

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Factors Related to Legislative Success:

A Report to the House Members of the 106th Legislature

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Early in the regular session of the 106th legislature, we needed the cooperation of House Members in a study designed to predict the success of the new members. After contacting two of the young legislators in our area, Ted Curtis and Frank Murray, we spoke with the House leaders and were assured of cooperation with our study.

We did receive fine cooperation. The first phase of the research involved the distribution of our "Self-Other Orientation-Questionnaire" to the 46 freshman members. Forty-two of them completed that questionnaire. The second phase of our study required judgements about the performance of the first term legislators. Early in June, letters were sent to both new and senior members requesting such judgements. Seventy-nine of the members responded to our appeal, a sufficient number upon which to base our conclusions.

Background for the Research

Various investigators have been interested in the workings of legislative bodies and the contributions of the diverse types of people who make up these bodies. One of the most comprehensive studies was done a few years ago by a political scientist at Yale University, James Barber. In his book, The Lawmakers, he reported a number of different styles of activity in the Connecticut legislature, ranging from that of legislators who were devoted to making the legislature an effective, progressive body, to those who seemed to be simply spectators to the process. Barber and others, particularly the famous political scientist Harold Lasswell, have proposed that self-doubt, or an individual's doubts about his own worth may underlie such differences in legislative role. Barber's observations of the Connecticut legislature suggested that legislators tended to be individuals with either a very low self-regard or a particularly high evaluation of themselves.

A somewhat new approach to the area was taken by a psychologist, Robert Ziller, who proposed that evaluation of oneself in the social context is more complex than has been implied by previous investigators. In his recent book The Social Self, Ziller maintained that it is not simply one's level of self-regard which affects political aspirations and behavior, but a combination of factors including what he called social self-esteem (SSE) and complexity of self-concept (SSC). He demonstrated the utility of this approach in a study of a general legislative election in Oregon. As he predicted, candidates who considered themselves complex individuals yet had rather low overall self-regard were the most successful in that election. Under different political conditions, Ziller suggested that another successful political type would also emerge, the individual with a high self-regard coupled with a relatively simple concept of self.

The Study of Freshmen Maine Legislators

The present study was undertaken to further explore factors related to political success, including the personality factors designated by Ziller. Political success was defined by peer ratings of the Freshman legislators. Each was assigned a "success" score and also a "liking" score on the basis of ratings by all of the House members. Information on factors that might relate to those ratings were obtained from House records and from the Self-Other Questionnaire the Freshmen completed for us.

Preliminary Findings

The success and liking ratings were highly correlated; if a freshman was well liked he was also seen as successful. Party affiliation related neither to success nor to liking. That is, overall, Republicans and Democrats received essentially equal success and liking ratings. First-term Democrats did, however, introduce more bills than freshman Republicans (10.1 versus 6.7) and tended to speak more on the floor of the House (885 versus 615 lines) as indexed by number of lines in the legislative record. Nonetheless, Republicans were more successful in passing the legislation they did introduce (40% versus 25%). First term Republicans were also older as a group than their Democratic counterparts (46.7 versus 33.8 years) and were somewhat more numerous (26 Republicans versus 19 Democrats).

One of the primary concomitants of success was legislative activity. In general those legislators who spoke more on the floor of the House and introduced more bills were the ones that were seen as most successful. Naturally, the more bills one introduced the more that person spoke on the floor, presumably in support of his own legislation. These results concur with a large body of research in social psychology that shows that the most active and talkative members of a group tend to be seen as the group leaders.

Among other factors studied, it seems clear that age is important. Older legislators were less active than younger, in number of bills introduced. Older first-termers also tended to speak less. However, the older members were as successful as the younger legislators in terms of the number of their bills which passed. The greater activity of younger first-term legislators in part accounts for the finding that their rated prospects for success in future legislative terms was greater than that for the older members.

In accord with Ziller's theory of social interaction, the self-other orientation scores of individuals revealed two "types" who were relatively successful and two who were relatively unsuccessful in terms of their legislative potential. These four types are shown in the table below.

<u>Self-Other Orientation</u>			<u>Mean Success</u> Rating	<u>Mean Activity</u>	
<u>Type</u>	<u>SSE</u>	<u>CSC</u>		<u>Lines</u> Spoken	<u>Bills</u> Introduced
I	Low	High	139	849	8.1
II	High	Low	123	1139	13.1
III	Low	Low	68	688	6.3
IV	High	High	55	551	7.6

The successful and unsuccessful types were differentiated on the basis of legislative activity as well as success ratings. The successful types spoke more on the floor and introduced more bills. It is also of theoretical interest that successful type II was significantly more active, both in bills introduced and speaking, than any of the other three types. At present we are attempting to differentiate these four personality types more specifically, in an attempt to further validate or clarify Ziller's theory.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Research

The legislator might well ask, what practical implications does this study have for our work? What can be said about the current question of higher salaries for state legislators, for example? It has been suggested that higher salaries might attract younger, less affluent members as well as able and successful people who cannot at present afford the financial sacrifice which legislative service entails. While we did observe some differences between younger and older first-term legislators in legislative activity, other social-psychological research suggests that any organization includes a diversity of people whose different roles contribute to the effective functioning of the organization.

At present, it is difficult to specify the relative roles which the different social-personality types play in the legislative process. We are still continuing the analysis of our data from the 106th Maine Legislature, and will be re-analyzing and re-considering its implications for some time. In fact, we hope to be able to gather some additional data during the Special Session, in an attempt to clarify the results we now have.

In any scientific effort, the results of each study contribute toward the overall understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Our continuing research, taken together with the work of other investigators will, it is hoped, contribute to the understanding and improvement of the legislative process. To this end, a preliminary report of this study will be presented by Mr. Baril in a paper to be read at the Eastern Psychological Association meeting in Philadelphia next April. The findings will also be reported by Dr. Stone with Robert Ziller in their chapter on "Self-Other Orientations and Political Behavior" in a forthcoming book.*

We are grateful for the extensive help received at all stages of the study from the leadership and membership of the Maine House of Representatives and from others at the State House. Our particular thanks to Ted Curtis, Frank Murry, and Edith Hary for their help; finally, the kind cooperation of the first-term members of the House was particularly appreciated.

* The Psychological Examination of Political Man, edited by Thomas Milburn and Margaret Hanson of Ohio State University.