

LEGISLATORS IN STATE POLITICS

Chapter 6

Functions of State Legislatures

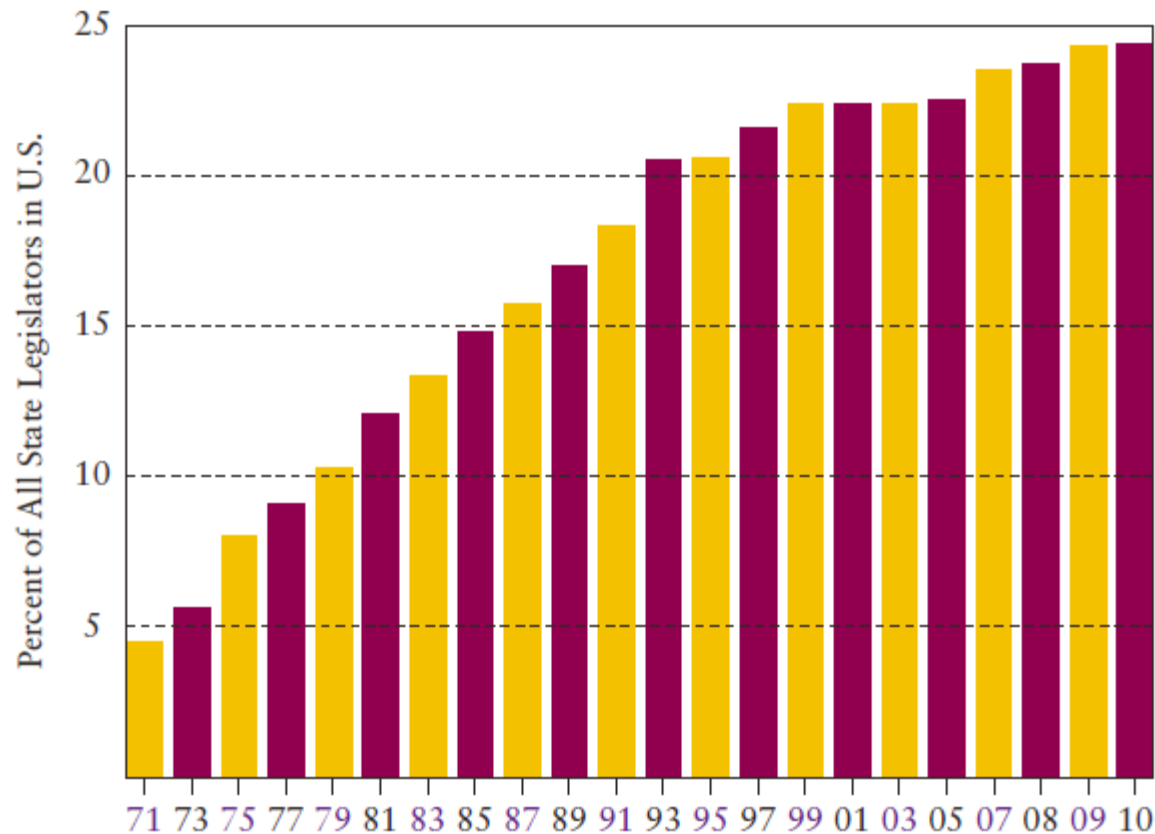
- Enacting Laws
- Considering Constitutional Amendments, Gubernatorial Appointments, and State Courts
- Approving Budgets
- Serving Constituents
- Overseeing State Agencies

Profiles of State Legislators

- The nation's 7,382 state legislators are not representative of the population
- Status
- Occupation
- Education
- Age
- Personal Wealth
- Attorneys
- Amateurs
- Lack of representation of women and minorities, although they are on the rise
 - 9% African Americans, 3% Hispanics, 1% Asian Americans, 1% Native Americans, 24% Women

Women in State Legislatures

FIGURE 6-1 Women in State Legislatures



Source: Center for American Women and Politics, “Women in State Legislatures 2010,” March 2010. Available at http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/stleg.pdf.

The Effect of Women in Legislatures

- Higher priority to women's issues
- More liberal policy preferences
- More cooperative with colleagues

Getting Elected

- Why politics?
- Experience
- \$\$\$\$\$\$\$
- Primary and General Elections
 - In the 2015 Virginia Senate general election, only 20 of 40 candidates ran against an opponent from another party

Remaining in Office

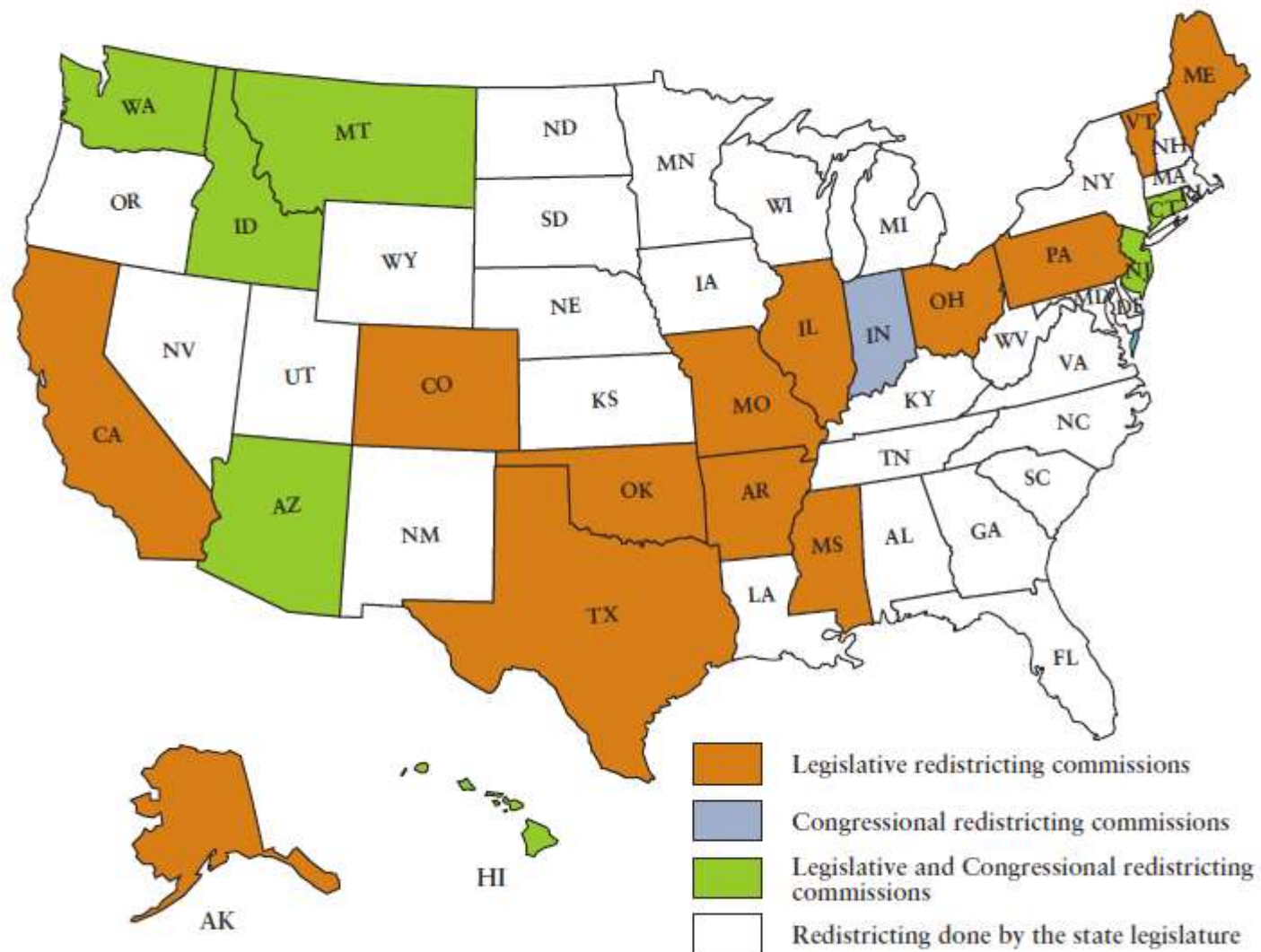
- Once elected, nearly 90% of incumbents win reelection due to more money, the resources of office, visibility, and a lack of credible opponents.
- Mayhew – The Electoral Connection
 1. Advertising
 2. Credit-claiming
 3. Position-taking

Legislative Apportionment and Districting

- Supreme Court Intervention
 - Baker v Carr (1962)
- Districting: Partisan and Incumbent Gerrymandering
- The Seats–Votes Relationship
- Affirmative Racial Gerrymandering
- District Size
 - Historically, most states have redrawn their legislative and congressional districts just once every ten years—right after the release of new census figures.

Redistricting

FIGURE 6-3 Independent Redistricting Commissions



Note: Data are for 2010.

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures

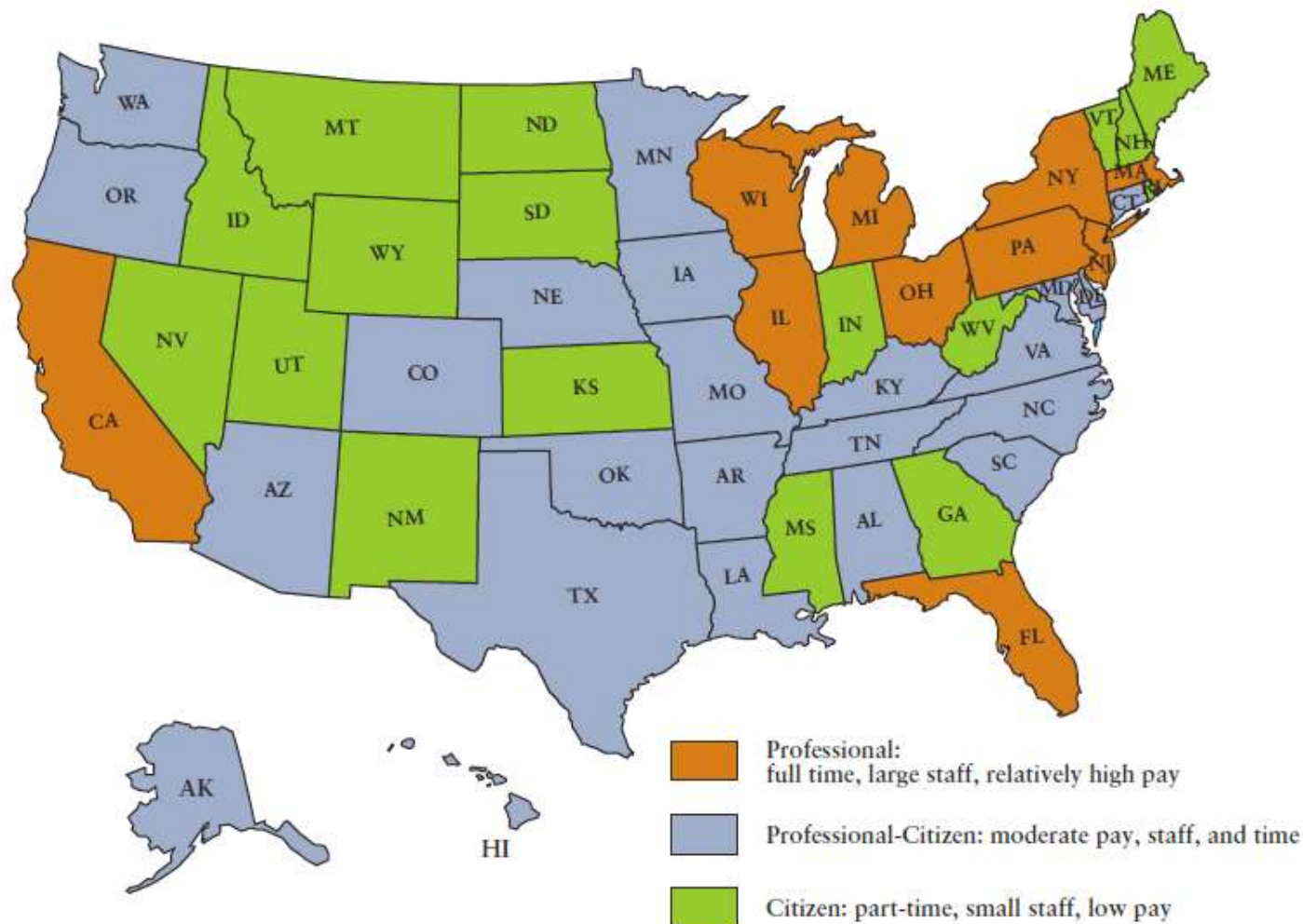
Legislative Organization and Procedure

- The formal rules and procedures by which legislatures operate are designed to make the process fair and orderly.
- Without such rules, it would be difficult for 50, 100, or 200 legislators to arrive at collective decisions.
- The legislature is structured for deliberation rather than speed.

Professionalism in State Legislatures

- Year-round legislatures are considered “professional”
- Encourages careerism
- Legislators have aspirations for higher political office

FIGURE 6-5 Professionalism in State Legislatures



Note: Data are for 2008.

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, “Full and Part-Time Legislatures.” Available at http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=16701#side_by_side.

Legislative Organization

- Political party in control manages the legislative chamber
- Selects leadership, assigns committee chairs
- Standing committees deal with bills within a specific area: education, transportation, health, taxation, etc., usually 20-30
- Professional staff

Leadership

- Roles
- Expectations
- Contrasting views of representation

Term Limits

- 15 state legislatures have term limits of some kind
- Term limits tend to mean:
 - More power to governors
 - Upper chamber has more power (longer terms)
 - Increased partisanship
 - Progressive ambition
- Pros/Cons

Parties

- Two-party states
- Leadership selection
- Party cohesion

The Growing Role of the Media

- State media now cover legislatures full-time
- Mutually beneficial relationship exists between legislators and media

Lobbying the Legislature

- Some type of regulation in all states
- Greater influence in legislatures than Congress
 - Less regulation
 - Part-time legislators
 - Revolving door in term-limited states

Legislatures and Corruption

- Questions about influence of lobbyists
- Increasing role of PAC money in campaigns
- Less restrictions on lobbyists and fewer campaign finance rules enforced