should be used however, when interpreting average and weighted average committee value scores as they are averaged cardinal value scores; thus one could say that on *average* a committee with a value of four is twice as valuable as a committee with an average value of two, but if the committees do not have exactly overlapping years, the cardinal values are imprecise.

Finally, we use the committee-level “Grosewart” values to calculate individual-level portfolio values for each legislator-year in our data (55,648 observations). Most committees have positive value, but some are calculated to be “burden” committees, to which a member would have preferred no assignment at all. The simplest way to convert committee values to member portfolio scores is thus to add the raw scores for each committee on which a member serves, thus generally advantaging members who serve on many committees. Alternatively, we could take the mean committee value score to measure a member’s portfolio, but this could inflate the value of members who serve on few important committees. Since a key benefit of the (?) method is that it produces cardinal values, we

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<sup>6</sup>Starting with committee membership in the first year, transfers may occur after year one, after year two, and after year three.

prefer to raw additive scores to individual a portfolio's value.<sup>7</sup>

An important component of our theory hypothesizes not just about which committees are valuable, but the extent to which transferring occurs in state legislatures. To date, there is little empirical evidence on whether state legislators move across committees in the same way members of Congress do. To measure the amount of movement across committees within the states, we also develop a chamber transfer per member score. This is the total number of transfers within the chamber, scaled by the size of the chamber. Most transfers are not a direct committee "trade" and involve a member moving between more than two committees. For example, a member may transfer off committees A and B to receive a seat on committee C. This counts as three transfers for that member. Data for every state exists from 2007 to 2014, or for eight years, so to find the number of transfers per member we sum up all transfers on and off committees across all eight years, divided by the number of seats in the chamber.

## **Committee Transfers: Descriptive Statistics**

### **Legislative Professionalism and Committee Transfers**

As a first cut, we compare selected states with different levels of legislative professionalism. Table 1 shows the number of transfers per member for the most professionalized state, California, followed by the 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th, and least professionalized state, New Hampshire. The top half of the table is for state houses, while the bottom half is for state senates. Legislative professionalism is a characteristic of the state legislature as a whole, not the chamber, so the professionalism rankings do not change from the House to the Senate. The chamber size column indicates the number of seats in the chamber and the number of committees column indicates the number of different committees within the state chamber during our sample. Note that a committee did not have to be present for all eight years, only for at least two of the years so that members had an opportunity to transfer onto or off of the committee. The last row of the House and Senate tables average each column across all states in our sample.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>We would rather have three retirement accounts with a total value of \$800,000 than one with a total value of \$600,000. We do recognize that the financial example does not account for the opportunity costs of serving on committees or that there are likely diminishing returns to valuable committees when a member may not have time to take full advantage of her/his representational resources.

<sup>8</sup>Due to a data issue, New Jersey is currently excluded from the sample. It is the only state we are missing from 2007-2014 and it will be included in future iterations of the paper.

Table 1: Legislative Professionalism and Transfers Per Member—Selected States

House					
State	Chamber Size	Leg. Profess.	Rank	Transfers/Member	No. of Committees
California	80	.571	1	21.0	45
Illinois	118	.249	10	23.55	88
Colorado	65	.172	20	4.95	39
Vermont	150	.117	30	1.37	33
New Mexico	70	.094	40	5.26	18
New Hampshire	400	.034	50	3.69	30
All House Chambers	111.67	.181	—	10.87	42.57
Senate					
State	Chamber Size	Leg. Profess.	Rank	Transfers/Member	No. of Committees
California	40	.571	1	42.75	110
Illinois	59	.236	10	13.73	40
Colorado	35	.172	20	17.26	34
Vermont	30	.117	30	5.40	29
New Mexico	42	.094	40	4.57	12
New Hampshire	24	.034	50	11.17	22
All Senate Chambers	39.48	.181	—	13.93	33

There seems to be some correlation between the level of legislative professionalism and the total number of transfers per member. The California and Illinois houses, two highly professionalized states both have more than 20 transfers per member in the sample, while states in the lower half of professionalism have fewer than 10 transfers per member. In state senates, there are also a significant number of transfers per member, and the overall average is higher; there are roughly four more transfers per member in state upper chambers than in state lower chambers. The California Senate has a remarkable 42.75 transfers per member, by far the highest in the states. This is not surprising as our theory suggests that transfers are more likely as members have increased electoral incentives, and California has the highest level of legislative professionalism while also having the greatest number of committees, increasing the incentives and opportunities for transfer.

The second interesting inference from table 1 is that state legislators do value different types of committees. Transfers take place even in the most unprofessionalized legislatures, and even though these part-time citizen-legislators may not be professional politicians in many states, they clearly have some preferences for committee assignments. In the table, the Vermont House has the lowest level of committee transfers, with less than 2 per member. Still, this implies that many members are swapping one committee for

another over the course of a few years. The overall average across all house chambers is a remarkable 10.87 transfers per member, and in senates, there are nearly 14 switches per member. This is all the more surprising given the costs of switching in some state legislatures, discussed in greater detail in the next section.

In table 2, a regression predicts the number of transfers per member using just legislative professionalism as independent variable (model 1), and including three control variables (model 2). Legislative professionalism is taken from Squire's measure (Squire 2007), party competition is Ranney's index measure (1965), while the chamber and number of state committees are also controlled for in the model. Again, an increasing number of state committees offer more opportunities for transferring, while the electoral and institutional dynamics between state upper and lower chambers may be substantially different, as evidenced by the higher baseline transfer rate shown in table 1, requiring the type of chamber be held constant. Model 3 also includes an interaction term between legislative professionalism and the number of committees in the chamber. The unit of analysis is state chamber, and recall that transfers per member are captured over an eight year timespan.

Consistent with the previous descriptive results, legislative professionalism is an important predictor of transfers per member. In the bivariate regression, a one standard deviation increase in legislative professionalism results in an increase in transfers per member of 2.31, while in the regression with the additional control variables, a one standard deviation increase predicts a 1.39 increase in transfers per members. These are substantively large impacts and support the hypothesis that more professionalized legislatures will have members who proactively seek out better committee assignments. The implication is that low levels of professionalism reduces the connection between members and their constituents, causing them to be less likely to transfer off committees that do not serve distributive or policy oriented purposes.

Model 3 interacts legislative professionalism with the number of state committees. As described above, more state committees provide more opportunities for transfer, and when conditioned on legislative professionalism, this is clearly the case. Thus, the evidence suggests that member movement across committees is the product of both incentives and opportunity. It is also important to note that professionalism and the number of committees are only correlated at .3, indicating that the two do not simply capture the overall quality of the legislature.

Table 2: The Effect of Legislative Professionalism on Committee Transfers

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Transfers per Member		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Legislative Professionalism	21.99*	13.84*	-1.42
	(4.87)	(4.19)	(7.89)
Party competition		-0.69	-0.39
		(3.27)	(3.20)
Chamber (Senate=0)		-4.53*	-4.38*
		(0.99)	(0.97)
Professionalism x Number of Comm.			0.35*
			(0.15)
Number of State Committees		0.15*	0.07#
		(0.02)	(0.04)
Constant	8.42*	6.91*	9.58*
	(1.06)	(1.86)	(2.17)
N	96	96	96
R <sup>2</sup>	0.18	0.47	0.50
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.17	0.44	0.47

\* $p < 0.05$  . Transfer data from 2007-2014. New Jersey and Nebraska excluded.

The models also show that state lower chambers see nearly five fewer transfers per member than state senates. Even when controlling for the number of committees, members of state houses are less likely to change committee assignments. This is what one would expect given the view of senates as the more august, distinguished body, with more professional members. Members of the upper chamber may be more career-oriented and more likely to seek higher office. Interestingly, party competition does not have a direct effect on transfers per member. While this may weaken the case that members switch committees because of electoral concerns, the party competition variable is not able to capture district-level dynamics that drive committee assignment decisions.

## **Term Limits and Committee Transfers**

In addition to legislative professionalism, term limits are expected to have an important, significant effect on transfers per committee members. Changing committees is costly; members must learn a new issue area, deal with new staff, and they may lose the seniority they had accrued on the previous committee. In Congress, it is worth it for most members to transfer to more highly valued committees because despite the costs, better committees improve reelection prospects and allow the member to accrue benefits over the long-term. In states with term-limits, the long-term benefits may not outweigh the costs. Members may simply not have time to accrue the benefits required to make committee switching worthwhile. When a member is initially assigned to a committee that is not particularly valuable, term limits seem to encourage a member to stay on the committee and accrue what benefits the member can before they are term-limited out of office.

To test this theory, we use data on term limits from the National Conference of State Legislatures. All states having term limits imposed them in the 1990s or early 2000s, before the beginning of our sample. A few states have rolled back term limits, but again, these instances occurred prior to the beginning of our sample in 2007. We do not distinguish between the types of term limits. It is the case that some states place stricter limits on the number of terms members are allowed to serve, and whether service in one chamber counts against time service in the other chamber, but we do not expect these factors to cause meaningful differences in the effects on committee transfers.

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for all states with term limits and transfers per member for each of the state chambers. There appears to be little relationship between



Table 3: Term Limits and Transfers Per Member

State	Year Term Limits Adopted	House Transfer/Member	Senate Transfer/Member
Maine	1993	5.96	10.29
California	1990	20.95	42.75
Colorado	1990	13.1	17.26
Arkansas	1992	16.52	26.46
Michigan	1992	11.72	7.84
Florida	1992	23.55	24.6
Ohio	1992	18.99	19.15
South Dakota	1992	7.49	12.8
Montana	1992	8.96	9.76
Arizona	1992	14.7	20.2
Missouri	1992	19.63	24.0
Oklahoma	1990	7.49	9.62
Louisiana	1995	8.99	23.79
Nevada	1996	14.52	12.67

the number of transfers and term limits. California, despite having strict term limits, has more transfers in the House and Senate than any other state chamber. But, besides California, other states with term limits, including Florida, Ohio, and Missouri have a significant number of transfers in both chambers, especially when compared to the mean transfer rate shown in table 1. In fact, of the 14 states with term limits, only five have house transfer rates below the overall average.

Table 4 shows the results for three regressions, where transfers per member is predicted using term limits, in addition to the previous variables used. In model 1, term limits have a positive and significant effect on transfers per member. States with term limits have about 4.5 more transfers per members than states without term limits. This result is the opposite of our theoretical expectation and suggests that term limits encourage committee transfers. As before, legislative professionalism is positive, lower chamber is negative, and the number of state committees is also positive.

As discussed above, California has strict term limits but is also the most professionalized legislature and has a many committees, with the Senate in particular having more committees than any other state. Perhaps California alone is driving the positive relationship between term limits and committee transfers. To test this claim, California is excluded from model 2. While the substantive effect of term limits declines, it is still about 4 transfers per member and is statistically significant. However, when California is removed from the data, the relationship between legislative professionalism and commit-

Table 4: The Effect of Term Limits on Committee Transfers

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Transfers per Member		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Legislative Professionalism	10.68*	6.98#	9.83*
	(3.88)	(4.10)	(3.94)
Term Limit State	4.45*	3.97*	2.57
	(1.00)	(0.99)	(1.86)
Party Competition	1.70	0.28	1.81
	(3.03)	(2.99)	(3.02)
Chamber (Senate=0)	-4.50*	-4.16*	-4.39*
	(0.90)	(0.89)	(0.91)
Term Limits x Number of Comm.			0.05
			(0.04)
Number of State Committees	0.14*	0.13*	0.13*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Constant	5.13*	6.83*	5.85*
	(1.74)	(1.81)	(1.84)
N	96	94	96
R <sup>2</sup>	0.56	0.46	0.57
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.54	0.43	0.54

\* $p < 0.05$ ; # $p < 0.1$ . Transfer data from 2007-2014. New Jersey and Nebraska excluded. California excluded from column 2.

tee transfers, controlling for term limits, is substantially weakened. The substantive effect is reduced by more than three transfers per member and is only statistically significant at the .1 level.

The last model (3), interacts term limits with the number of committees in the legislature. Perhaps term limits increase committee transfers because there are more opportunities to take over committee seats. Term limits force a significant number of members to leave the legislature, which opens up seats for existing members, despite the potentially high costs of transfer. This effect may be increased by a larger number of committees, as members in term limit states will have a greater set of committees to choose from when officials are term-limited out of office. Surprisingly, there is no statistically significant effect of the interaction between term limits and the number of committees in a state. The effect of term limits is not conditional on the number of committees, weakening support for the claim that term limits create more opportunities for transfers between committees. We also interacted term limits with legislative professionalism. There is not a significant correlation between the two as term limits can be associated with highly professional legislatures (e.g., California), and the interaction term is insignificant.

The causal relationship between term limits and committee transfers is unclear. There is little evidence it depends on legislative professionalism, and it does not seem connected to transfer opportunity, at least as captured by the number of committees within the chamber. This result requires further investigation as it is the opposite direction as predicted by the theory.

## **Which Committees are Most Valued?**

In this section, we explore which committees are most valued by members of the different states. It is, unfortunately, quite difficult to develop an empirical measure of the types of committees across a large sample of states. As a starting point, we explore the most and least valued committees in states with variation in professionalism and term limits, and attempt to draw conclusions based on the types of committees that seem to be highly valued. Valued committees are those with the highest net transfer score.

There are some patterns within the states, and also some surprises. Clearly, budgetary and financial issues are the most important. In each state, at least one budgetary or finance committee appears in the top three. Two of the Colorado House's most valued committees are budgetary in nature. The last, Legislative Council, has broad oversight

Table 5: The Value of Committee Seats in Selected States

		Most Valued	
California	Illinois	Colorado	Maine
1. Accountability and Administrative Review	1. Mass Transit	1. Joint Legislative Council	1. Ethics
2. Budget	2. Financial Institutions	2. Joint Finance	2. Joint Legislative Council
3. Insurance	3. Tourism and Conventions	3. Appropriations	3. Joint Finance
		Least Valued	
41. Veterans Affairs	83. Local Govt	37. Legislative Legal Services	38. Health and Human Services
41. Jobs, Economic Develop. and the Economy	84. Railroad Safety	38. Health and Human Services	39. Joint Exec. Comm. of Legislative Council
43. Human Services	85. Rural Economic Develop.	39. Joint Executive Committee of Legislative Council	40. Joint Computer Management
	Legislative Prof. Rank of State:		
1	10	20	39
	Term Limits:		
Yes	No	No	Yes

over other legislation and over ballot initiatives. Two other valued committees in California and Illinois represent important policy issues in those states: insurance and tourism. California has a long history of controversy over insurance regulations (Lupia 1994), and tourism is an important facet of the Illinois economy. Ethics is the most valued committee in Maine, which may be an important issue in the state. The committee offers both formal and informal guidance on campaign finance and accepts legislative ethics violations reports from citizens.

Perhaps most interesting, none of these committees seem overtly distributive in nature. Rather, the top three for each of these states, with varying levels of legislative professionalism, are policy oriented, similar to Appropriations and Ways and Means in Congress. Further, the list of least valued committees in each of the states includes committees which appear to be distributive in nature. In California, the least valued committees include Veterans Affairs and Human Services, Rural Economic Development is the least valued in Illinois, and Health and Human Services are both among the least valued in both Colorado and Maine. In Congress, the federal agency Health and Human Services is overseen by the Energy and Commerce Committee, ranked as the fourth most valuable by Groseclose and Stewart (1998). Health is also an important state function;

states are largely in charge of regulating insurance, implementing federal programs, and spending money on Medicaid.

This brief descriptive analysis supports the notion that state legislators have somewhat consistent preferences with respect to valued committees. However, those preferences seem mostly to be for policy committees, rather than distributive committees. Yet, there are some important differences and in future research we will explore these differences in more depth. It would be useful to develop a categorization scheme, allowing for the quantification of the different committee typologies across states.

## Conclusion

Identifying committee seat value is an important and necessary task if scholars want to better understand how state legislatures work. It also allows us to answer questions about the applicability of theories of legislative organization to different institutional settings. State legislatures, despite their importance in the American system, are not miniature versions of Congress. They operate under different institutional rules and legislators are placed under significant constraints that members of Congress do not have to deal with. In this paper, we leveraged our unique committee membership data to explore the pattern of transfers between committees in the states, to predict the causes of committee transferring, and to examine the types of committees most valued in a few states.

Legislative professionalism, as predicted, increases the number of transfers within a legislature, even when accounting for the number of committees, the chamber (i.e., lower or upper), and party competition. Electoral concerns are the most commonly cited explanation for valuing some committees more than others. Members can use the power of legislative committees to benefit their constituency and increase their reelection chances. In states with more professionalized legislatures, the electoral connection between members and voters is stronger, and thus members will seek out more valuable committees.

Term limits was expected to reduce the quantity of committee transfers, but had the opposite effect. As with lower levels of professionalism, term limits de-institutionalize the chamber, break the connection between voters and elected officials, and de-emphasize careerism. Despite these effects, states with term limits have more transfers than states without. We can only speculate as to the reason for this, but it does not seem to be because of the increased opportunities for moving. Perhaps term limits make legislators more aware of their next election and increase their desperation for valuable committee

seats with an eye on running for higher office. This hypothesis will be explored in future research.

The data themselves are valuable because they allow for the testing of a number of theories about state legislative organization. Given the strange finding with respect to term limits, by expanding the sample, we can examine how the introduction of term limits changed committee transfers. We can also look at members moving between the House and Senate in states which have separate term limits for each chamber. Using the data, we can take advantage of institutional changes and gain some leverage on these theoretical questions.

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