

# **Reconsidering the Democratic Bias: Legislative Professionalism and Partisan Career Paths**

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## **Abstract**

Does professionalization of state legislatures cause a Democratic bias in seat share? Empirical evidence from states outside the South suggests the answer is yes. Research by Fiorina shows that increases in salary are associated with gains in Democratic seat share over time. However, this research fails to account for the “puzzle of the South,” where changes in salary are associated with *Republican* gains in seat share. One possibility for the divergent results in South is that Fiorina’s basic assumptions about differences in opportunity costs for Democrats and Republicans are wrong and the aggregate results spurious. However, we suggest an alternative view: changes in the partisan seat share differ in the North and South because of differences in the opportunities to move from the state legislature to higher office. State legislatures often function as the entry port and training ground for ambitious politicians hoping to move beyond the statehouse. While scholars typically highlight the role for professional institutions as training grounds, even those that are non-professional can attract ambitious members if there is sufficient opportunity to move to higher office. Using both individual and aggregate level data, we argue that ambition and the political career path plays an important role in shaping the incentives for legislative service and, consequently, the partisan composition of state legislatures. Although professionalism creates bias toward Democratic membership, in some states, particularly Southern states, this bias is more than offset by changes in the opportunities structure to move to Congress.

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Nearly a decade ago, Fiorina (1994) argued that increased professionalism creates a Democratic bias in state legislative membership. The cornerstone of Fiorina's argument is his assertion that the opportunity costs of serving in the state legislature differ markedly for Democrats and Republicans, leading to an increase in the pool of Democratic candidates for professionalized state legislatures and a decrease in the pool of Democratic potential candidates for non-professional state legislatures. The implications of this theory are far reaching because such biases potentially alter the prospects for divided government in the states and substantive representation in state legislatures.

While Fiorina's analysis showed strong aggregate level evidence of a link between legislative salary and Democratic seat share in Northern states, his theory does not explain patterns of seat share in the South. Therein lies the puzzle. In the South, Republicans have made substantial gains in seat share despite increases in salaries (see figures 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Stonecash and Agathangelou's (1997) state by state analysis showed that increases in legislative salary have *reduced* Democratic seat share in nearly all Southern states. The inverse relationship in Southern states is puzzling because it suggests that the same mechanism leads to a different outcome in the South. It is essential to resolve this contradiction to determine whether the implications attributed to professionalization are warranted.

[Figures 1 & 2 here]

There are several possibilities that might account the differences in the relationship between professionalization and partisan seat share in Southern and non-Southern legislatures. One possibility is simply that Fiorina's underlying assumptions are wrong, and Democrats do not differ substantially from Republicans in their career orientations or opportunity costs of serving. If so, the finding of a relationship between salary and seat share in Northern state is spurious, as suggested by Stonecash and Agathangelou (1997), and we need to look elsewhere for an explanation of partisan seat share. Alternatively, it is possible that Fiorina's assumptions hold in the North, but not in the South, thus, as he suggests "the data do not pool" (1997). In this case, we must look to different mechanisms to explain partisan seat share in the South. However, a third possibility is that Fiorina's assumptions are essentially correct, but offer an incomplete picture of the differences between Republicans and Democrats and differences across regions. If so, Fiorina's theory cannot fully explain the patterns in both regions unless additional causal factors are accounted for in the model. We argue the latter.

We use individual and aggregate level data to reexamine the relationship between legislative professionalization and partisan seat share in state legislatures. We begin by identifying and empirically testing Fiorina's central assumptions about partisan differences among state legislators in professional and non-professional institutions. The findings from the individual level analysis direct our attention to the role of ambition and opportunity structure, and prompt us to re-analyze the aggregate changes in partisan seat share with an eye toward the changing career opportunity structure beyond the state legislatures as a source of influence.

### **Are Republicans and Democrats Different?**

Fiorina (1994, 1997, 1999) bases his argument on several assumptions about the pool of potential candidates in the Democratic and Republican parties, which in turn, leads to differences in the characteristics of state legislators holding office. While the assumptions seem relatively intuitive, they have not been directly tested. He assumes that the Republican pool, on average, is wealthier, and holds

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<sup>1</sup> We include the eleven Confederate states plus the border states of MO and KY in a single category. Figure 1 breaks down the non-southern states into two categories: *Southwestern, Mountain, and Pacific States* (CO, ID, MT, NM, OK, UT, WY, AK, AZ, CA, HI, NV, OR, WA) and the remaining Northern states. In the remainder of the analysis we combine all non-southern states.

occupations that allow them to maintain lucrative careers while serving in the legislature. Because of this, he assumes that Republicans are less attracted to the idea of a full time career in the state legislature. Fiorina assumes that Democrats, on the other hand, tend to come from lower socio-economic strata. They are more likely to hold jobs that are inflexible and cannot be maintained while in office. Thus, they require a full time job before service in the legislature becomes viable. Increases in salary and session lengths, then, make a career in the legislature relatively more attractive to Democrats and relatively less attractive to Republicans.

We begin our analysis by exploring these assumptions at the individual level. If these most basic assumptions are correct, we should see discernible differences between Democrats and Republicans holding office, and these difference should be especially apparent in full time, high salaried legislatures. Data for individual-level analysis are drawn from state legislators' responses to a 1995 survey, conducted by Carey, Neimi and Powell (2000). Questionnaires asking legislators about a variety of issues, their views of their office, their activities, and career goals were mailed to a random sample of 77 percent of all lower chamber members in the fifty states and to all upper chamber members. We use responses from 1866 lower chamber members to examine differences in Democratic and Republican members in different legislative contexts.<sup>2</sup> Although the cross sectional data cannot tell us whether changes in context lead to changes in members composition, we can assess Fiorina's basic expectations that Democrats and Republicans differ in their professional and political career goals.

### Professionalism and Career Goals

The major underlying assumption is that Republicans and Democrats have fundamentally different opportunity costs in pursuing a legislative career. Therefore, we should expect to see differences in political career orientations that are consistent with that assumption. We identify three implications of the career opportunity cost assumption.

First, Republicans should be more likely to work outside the legislature than Democrats. Fiorina maintains that the opportunity cost of legislative service is higher for Republicans than Democrats because they would prefer to maintain their lucrative non-legislative career. Democrats, on the other hand, are more likely to hold inflexible lower paying jobs that they would prefer to substitute for legislative service. This implies that, empirically, we should find a greater proportion of Republicans holding outside jobs during their tenure. We test this assumptions using legislators' responses to a question asking whether s/he works outside of politics while in office.

Second, Democrats should be more likely to view politics as a career than Republicans. Fiorina argues that the differences in the opportunity costs of serving in professional state legislatures, combined with differences in philosophical orientation toward government will lead Republicans to value a career in legislative service less than Democrats. Hence, fewer Republicans should desire a long term career in government. We test this by looking at the difference in percentages of Republicans and Democrats who indicate that they "think of politics and public office as a career."

Finally, these same difference should result in a higher proportion of Democrats harboring ambitions for higher office after their legislative service, as compared to Republicans. Although Fiorina does not directly address this question, the opportunity cost assumption implies that Republicans, on average, would prefer a private career to a public career. This should apply to public office at any level of

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<sup>2</sup> Full information about the survey procedures used can be found in Carey, Neimi, and Powell's (2000) book, *Term Limits in the State Legislature* pages 11 - 12 . The overall response rates for the survey was 47%. Analyses revealed some bias in response rates, therefore the sample is weighted to correct biases in response based on gender, region, session length, and district population (2000:154 n11).

government. We test this by exploring whether a greater proportion of Democrats than Republicans hold ambitions to seek a congressional seat after leaving the state legislature.

Given Fiorina's arguments, we expect the differences between Republican and Democratic state legislators to be greatest in professional legislatures which have both high salaries and full time workloads. Legislatures that offer full support to members offer Democrats the opportunity to work exclusively in the legislature. If Fiorina's assumptions hold, we should see more Democrats take advantage of this opportunity than Republicans. In addition, we expect greater partisan differences in career orientations and long term career goals in professional legislatures. Although professional legislatures as a whole should attract more career oriented politicians seeking to move up, Fiorina's assumptions suggest that Democrats will hold a greater interest in politics as a career, and can be supported in that goal in more professional institutions. Of course, this does not preclude Republicans from harboring political career ambitions as well. Indeed, we expect a higher proportion of ambitious and career oriented Republicans in professional than non-professional legislatures. However, Fiorina's argument suggests that fewer Republicans, in all situations will harbor ambitions for a long term career in politics.<sup>3</sup>

We categorize legislatures into high and low professionalism based on salary and session length. Legislatures that offer salaries which are at greater than 90% of the median family income in the state are considered high salary. Full-time legislatures are those that require a minimum of 180 days of session work per year. Professional legislatures are defined as those that offer high salaries and require a full time workload. States included in this category are California, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

[Table 1 here]

Table one shows patterns that are highly consistent with Fiorina's individual level assumption that opportunity costs differ for Republicans and Democrats. A greater proportion of Republicans work outside the legislature in both professional and non-professional institutions. While fewer legislators, overall, work in professional legislatures, the difference between Republicans and Democrats is striking. Even more dramatic, however, is the difference in the percentage of Republicans and Democrats in professional legislatures who view politics as a career. A full 62 percent of Democrats in professional institutions have a strong orientation toward a politics as a career while only thirty percent of Republicans harbor such interests. Of course, as one would expect, the proportion of "professional" politicians is higher in both parties in professional institutions, yet the increase in career oriented Democrats is much greater than the increase in career oriented Republicans. The responses to these two questions suggests that a much higher proportion of Republicans are committed to outside careers and lack interest in politics as a profession.

Yet, table one also shows a surprising similarity in the ambition for a congressional seat for Democrats and Republicans. A higher proportion of members from both parties desire a seat in Congress in professional legislatures, but there is no statistically significant difference between parties. So, although there are important differences in other areas, the proportion of members with ambition to move up is similar. The similarity of ambition is important because some state legislatures, while perhaps not

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<sup>3</sup> Another possibility is that we would observe no difference between Democrats and Republican because professional legislatures attract only those who are career oriented and ambitious while non-professional legislatures attract only those who lack a political career orientation or ambitions. In this case, we might have fewer Republicans, as Fiorina suggest, but the Republicans who do run for office are identical to Democrats. The test we have devised here is particularly stringent because we expect Fiorina's assumptions to hold even among legislators attracted to serve in more professional institutions.

attractive as a career in their own right, act as a stepping stone to higher office. Further, we note that Democrats are more likely to view politics as a career than are Republicans in non-professional legislatures. While the lack of any difference on working outside the legislature in non-professional legislatures may suggest that Democrats would not be attracted to salary increases in these, their career orientation gives us some pause: if they see the state as a necessary first step to this career even marginal differences in fairly low salaries might make more or less likely to move into the state legislature. In any case, the results in table 1 prompt us to explore whether a state legislative institution might be more attractive to some members because of their desire to move up.

### Opportunity Structure and Career Goals

It is plausible that career goals prompt legislators to seek state legislative office even if the short run opportunity costs are high because it helps them achieve their long-term goals. As Schlesinger's (1966) seminal work points out, ambition is a function of available opportunities. If so, we would expect to see a higher proportion of legislators attracted to institutions in states with clear paths to a higher office career.

Table two explores the ambitions and career orientations of Republican state legislators in states with different opportunity structures to move to Congress. We focus on Republicans rather than Democrats because we are most interested in understanding whether there might be alternative reasons that Republicans are drawn to state legislative service. If so, such forces could act to counter-balance the partisan biases associated with professionalism.

We developed a measure of opportunity structure through identifying state contexts in which the Democrats were more advantaged in winning Congressional seats. We took the average of Democratic freshmen over three terms and subtracted the average of Republican freshmen over three terms. This provides a measure of the relative number of wins per party. If both parties win equally, on average, neither party is advantaged. However, if the average number of Republican freshmen exceeds the average number of Democratic freshmen, Republican state legislators should be advantaged in their ability to move up. This relative difference in freshmen was divided by the total number seats. Overall, this opportunity index is negative if Republicans are advantaged and positive if Democrats are advantaged. For the purposes of the analysis, we compare the career orientations and ambitions of Republican legislators in states that have a Republican advantage (negative values) to those in states with a Democratic advantage (positive values).

[table 2 here]

The analyses show that relative opportunity structure matters to both the career orientations and career goals of Republican legislators.<sup>4</sup> Across all legislatures, Republicans in states with a Republican opportunity structure are slightly more likely to view politics as a career and are much more likely to harbor ambitions for higher office than are Republicans in states with a Democratic opportunity structure.

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<sup>4</sup> Although the tables present only bivariate differences, we also ran multivariate logit models to ensure that the differences across opportunity contexts holds in the face of controls for individual characteristics. The political career orientation model controlled for salary level, full time session lengths, number of terms served in the legislature, income, sex, education, age and South. The opportunity variable remained statistically significant at  $p < .10$ ; The ambition variable controlled for salary level, full time session lengths, political career orientation, number of terms served in the legislature, income, sex, education, age and South. The opportunity measure was significant at  $p < .01$ .

The surprising finding in this table is the stark difference in proportion of ambitious Republicans in high opportunity and low opportunity non-professional legislatures. Previous literature suggests that opportunity and professionalism should interact to encourage the entry of ambitious politicians to the state legislature. However, table two does not show evidence of this. Instead, opportunity structure seems to make the most difference in the ambitions of members in the least professional states. We suspect that this counter-intuitive findings may be the result of longer term shifts in the opportunity structure in the South that are not observable in cross-sectional data, and the decisions of Republican party leaders to target state legislative and congressional races in the South (Moncrief, Squire and Jewell 2001). We discuss these changes in more detail in the next section. In addition, it is possible that we see such stark differences in career goals under different opportunity structure in professional and non-professional legislatures because the opportunity structure serves as a primary “draw” in non-professional legislatures. In professional institutions, legislators may be drawn to service for other reasons outside of the larger opportunity structure.

Since we are especially interested in understanding the puzzle of the South, and suspect that the opportunity structure might create a special attraction for Republicans in the South, it is important to examine the effects of opportunity structure on ambitions by region. Table 3 compares the ambitions of Republicans in non-professional legislatures in the South and with those outside the South.<sup>5</sup> This table shows that Southern Republican legislators tend to be much more ambitious than their counterparts outside the South. While there is little difference in the general political career orientation among Southern and non-Southern Republican state legislators in favorable opportunity structure states, the difference in ambition is dramatic. Thirty-five percent of Southern Republicans state legislators in favorable opportunity states harbor ambitions for higher office, as compared to only eighteen percent outside the South. Moreover, the effect of the opportunity structure is much greater in the South. The percent of ambitious Republicans increases from twenty to thirty-five percent in Southern legislatures, as compared non-Southern legislatures where the percent of ambitious Republicans increased from ten to eighteen percent. This suggests that the opportunity structure may exert a larger “pull” for Republicans in Southern states. Such findings are consistent with the idea that Republican party in the South has made special efforts to build a stronger candidate pool.

[table 3 here]

These tables, taken together, show evidence of a link between opportunity structure, career orientation and political ambitions that is especially strong in Southern legislatures. This prompts us to reconsider Fiorina’s argument that professionalism causes a Democratic bias. As table one showed, Republican state legislators, on average, harbor very similar ambitions to Democrats. This is important because previous research indicates that state legislatures function as a central step to higher office (Berkman 1994, Fowler and McClure 1989, Francis and Kenny 2000, Squire 1988). However, individuals will not be attracted to a state legislature as a stepping stone if there is no higher office to climb toward. Table two supports this by showing that state legislatures in states with relatively more Republican opportunities tend to attract ambitious Republicans. Thus, the willingness to bear the cost of serving in the state legislature may depend, in important ways, on the career path beyond the state legislature. Table three shows this effect to be especially strong in the South. This implies that the opportunity structure could mitigate the effects of Democratic bias, particularly in Southern legislatures that have developed strong Republican career paths to higher office.

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<sup>5</sup> None of the legislatures in the South qualify as professional on both dimensions of salary and session length, therefore, the relevant comparison group is the non-professional legislatures outside the South.

## Changes in the Opportunity Structure Over Time

The cross sectional analysis is suggestive, but it does not allow us to explore how changes in the opportunity structure influence the partisan seat share over time. Certainly, there is evidence of realignment in the South, both among voter identifications and across election outcomes, creating a substantial change in the opportunity structure for Republicans.<sup>6</sup> The South has seen a significant shift in voter loyalties as parties have become more polarized in recent decades (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). With such changes come increased opportunities for Republican candidates to win higher office. From the candidate perspective, realignment is a “trickle-down” phenomenon. Bullock (1988) shows that candidate success is apparent first at higher level offices, then moves down the political career ladder. Bullock points out that evidence of shifting partisan and ideological differences may be lagging indicators of realignment because citizens do not recognize their changed loyalties until they have established a pattern of voting for a range of candidates from a particular party (1988:555). If true, this raises the possibility that realignment in lower level offices may be candidate driven rather than voter driven. As national and state offices become more competitive for the “out party,” party leaders and lower office candidates are emboldened to exploit the shifts in vote patterns apparent in higher level races. As opportunity at the top increases, the willingness of strong “out party” candidates to enter the political career track also increases, creating shifts in party seat shares in lower offices.

For state legislators, one of the most important career paths is the path to the U.S. House. The opportunity structure for a congressional career has changed dramatically over time, both in terms of the use of the state legislature as a stepping stone to higher office, and in terms of changing partisan opportunity in different regions of the country. Figure three shows that state legislatures have been increasingly used as “farm teams” for Congress, as the proportion of state legislators in Congress has increased dramatically over the last fifty years in both parties.<sup>7</sup> Democratic House members, on average, are more likely than Republicans to have state legislative experience, but both parties are substantially more likely to have state legislative experience in recent years. Figure 4 shows that the increase is nearly identical in the South and non-South. This is interesting because the degree of professionalization in non-Southern legislatures is greater, overall, than in the South (see figure 2). Despite these differences, the pool of members of the House in both regions is comprised of a significant number of former state legislatures.

[figures 3 and 4]

Figure five presents another view of the Republican career path in southern and non-southern states. Over time, the South has become more like the North in that congressional delegations in each region are now just about as likely to have a large percentage of former state legislators. Republicans have increasingly used the state legislature as a stepping stone and this trend is stronger in the South after 1970.

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<sup>6</sup> Stonecash and Agathangelou (1997) suggest, though do not test, the hypothesis that realignment rather than professionalization drove seat share patterns in both North and South. Follow-up analysis Fiorina (1999), shows that ideological composition of the electorate does affect the partisan balance of the legislature, but the professionalization hypothesis holds up for Northern states, even in the face of strong controls for ideology, electoral tides and economic change.

<sup>7</sup> Data on previous careers collected from various editions of *The Almanac of American Politics*. A member with state legislative experience at any time in their career in either the upper or lower chamber of their state legislature is coded as a former state legislator. Figure 3 shows the percentage of all Democratic House Members and all Republican House members with state legislative experience. Figure 4 shows the percentage of all House members in Southern and non-Southern states with state legislative experience.

[figure 5 here]

One reason for this, previous research suggests, is that the Republican party made special efforts to target elections in the South, aggressively recruiting candidates for office. Moncrief, Squire and Jewell (2001) show that the number of seats in Southern state legislatures contested by Republicans in the South grew from 45% in the late 1960's to nearly 73% in the mid 1990's (2001:67). While party targeting alone may be one explanation for the differences in partisan seat share in the North and South, we suggest that efforts to recruit state legislative candidates by state and local Republican parties was bolstered by increasing opportunities for Republicans to win seats in Congress. Bullock's (1988) careful tracing of patterns of candidate success in both parties shows that party success in lower office tends to lag behind party success in higher office. In the South, Republicans first gained success in Presidential and Senate races. This success was followed by success in House races and finally in state legislative races. In this sense, opportunity spread from the top down, rather from the bottom up, as Fiorina suggested in his earliest article (1994:312).

We argue that as opportunities for Republicans to win higher office become more prevalent, service in even in non-professional legislatures became more attractive because they offered a first step toward a more prominent political career. Party targeting in the South served to reinforce this pattern, as parties looked to state legislatures to train future candidates for Congress. Indeed, we view this scenario as a likely solution to the "puzzle of the South."

Figure six looks at the change in opportunity structure from a different perspective, by looking at the relative opportunities for each party in Congress in the thirteen southern states. The relative opportunity measure in this figure is identical to the measure described above, where the reference party is Democrat. Higher values of this index indicate a higher relative advantage for Democrats. The striking feature of this graph is the significant decline in relative Democratic advantage over time in the South. In most of the states, in particular the deep South states, Republican opportunities have increased significantly from the 1970s to the 1980s and through the 1990s. Figure seven shows the broader trends in three regions, the South, the Southwestern/Mountain states, and the North. The trend toward increased opportunities in the South is clear. We argue that it is this change in opportunity structure that holds the key to understanding changes in the partisan composition in the South. Therefore, we must reanalyze the aggregate data on partisan seat share with an eye toward the opportunity structure.

[figures 6 and 7 here]

### **The Effects of Opportunity Structure and Professionalization on Partisan Balance**

Our aggregate level analysis builds upon Fiorina's previous work as well as ambition theory to explain Democratic seat share. Each party's ability to recruit good candidates for state legislative races is affected both by the professionalization of the legislature and by the opportunity for and desirability of a possible alternative career in Congress. While Fiorina identifies one important incentive offered by a professional legislature to Democrats--higher salary and full-time job status--there are other incentives whose partisan appeal is less clear-cut. As Fiorina (1994) notes, candidates for office obviously look at more than just "the prospective wages and hours" (308) offered by a legislature in determining whether or not to run. We must account for changes in the partisan career paths to fully appreciate how recruitment for state and national legislative seats are linked together.

We do not dispute that Democratic strength in state legislatures is affected by state legislative professionalization. But unlike Fiorina, we argue that the opportunity structure in some states serves to mitigate - indeed, even reverse - those effects. While no southern state has turned Republican, mean

Republican strength has increased in the southern states, and more in some states than others. Stonecash and Agathangelou (1997) correctly identify a negative association between Democratic seat share and salary in Southern states, as well as some northern states. We argue, however, that this effect may be spurious because during the time that legislative salaries were increasing in the South, the relative opportunities for Republicans were changing as well.

To summarize, our argument is this: opportunities for higher office attract ambitious individuals to the state legislature as a means of gaining experience before running for higher office, thus relative party opportunities for higher office affect the partisan seat shares in state legislatures, independent of the level of professionalism. States with greater relative opportunities for Democrats to gain higher office attract a greater number of high quality, ambitious Democrats to office, because the value of a state legislative seat is greater when it can serve as a launching pad to run for a higher office. Moreover, once an ambitious individual wins a state legislative seat, s/he is likely to retain that seat until a clear opportunity arises to move up the ladder. Previous research shows that state legislators behave strategically by waiting for the best opportunity to run for higher office, such as an open seat (Berkman and Eisenstein 1999, Maestas, Maisel and Stone 2000). Because ambitious individuals recognize the value of state legislative experience in winning higher office, they are more willing to bear the costs associated with serving in the state legislature, regardless of the level of professionalism. States that have relatively more opportunities for Republicans will attract a greater number of ambitious Republicans to office, for the same reason. Thus, at the margin, the party with the greater opportunity structure will have a stronger pool of state legislative candidates, leading to greater seat gains for the advantaged party.

#### Data Analysis

We model Democratic seat share using a pooled time series model that allows for random effects.<sup>8</sup> The dependent variable is the percentage of seats in a legislature held by the Democratic party, and ranges from less than 1 percent to 100 percent. The data is collected for two year periods (from 1938-1998), corresponding to the length of a Congress, and ranges for most of the analysis from 1940 to 1998. Data for the opportunity variable is lagged by two congresses so analysis using this measure includes fewer cases. Descriptives for all variables used in the analysis are shown in table 4.

[table 4 here]

Our main independent variables are those that capture the level of professionalism and the relative Democratic opportunity. We measure professionalism using two variables, salary and session length. Salary, in thousands, is measured in constant 1986 dollars.<sup>9</sup> Session length is measured by a three category variable, where the lowest category represents biennial legislatures, the middle category is part-time annual legislatures, and the top category is full time annual legislatures. As discussed above, full time legislatures are those whose annual sessions exceed 180 days, on average. Since session length varies from session to session, we use a five term average as a measure of days in session. Previous analysis by Fiorina used the actual number of days. However, use of a cardinal measure of days suggests that there is a uniform effect for each additional day in the session. We argue that the distinction is less fine grained. Individuals respond to the general length of session. Thus, there is a great deal of difference

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<sup>8</sup> The analysis is run using the STATA subprogram XTREG with random effects. We are guided in this approach by Beck and Katz (1995).

<sup>9</sup> Data on legislative salaries are collected from various editions of the *Book of the States*. To compute annual salary we used salary plus per diem multiplied by the number of days. Number of days is the actual number of days in session calculated from dates reported in tables in *Book of the States* that list bill introductions and other information on sessions. When length of session exceeds session length we used the limit instead of actual days.

in the opportunity costs of service between a biennial legislature such as Texas, and a full time annual legislature such as California. In contrast, there is little difference between California and other full time legislatures such as Wisconsin. The use of ordinal categories allows us to group states of similar opportunity costs.

We test our central hypothesis with the opportunity measure outlined in the previous section. We expect this measure to be positive, as higher relative opportunity for Democrats should increase the number of strong Democrats who run for and win seats in the state legislature. When Republicans hold the relative advantage, this measure is negative. Thus, a positive coefficient would indicate that greater relative Democratic opportunities result in greater Democratic seat share, while greater relative Republican opportunities result in lesser Democratic seat share.

Since seat share in any given term is heavily dependent on seat share in the previous term, we control for lagged seat share. We also control for the proportion of Democrats in the House delegation using a moving average over three terms. This control is important because it captures the general patterns of realignment in the states over time, and, like our opportunity measure, should be positively related to Democratic seat share. Finally, we analyze states from the South separately to facilitate comparisons between the magnitude of effect of salary, session length and relative opportunity in the South and Non-south.

## Results

The baseline model for each region echoes the findings for compensation by both Fiorina (1994,1997, 1999) and Stonecash and Agathangelou (1997). Salary has a positive, statistically significant effect on Democratic seat share outside the South. For each additional ten thousand dollars in compensation, Democratic seat share increases by nearly 2.3%. In contrast, the baseline model for the South shows a significant *negative* effect of compensation on Democratic seat share, even after controlling for other factors such as previous seat share and partisan composition at the national level. This is consistent with the individual state level effects found by Stonecash and Agathangelou (1997), where they found negative effects of compensation in most states.

[table 5 here]

Both baseline models show effects of session length. This is notable because Fiorina's early model of partisan seat share showed no effect. However, the use of a categorical variable which distinguishes broader categories of legislative sessions allows this effect to emerge in the analysis. Like salary, the session length variable has a negative effect in the South, indicating that longer sessions are associated with fewer Democrats.<sup>10</sup> But even controlling for session length we continue to see effects from salary where greater salary leads to more Democrats in the North and fewer Democrats in the South. As Squire(1997) notes, few legislatures offer a truly full-time occupation and a strict reading of Fiorina would lead to the conclusion that salary increases in legislatures that are not full-time (or fully professionalized) should not really matter. But even in part-time legislatures, salary increases matter. Rather, even in part-time legislatures there are opportunity costs to devoting time to legislative service, costs that are apparently borne more by Democrats in the North and Republicans in the South. One possibility is that such costs are borne in part because of the partisan opportunity structure in each region.

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<sup>10</sup> An alternative way to interpret this finding is that for very low salary ranges, as exist in the South, increases in session length create a Republican bias simply because Democrats are less able to serve full time when the legislature cannot replace their existing career. Certainly, this is consistent with Fiorina's basic assumptions.

The second model for each region presents the central findings related to the opportunity structure.<sup>12</sup> Relative opportunity has a large, statistically significant effect in both regions, indicating that the seat share for each party increases as its higher office opportunities increase. For Southern states, the partisan opportunity ranges from approximately +.07 in the early 1950's to -.05 in the mid 1990's. A decrease of .1 in Democratic advantage, then, leads to nearly 2% change in partisan seat share. In non-Southern states, the effect is slightly smaller. A .1 change leads to a 1.4% change in partisan seat share.

While the magnitude of effect may seem small, it is large enough to outweigh Democratic gains from salary change, particularly given some of the strong short term fluctuations in partisan advantage. Consider, for example, the decrease in Democratic opportunity during the period from 1958 to 1970 outside the South. In the space of a little more than a decade, the opportunity measure shifts from .08 to -.07 for a total drop of .15. Our analysis predicts a shift in seat share of 2.1%. During the same period, average salary increased by nearly 8,000 real dollars, leading to a Democratic gain of only .94%. Here, the opportunity effects overwhelm the salary effects, and the gains in seat share reverse to favor Republicans. Indeed, returning to figure 1, it is apparent that despite steady increases in salary during this time period, Democratic seat share took a substantial downturn between 1964 and 1970 thus is more consistent with the change in the opportunity structure during this period.

One reason the opportunity structure effects overwhelm the salary effects is that the effect of salary on seat share is much lower, once opportunity structure is taken into account. Fiorina's hypothesis holds in states outside the South, although the results are greatly attenuated. A ten thousand dollar increase in real salary leads to roughly only 1.2% increase in Democratic seat share. More importantly, the anomalous findings in the South are no longer significant. Indeed, the standard error exceeds the coefficient once opportunity structure in the South is included in the model. This suggests that opportunity structure is correlated with rising salary, and salary effects on partisan seat share are partially or wholly spurious.

It is notable that the coefficient for opportunity structure in the South is much larger than the coefficient for the non-South. We believe this is due to the joint effects of opportunity structure and party targeting efforts in the South. Although we cannot directly test the role of party targeting and mobilization of candidates, we strongly suspect that the effect of the opportunity structure is greater in the South than in the North because the party has actively worked to exploit the shifts in the opportunity structure. Targeting focuses attention on candidates in areas where parties feel most able to shift the vote and draws resources away from areas where it is more difficult to convert voters. The result is to exacerbate the overall effects of opportunity structure for both parties in the South. Of course, without specific data on party targeting efforts in each region, the claim remains speculative. Regardless, the analysis in table five

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<sup>12</sup> One criticism of these models is that they fail to fully control for underlying changes in voting patterns, and that the opportunity measure simply picks up shifts in vote preferences that influence both House seat opportunities and state legislative vote simultaneously. While we lack the data to control for these shifts in the current analysis, we did run additional analysis on a shorter time frame of data to include the Berry et. al. state ideology measure to control for realignment of voters. In the South and non-South models the opportunity measure remained positive and highly significant. However, the salary coefficient became insignificant in the non-South model while the session type remained significant in both. We view this as a strong control of the realignment hypothesis, thus our confidence in the findings is strengthened. Because we are interested in analyzing trends over a longer period of data, we chose to present the analysis without the ideology control.

shows clear evidence that opportunity structure, apart from professionalism plays a significant role in the Southern and non-Southern legislatures.

## **Discussion**

This analysis offers a significant step toward understanding the changes in partisan composition of legislatures within and beyond the South. In one sense, our analysis bolsters Fiorina's claim that professionalization makes state legislatures more attractive to Democrats than to Republicans. We find, for example, that salary increases matter even when legislatures do not meet full time. We find as well that Democrats and Republicans do differ at the individual level in ways that Fiorina's original analysis anticipated. Democrats are less likely to work outside the legislature than Republicans and more likely to see career potential in public service. Further, while the effects of salary largely disappear in the South when controlling for opportunity, it is clear that longer session length attracts Republicans in much the same way it attracts Democrats in the North. This indicates that perhaps in some ways, Democrats and Republicans may be more alike in the South than they are in the North. The findings also highlight the fact that work-load effects warrant further investigation. Thus far, much of the literature on careers and professionalism focus on the salary side of the career. Fiorina's assumptions, however, have much to do with the opportunity costs of time. Yet, the effects of this opportunity cost run in opposite directions in the North and South, leaving a missing piece to the puzzle of the South.

The central contribution of this work, though, is to show the importance of the opportunity structure in shaping state legislative seat shares. We find that the opportunity structure in a state can create counter-veiling pressures that mitigate the Democratic biases associated with professionalism. The fact that state legislatures serve as a stepping stone to higher office, most often the U.S. House, is more than a trivial observation. The political career path has genuine consequences for attracting individuals to service in lower level offices and suggests that we reexamine some of the other implications of Fiorina's argument. For example, Fiorina (1994) suggests that a professionalization may produce a persistent partisan bias at the national level because state legislatures train a stronger pool of Democrats than Republicans. Our analysis disputes that finding by suggesting the pool of future state legislator candidates are drawn by opportunities associated with shifting electoral patterns at the national level. It is more plausible that persistent opportunity at the national level will create biases in the partisan structures of the statehouse rather than the reverse. In this sense, redistricting outcomes that limit opportunities at the Congressional level may trickle down to the state legislative level as, at the margins, potentially ambitious politicians choose not to step onto the first rung of the political career ladder.

Overall, this research opens an important avenue of investigation and provides some intriguing results that reverse the expectations of persistent Democratic biases in professionalized state legislatures. We end by noting that this first cut at the aggregate analysis does not control for the effects of key factors such as term limits and coattails effects. The next step in this sort of analysis, of course, will be to incorporate these important factors into our model to better understand the types and numbers of Democrats and Republicans serving in American state legislatures.

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**Table 1. State Legislator's Career Orientation, by party and type of legislature**

	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>All Legislatures</b>			
Work outside of legislature	69%	63%	6% **
View Politics as a Career	14%	30%	16% **
Ambition for higher office	16%	16%	0%
smallest N	924	920	
<b>Professional Legislatures</b>			
Work outside of legislature	41%	27%	14% **
View Politics as a Career	30%	62%	32% **
Ambition for higher office	22%	24%	2%
smallest N	132	155	
<b>Non-Professional Legislatures</b>			
Work outside of legislature	74%	70%	4% *
View Politics as a Career	12%	23%	11% **
Ambition for higher office	15%	14%	1%
smallest N	797	770	

Source: Carey, Neimi and Powell Survey of State Legislators in 1995

\*\*p <.01 \*p<.05, one tailed

**Table 2. Republican Career Orientations, by Opportunity Structure**

	Relative Opportunity Structure		Difference
	Favors Democrats	Favors Republicans	
<b>All legislatures</b>			
% Republicans who view politics as a career	13%	19%	6% **
% Republicans who hold ambitions for Congressional Office	14%	25%	11% **
smallest N	396	292	
<b>Professional legislatures</b>			
% Republicans who view politics as a career	26%	33%	7% *
% Republicans who hold ambitions for Congressional Office	23%	22%	1%
smallest N	74	56	
<b>Non-Professional Legislatures</b>			
% Republicans who view politics as a career	11%	15%	4% *
% Republicans who hold ambitions for Congressional Office	12%	26%	14% **
smallest N	322	206	

Source: Carey, Neimi and Powell Survey of State Legislators in 1995

\*\*p <.01 \*p<.05, one tailed

**Table 3: Republican Career Orientations in Non-Professional Legislatures, by Opportunity Structure**

	<b>Relative Opportunity Structure</b>		<b>Difference</b>
	<b>Favors Democrats</b>	<b>Favors Republicans</b>	
<b>Southern Legislatures</b>			
% Republicans who view politics as a career	17% <sup>a</sup>	15%	2%
% Republicans who hold ambitions for Congressional Office	20% <sup>a</sup>	35% <sup>a</sup>	15% <sup>**</sup>
Smallest N	90	67	
<b>Non-Southern Legislatures</b>			
% Republicans who view politics as a career	9% <sup>a</sup>	15%	6% <sup>*</sup>
% Republicans who hold ambitions for Congressional Office	10% <sup>a</sup>	18% <sup>a</sup>	8% <sup>**</sup>
Smallest N	232	139	

Source: Carey, Neimi and Powell Survey of State Legislators in 1995

\*\*p <.01 \*p<.05, one tailed

a. Difference between Southern and non-Southern legislature is significant at p<.05, one tailed.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics**

	<b><u>Minimum</u></b>	<b><u>Maximum</u></b>	<b><u>Mean</u></b>	<b><u>Std. Deviation</u></b>
Annual Legislative Salary, 1986 Dollars	0.00	60.74	10.17	10.55
Percentage Democrats in State Legislatures	0.88	100.00	59.33	23.82
Democratic Strength in Congress: Three year running average of Democrats/State Delegation Size	0.00	1.00	0.56	0.30
Dummy Variable: Legislature Meets biennially (-1), less than 180 days a year (0), more than 180 days a year (1)	-1.00	1.00	-0.38	0.68
Percentage Democratic State Legislators in State Congressional Delegation	0.00	100.00	42.91	31.17
Percentage Republican State Legislators in State Congressional Delegation	0.00	100.00	42.62	34.88
Opportunity Measure: $AVG((\# \text{ of Democratic Freshmen over three Congresses}) - AVG(\# \text{ of Republican Freshmen over three Congresses})) / AVG(\# \text{ of Seats in State Delegation over three Congresses})$	-1.00	0.50	-0.01	0.16

Table 5. The Effects of Professionalization and Opportunity Structure on Democratic Seat Share, random effects pooled time series (robust standard errors).

	<b>NON-SOUTH</b>		<b>SOUTH</b>	
	Model 1 (baseline)	Model 2	Model 1 (baseline)	Model 2
<b>Professionalization &amp; Opportunity Structure:</b>				
Salary (in 1986 dollars)	.232** (.066)	.121* (.067)	-.191* (.103)	-.089 (.109)
Session Type	3.19** (.891)	2.862** (.885)	-3.132** (1.313)	-3.451** (1.413)
Democratic Opportunity Structure	--	14.078** (2.617)	--	19.707** (7.168)
<b>Controls</b>				
Democratic seat share, previous term	-12.845** (2.851)	-10.902** (2.919)	-17.149** (8.458)	-14.84 (9.207)
Average proportion of Democrats in House	33.577** (3.438)	22.191** (3.695)	64.947** (9.387)	59.306** (10.421)
Delegation				
Constant	38.331**	45.478**	45.149**	46.183**
N	976	877	363	324
Overall R2	.311	.311	.44	.446

\*\*p<.05, \*p<.10, one tailed tests.

Figure 1. Democratic Strength in State Legislatures

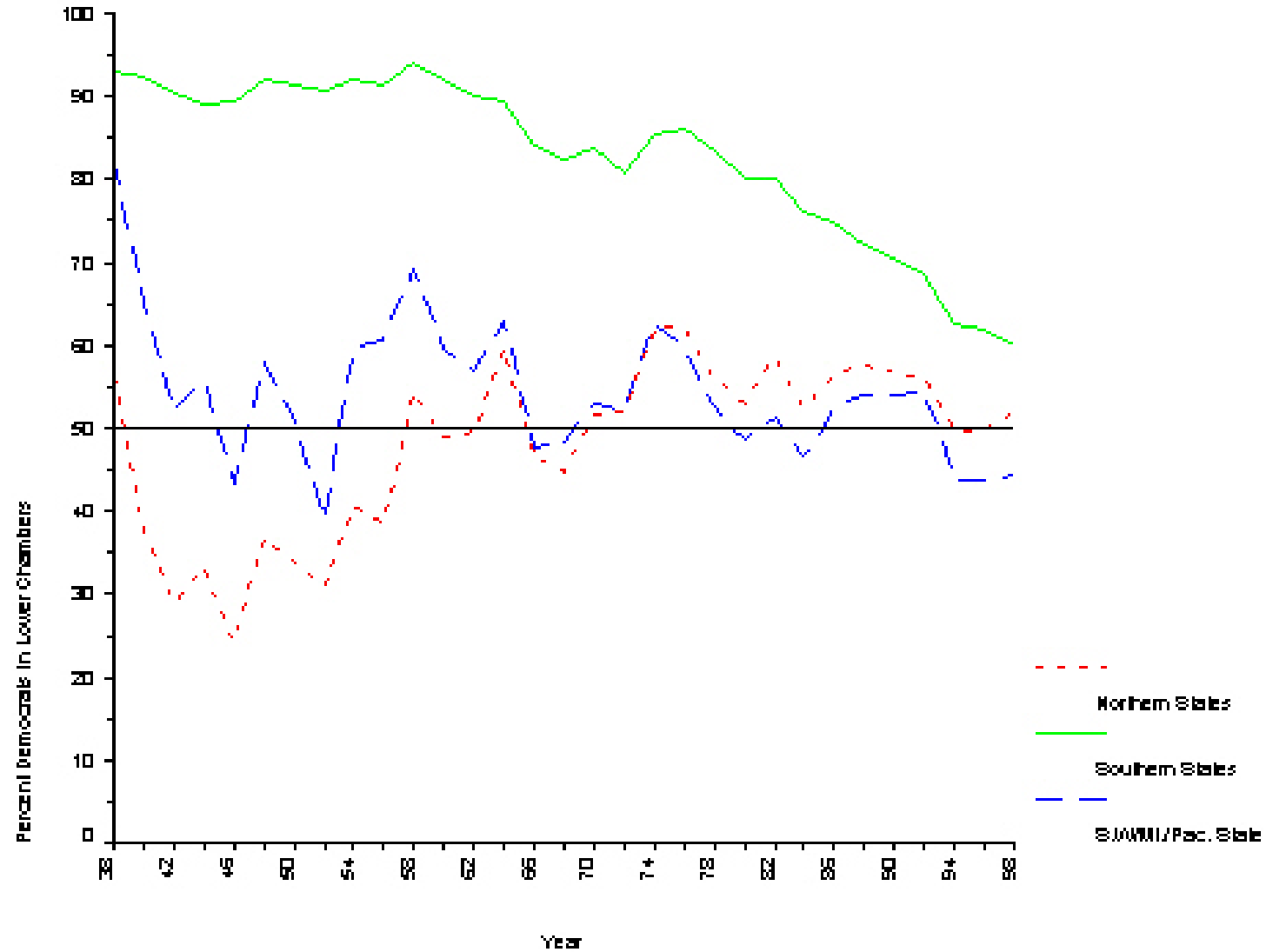


Figure 2. Annual Legislative Salary, Southern and Non-Southern States



Figure 3. State legislators in Congress, by Party



Figure 4. State Legislators in Congress, 1940-1996

Southern and Non-Southern States



Figure 5. Republican State Legislators in State Congressional Delegation

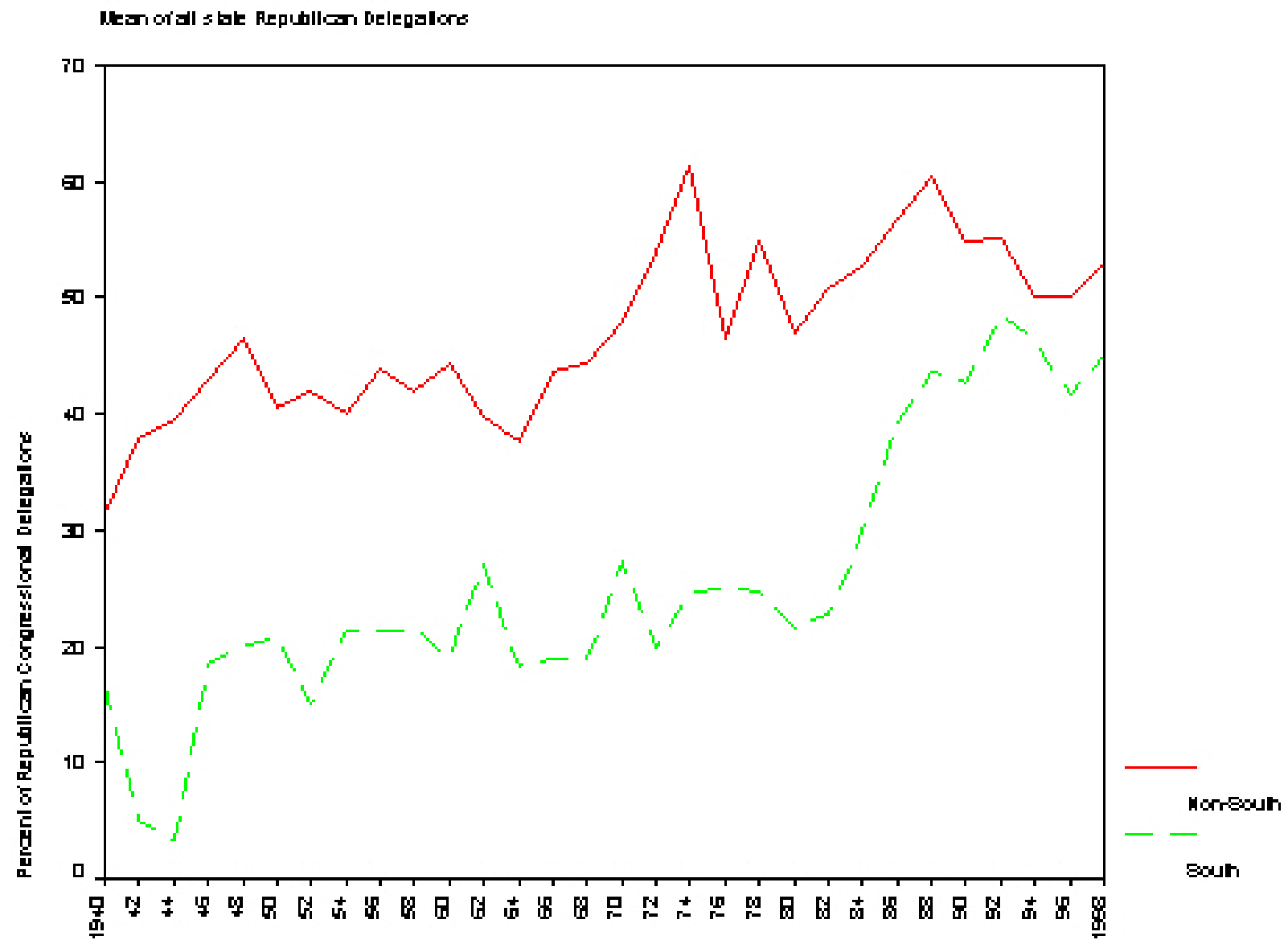
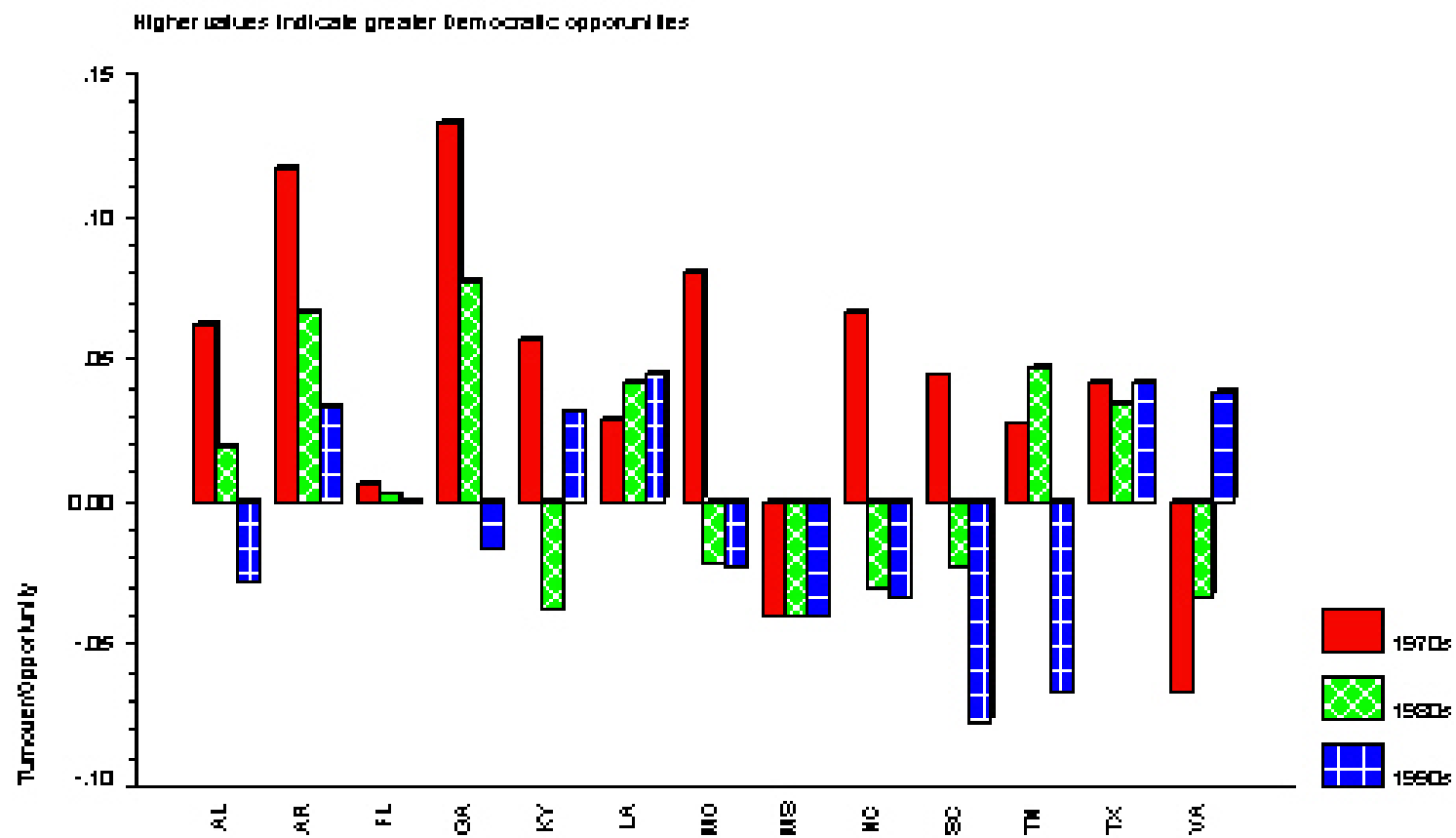


Figure 6. Turnover/Opportunity in State Congressional Delegations

Mean values for 1970s, 1980s, 1990s



Annual Turnover/Opportunity Index computed as  $\text{Aug}(\text{fresh Dem for 3}$

$\text{congresses}) - \text{Aug}(\text{fresh Rep for 3}) / \text{total \# of seats}$

Figure 7. Democratic Opportunity Structure in Southern States

