Why Citizens Dislike Professional Legislatures: White-Collar Government and Policymaking for the Wealthy*

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Abstract

The steady professionalization of American state legislatures has created a key tension in political representation: citizens disapprove of professionalized legislatures, on average, yet those legislatures are best equipped to represent their policy preferences. We explain this paradox by arguing that citizens' disapproval stems from distrust of white-collar legislators—who are overrepresented in professionalized chambers—and their policy priorities, rather than from opposition to institutional reforms that enhance legislative capacity. Using data from a preregistered conjoint experiment and temporal observational analyses, we find that citizens do not oppose the institutional expansion of legislative capacity. Rather, they react negatively to representation from white-collar lawmakers, whom they associate with professionalized legislatures. Further, we demonstrate that this opposition is justified; income inequality and poverty have increased with professionalism over time. These findings challenge existing accounts by suggesting that disapproval of professionalism is a rejection of governing by economic elites—not of reforms intended to support legislative capacity.

Keywords: Legislative professionalism; Representation; Social class; Inequality; Economic policy

Word Count: 7,202

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Existing research suggests that public policy in the United States generally reflects public opinion (Caughey and Warshaw 2018), that legislatures are often the fastest institutions to adapt to shifts in public preferences (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002), and that more professionalized state legislatures provide better policy representation than their less professional counterparts (Lax and Phillips 2012). Professionalized legislatures benefit from higher resources, member experience, and capacity to learn and translate citizen preferences into policy (Maestas 2000, 2003; Harden 2016). Yet when asked, citizens express strong disapproval of professionalized legislatures, favoring instead smaller, citizen legislatures (Squire 1993; Kelleher and Wolak 2007; Richardson, Konisky and Milyo 2012; Fortunato, McCrain and Schiff 2023). Why do citizens dislike the legislatures best equipped to represent their interests?

We argue that citizens' disapproval of professional legislatures stems from distrust of white-collar legislators—who are disproportionately represented in professionalized chambers (Carnes and Hansen 2016)—rather than from opposition to the institutional features that enhance legislative capacity and resources to address public problems. Specifically, we argue that citizens associate white-collar lawmakers with professionalized legislatures and expect these lawmakers to enact policies that benefit the wealthy at the expense of average Americans. Our expectations align with existing research showing that citizens disapprove of professionalized chambers; however, our argument clarifies that this disapproval is directed at the white-collar legislators who serve in these chambers—not at capacity-enhancing institutions like higher salaries, more staff, or longer sessions (see Fortunato, McCrain and Schiff 2023).

We pair data from a pre-registered conjoint experiment (n = 1,996) with over-time observational analyses and find that respondents do not oppose the resources commonly found in professional legislatures. Instead, respondents associate professionalism in legislatures with representatives from white-collar backgrounds, who they believe prioritize policies that do not benefit themselves or society. Further, we demonstrate that citizens' distrust of white-collar representation is justified—states with professionalized legislatures have higher levels of income inequality and poverty.

Clarifying that citizens' opposition to professionalized legislatures is a rejection of white-collar

government—not capacity-enhancing institutions—is important for several reasons. First, our findings highlight a stark misalignment between citizens' representational preferences and the social class composition of American legislatures. While our results suggest Americans collectively favor working-class legislatures over white-collar ones, fewer than 2% of state legislators come from working-class backgrounds (Carnes and Hansen 2024). As a result, Americans are governed by the rich, who they believe are least likely to represent their policy preferences. This misalignment is further complicated by the fact that expanding legislatures' ability to effectively represent constituents tends to attract white-collar legislators. These legislators, in turn, often use those enhanced resources to enact policies that exacerbate economic inequality and poverty—precisely the outcomes citizens hope to avoid. Most broadly, our findings add to the growing literature documenting the political consequences of workers' underrepresentation in American legislatures (Carnes 2013; Carnes and Lupu 2023; Lollis 2024).

Citizen Attitudes Toward Professional Legislatures

State legislatures vary widely in their level of professionalization, which is also known as capacity and reflects legislators' salaries, staff, and session length. States like New Hampshire, Wyoming, and Utah tend to pay legislators less, offer minimal staff support, and meet infrequently. In contrast, states such as California, New York, and Massachusetts have highly professionalized legislatures that function similarly to the U.S. Congress. The professionalization of state legislatures affects how legislators engage in policymaking (Jansa, Hansen and Gray 2019; Kroeger 2022; Makse 2022), representation (Harden 2016), communication (Payson, Casas, Nagler, Bonneau and Tucker 2022), and constituency service (Harden 2016; Landgrave and Weller 2020; Garcia and Sadhwani 2023). Professional legislatures, for example, are more likely to advance original legislation that is not "copied" from other states (Jansa, Hansen and Gray 2019) and is written by legislators rather than bureaucrats (Kroeger 2022). They also provide better policy representation than less professionalized legislatures (Maestas 2000, 2003; Harden 2016). Taken together, existing research suggests that professional legislatures are especially well-positioned to enact original legislation aligning with public preferences.

Professional legislatures also attract more ambitious, career-oriented legislators (Maestas 2000, 2003), who are more likely to run for—and win—elections to higher office (McCrain and O'Connell 2023). These legislators also tend to come from white-collar backgrounds (Carnes and Hansen 2016). Moreover, increasing salaries—a core feature of professionalized legislatures—does not increase the number of working-class lawmakers. Instead, higher salaries make these chambers more attractive to white-collar candidates, increase electoral competition, and crowd out workers (Carnes and Hansen 2016). Fewer than 2% of legislators in chambers that pay over $75,000 are from working-class backgrounds, compared to over 7% in chambers where lawmakers receive only a nominal salary (Carnes and Hansen 2016, 703). These findings indicate that although workers are numerically underrepresented in every state legislature, their exclusion is most extreme in professionalized chambers.

At the same time, citizens hold clear preferences regarding the professionalization of their legislatures. When asked about their opinions of state legislatures, Americans have strongly disfavored professionalized chambers for decades (Squire 1993; Fortunato, McCrain and Schiff 2023). As Kelleher and Wolak (2007, 713) note, "people report greater confidence in... statehouses that resemble the ideal of citizen legislatures than those that resemble the U.S. Congress." But while it is clear that citizens dislike professional legislatures, existing work has not clarified *why* they disapprove of high-capacity chambers, which is particularly important given that these are the chambers best equipped to represent citizens' policy preferences. One possible explanation is that citizens oppose the capacity-enhancing features of professionalized legislatures, such as increased salaries, staff, and session lengths. We argue this is *not* the case. Beyond having little knowledge of Congress (Mondak, Carmines, Huckfeldt, Mitchell and Schraufnagel 2007), Americans are also woefully underinformed about their own state legislatures (Rogers 2023). In fact, nearly 90% of Americans cannot name their state legislator (Rogers 2023). As a result, it is unlikely that citizens hold consistent or meaningful attitudes about the specific institutional features of their state legislatures.

Instead, we argue that citizens' disapproval of professional legislatures is directed toward

the types of lawmakers who occupy these chambers—who are primarily from white-collar backgrounds—not the capacity-enhancing institutions these legislatures provide. Specifically, we expect that citizens hold in their minds general associations of professional legislatures with white-collar lawmakers, of whom they tend to disapprove. There are several reasons to expect this association. First, professional legislatures closely resemble the structure and function of Congress, where white-collar government—and its consequences—are most visible (Carnes 2013). If citizens associate professional legislatures with Congress, they likely infer that they are being represented by the wealthy.

Second, Fortunato et al. (2023) find, in a survey experiment of Americans and political elites, that citizens' attitudes toward professional legislatures improve substantially when they are reminded that enhanced legislative capacity can increase social welfare benefits. If citizens' negative views of professional legislatures were rooted in opposition to specific capacity-enhancing features—such as staff, salary, or session length—information about social welfare policy outcomes should have little effect on their support. On the other hand, if their attitudes stem from concerns about the overrepresentation of white-collar lawmakers, reminding them that enhanced capacity can improve policy outcomes for average Americans should increase their support for professional legislatures. Therefore, we argue that Americans associate legislative professionalism with white-collar representation, not with legislative resources.

> **H1:** Americans associate increased legislative professionalism with more white-collar representation, not with the specific institutional features that enhance legislative capacity.

We expect that citizens' dislike of white-collar representation—and, by extension, professional legislatures—is rooted in the belief that wealthy representatives create policies that primarily benefit the rich at the expense of average Americans. Specifically, we hypothesize that respondents view white-collar legislatures as less likely to advance the interests of people like them and society. Existing work demonstrates that Americans overwhelmingly resent the rich for having far more than they deserve (Bartels 2017; Piston 2018), and this resentment extends to their evaluations of wealthy political candidates. Voters consistently prefer candidates who are not wealthy

and who come from average-class backgrounds (Griffin, Newman and Buhr 2020; Vivyan, Wagner, Glinitzer and Eberl 2020). For example, Griffin et al. (2020) find that respondents randomly assigned to read about candidates from different class backgrounds report significant biases against the wealthiest candidates. Likewise, Carnes and Lupu (2016) find that voters view working-class candidates as qualified, relatable, and equally likely to win elections as their white-collar counterparts. Taken together, existing research suggests that voters are skeptical of representation by the rich.

We argue that citizens disapprove of white-collar legislatures because they expect wealthy lawmakers to pass policies that advantage the rich. Piston (2018) demonstrates that Americans' class-based attitudes are associated with their views on policy. For example, Americans who resent the rich are more likely to support higher taxes on wealthy individuals. If Americans also connect the class composition of a legislature to policy outcomes, they may reasonably infer that white-collar governments will produce policies that favor the rich. Moreover, we argue that this skepticism is justified. We hypothesize that states with professional legislatures, who are comprised of white-collar lawmakers, exhibit higher levels of economic inequality and poverty—outcomes associated with policies that benefit the wealthy over the poor in the long term. Existing research shows that white-collar lawmakers in Congress consistently tilt policy outcomes toward benefiting the rich (Carnes 2013). We expect that the overrepresentation of white-collar lawmakers in professional state legislatures similarly leads to policy outcomes that harm less affluent Americans.

> **H2:** Americans believe that white collar representatives are less likely to advance and pass policies that benefit people like them and society.

> **H3:** Legislative professionalism is associated with increasing economic inequality and poverty rates.

Taken together, we argue that citizens' disapproval of professional legislatures is not driven by opposition to capacity-enhancing institutions. Instead, their dislike of professional chambers stems from skepticism toward white-collar lawmakers—who are overrepresented in these legisla-

tures—and the types of policies they tend to prioritize. Moreover, we expect that this skepticism is well-founded: states with professional legislatures are more likely to exhibit higher levels of income inequality and poverty.

Conjoint Survey Experiment

To begin testing this theoretical framework, we fielded a pre-registered, choice-based conjoint survey experiment via Prolific from March 28, 2024 through April 6, 2024.[1] Our sample of 1,996 respondents was matched to national marginals on age, gender, and race. Basic demographic data for our sample can be found in the supplemental appendix. To ensure uniform understanding of the concept under study, respondents were first shown the following definition of legislative capacity:[2]

> "Legislative capacity is the resources a legislature needs to function. Legislative capacity varies across legislatures, with some legislatures having many resources and other legislatures having few resources."

Respondents were then asked to answer a standard set of demographic questions that asked information about their age, income, occupation, partisanship, state of residence, and overall eco-

[1]The pre-registration plan can be found in Appendix Section 1. In the pre-registration, we specified subgroup-specific hypotheses (i.e., how white-collar and working-class respondents' attitudes differ toward professional legislatures). In this paper, we argue that *all* respondents associate legislative professionalism with the class composition of a legislature and the policies it produces, irrespective of their class identity. Although the specific hypotheses in our pre-registration differ slightly from those presented here, we include the pre-registration to demonstrate that our expectations before conducting the conjoint experiment are consistent with the results and argument presented in this paper.

[2]More specifically, defining capacity allowed to examine whether respondents associate legislative capacity with professionalism or legislative composition with professionalism. It is possible that respondents only think of professionalism as political scientists do, that is, as a function of institutional capacity. Our argument, however, is that they may also view professionalism to be a function of the composition of the legislature itself.

nomic status. In the middle of the demographic question block, we asked a *pre-treatment* version of a typical manipulation check question. To gauge how respondents conceptualize legislative capacity, we provided them information about two legislators (session length, salary, staff, occupation) and asked which legislator serves in the higher capacity legislature. This allows us to isolate the respondents that did not internalize our definition of legislative capacity. We asked respondents about two legislators (rather than two legislatures) to distance this question from the question format of our conjoint experiment, which reduces the likelihood of priming effects. Finally, this "manipulation check" appeared prior to the experimental manipulation to avoid biased estimates from dropping respondents who failed to answer correctly (Aronow, Baron and Pinson 2019).

Respondents then iterated through five randomly assigned pairwise comparisons of two profiles of hypothetical legislatures (Legislature A and Legislature B). Each profile randomly assigned a variety of attributes and features. The features of interest are the three components of legislative professionalism (session length, staff, and salary) and the class composition of the legislature (white-collar, working-class, or mixed). All possible feature and attribute combinations are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1: All Potential Attributes for Choice-Based Conjoint Random Assignment

Feature	All Possible Options
Legislative session length	"1 month" OR "3 months" OR "6 months" OR "Unlimited"
Total legislature staff	"50 legislature staff members" OR "200 legislature staff members" OR "750 legislature staff members"
Legislator's salary	"$0" OR "$30k" OR "$50k" OR "$100k"
Class	"The newly elected legislature is made up primarily of white-collar legislators who formerly worked as lawyers, doctors, or educators." OR "The newly elected legislature is made up primarily of working-class legislators who formerly worked as farmers, factory workers, and in clerical occupations." OR "The newly elected legislature includes legislators from a variety of occupation backgrounds."
Party in Control	"Democrats" OR "Republicans"
Bill introduction limits	"5 bill limit" OR "Unlimited"
Session calendar posting Requirements	"Session calendars must be posted 24 hours before session convenes." OR "Session calendars are not required, permitting legislators to take up any desired issue."

Respondents were then asked to select the profile that best aligns with the following three outcome questions:

Q1: Which legislature is best positioned to benefit society? [Legislature A or Legislature B];

Q2: Which legislature is best positioned to benefit people like you? [Legislature A or Legislature B];

Q3: Which legislature is most professional? [Legislature A or Legislature B].

Our theory posits that respondents associate white collar lawmakers with more professional legislatures that are less likely to pass policies that benefit society and people like them. We estimate conditional marginal means for each of the three outcome questions (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley 2020). To demonstrate that these effects are consistent across the class backgrounds of respondents themselves, we code respondents as working class if they reported that they currently

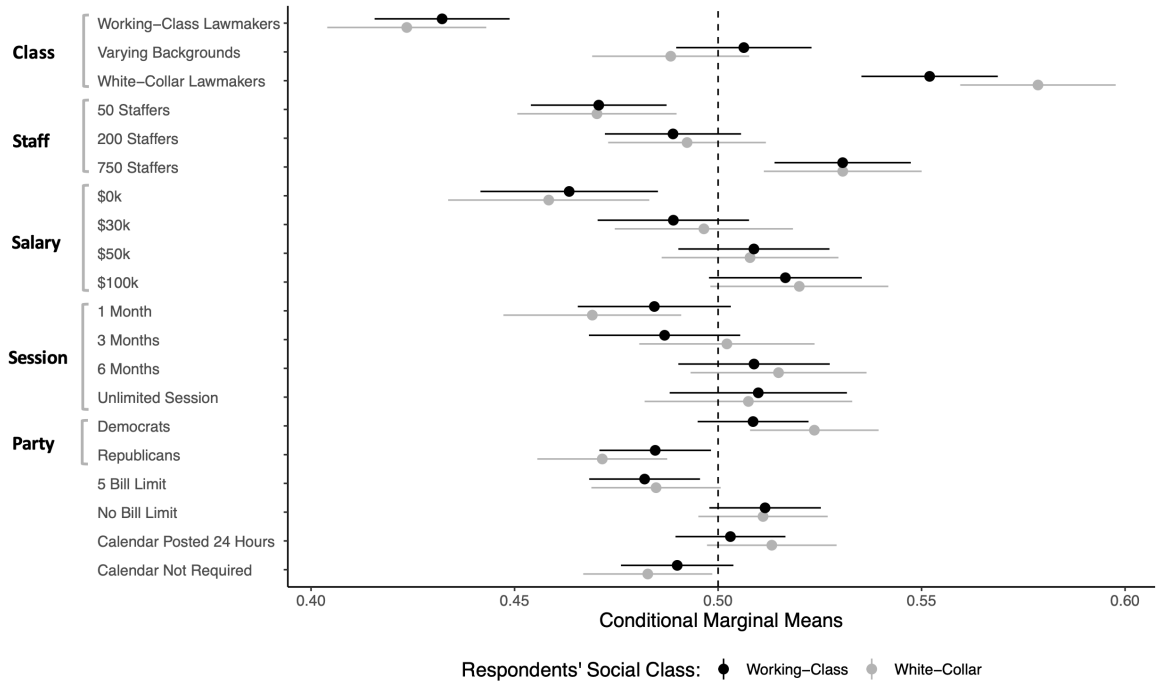

Figure 1: Respondents Associate Professional Legislatures With White-Collar Lawmakers

or previously worked as a contractor, construction worker, office or clerical worker, public safety worker, retail or service worker, or in a trade job (Lollis 2024). All other respondents are coded as white collar.

Figure 1 reports the conditional marginal means for responses to the question: "Which legislature is most professional?" The results indicate that respondents—regardless of their own class background—perceive legislatures comprised mostly of working-class lawmakers as less professional. By contrast, respondents view legislatures made up predominantly of white-collar lawmakers as more professional. Legislatures with a mix of backgrounds fall between the two extremes. These findings suggest that respondents associate a legislature's class composition with its perceived level of professionalism. Importantly, respondents also correctly associate lower staff levels and lower legislative salaries with less professional legislatures. However, as we expect, the magnitude of these effects is modest compared to the influence of class composition on perceptions of professionalism. Consistent with our first hypothesis, respondents associate white-collar representation with professional legislatures, which aligns with the actual class composition of

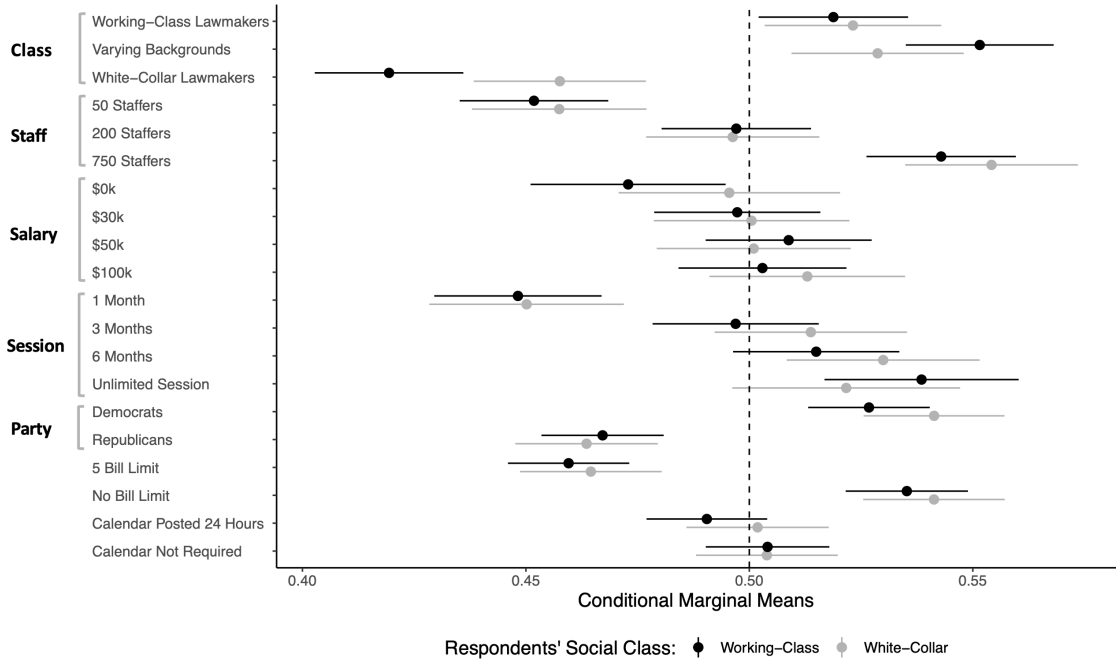

Figure 2: Respondents Think Working-Class and Mixed-Class Legislatures Are Most Likely To Benefit Society

professionalized state legislatures (Carnes and Hansen 2016).

The second outcome question asked respondents "Which legislature is best positioned to benefit society?" Figure 2 displays the conditional marginal means for this response. The results suggest that respondents view legislatures with lawmakers largely from white collar backgrounds (which they also view as most professional) as least likely to benefit society. There is no significant difference in the marginal means for working-class and mixed class background legislatures; however, it is clear that respondents—irrespective of their own class identity—view white-collar legislatures as problematic for society. This result is consistent with our second hypothesis.

Our results also indicate that respondents view unlimited bill introductions, larger staff sizes, longer session lengths, and Democrat-controlled legislatures as better for society.[3] In contrast to

[3]This result reflects the fact that our sample consists primarily of Democratic respondents. We examine treatment heterogeneity by party in the next subsection. Based on self-reported partisanship, our sample included 968 Democrats, 420 Republicans, and 572 Independents.

existing work, which finds that citizens generally dislike professional legislatures (Squire 1993; Kelleher and Wolak 2007; Richardson, Konisky and Milyo 2012), our findings suggest that respondents view increased staff sizes and longer session lengths—two hallmarks of professionalized legislatures—as beneficial for society. Consistent with our argument, however, they view white-collar representation in these professionalized chambers as harmful to society.

The conditional marginal means for our final question, "Which legislature is best positioned to benefit people like you?" appear in Figure 3. Once again, both working-class and white-collar respondents view working-class legislatures as more beneficial to people like themselves. Conversely, all respondents see white-collar legislatures as unlikely to benefit people like them. There is some heterogeneity by respondent class: white-collar respondents perceive white-collar legislatures as *less* harmful than do working-class respondents. Still, both groups view white-collar legislatures as least likely to benefit people like themselves. An important implication of this finding is that respondents perceive white-collar legislatures as detrimental to both themselves and society. This undermines the possibility that wealthy Americans may recognize that having lawmakers from white-collar backgrounds would benefit themselves, even if not others. Overall, results from Figures 1, 2, and 3 suggest that respondents—regardless of class identity—associate white-collar lawmakers with professional legislatures and with policy outcomes least likely to benefit themselves or society.

Does Respondents' Partisanship Moderate These Effects?

It is possible that respondents' partisanship moderates our results. While our survey sample is matched to be nationally representative on age, gender, and race, it is not matched on party.[4] Moreover, the findings reported in previous figures suggest that respondents view Republican-controlled legislatures as less likely to benefit themselves and society. To rule out the possibility that partisanship moderates our results, we present the same models reported in Figures 2 and 3, subset by respondents' party identification (Democrat, Republican, or Independent).

The results of this additional subgroup analysis appear in Figure 4. The figure shows that

[4]This option was not available from our survey vendor at the time of purchase.

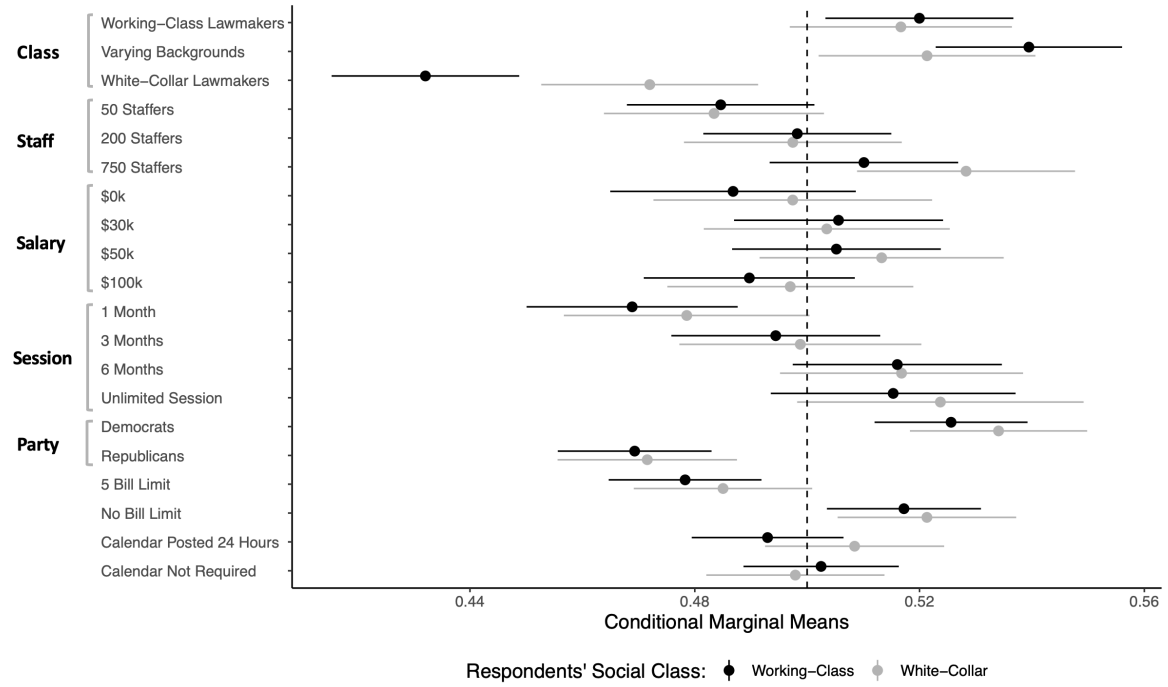

Figure 3: Respondents Think Working-Class and Mixed-Class Legislatures Are Most Likely To Benefit People Like Them

respondents—whether Democrats, Republicans, or Independents—consistently view white-collar legislatures as least likely to benefit society (left panel) and people like themselves (right panel). When breaking the results down by party, however, we observe slightly more heterogeneity across the non-class variables. Specifically, Figure 4 indicates that both Democrats and Independents are more likely to view legislatures made up of lawmakers from working-class or varied backgrounds as good for society. In contrast, Republicans are no more likely than random chance to select such legislatures as beneficial for society. Further, Republicans are not more likely to view varied or working-class legislatures as benefitting themselves, while Independents are more likely to select both types of legislatures as good for people like them. Democrats, by comparison, report that legislatures comprising both working-class and white-collar lawmakers are beneficial for themselves, but not legislatures made up exclusively of working-class lawmakers. Although we find some evidence of partisan heterogeneity, the results from our subgroup analyses consistently show that respondents believe white-collar legislatures produce worse outcomes—not only for themselves

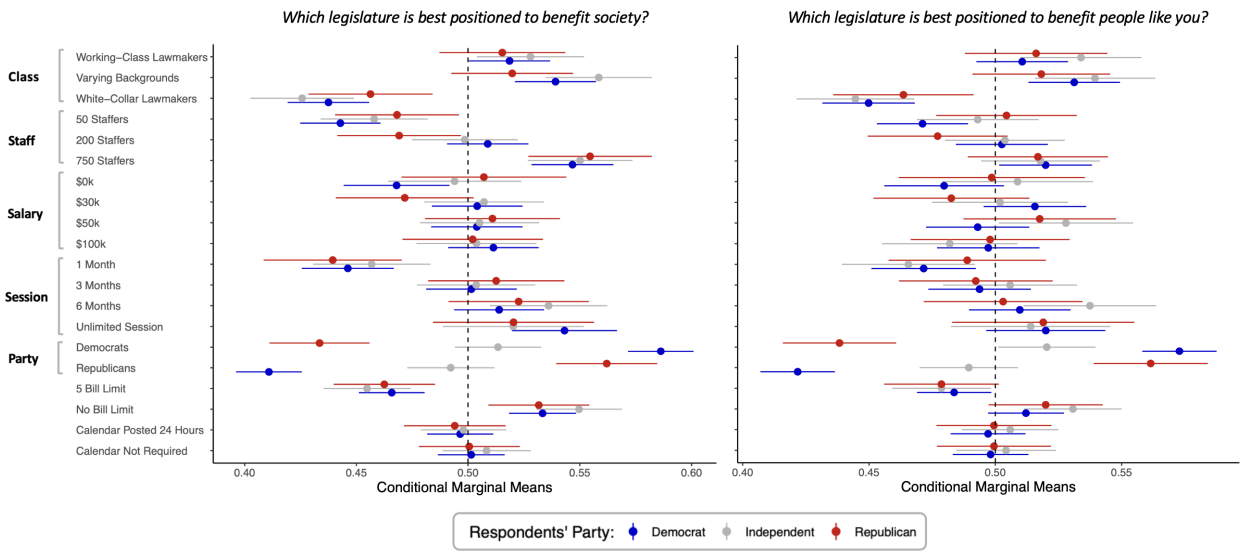

Figure 4: Respondents Think Working-Class and Mixed-Class Legislatures Are Most Likely To Benefit Themselves and Society Regardless of Party ID

but for society as a whole.

Perceptions of Lawmakers' Class Backgrounds

A natural concern with our conjoint experiment analysis is its external validity. While our results indicate that respondents associate white collar lawmakers with legislative professionalism, that association may exist because we directly defined and asked about those concepts. It could be the case that in the absence of direct questioning, respondents would not have a link between legislative professionalism in practice and their beliefs about class representation. Another concern might be that our theory suggests that legislative professionalism affects attitudes about class representation, but our conjoint analysis shows that class representation leads to perceptions of professionalism. One way to solve both of these problems would be to have survey questions related to perceptions of class representation outside our experimental context and unrelated to survey questions about legislative professionalism.

Fortunately, Carnes and Lupu's (2022) data from the 2016 Cooperative Election Study (CES) provides such a solution. Carnes and Lupu asked 1,000 respondents in the US about their perceptions of the proportion of American lawmakers from working class backgrounds. They also

instructed respondents to provide their ideal proportion of lawmakers from the working class. We compute the difference between these two responses (actual and preferred). This measure then reflects the under-representation of the working class and over-representation of white collar lawmakers based on a the preferences of a national sample. Larger numbers suggest that respondents want more working class lawmakers than they perceive to be true. Smaller numbers reflect more working class lawmakers than respondents would prefer in an ideal world. The range of this variable is -89 (suggesting perceptions of far too many lawmakers of working class backgrounds) to 100 (far too few) with a mean of 28.3.

To examine whether perceptions of the over-representation of the wealthy is legislatures is tied to legislative professionalism, we regress Bowen and Greene's (2014) two dimensional legislative professionalism scores on this gap in perceptions along with a variety of covariates.[5] The first dimension of this measure of legislative professionalism is strongly tied to lawmakers' salaries and correlates strongly with traditional measures of professionalism. The second dimension is associated with legislatures that tend to either have a long session length or heavy legislative expenditures, but tend not to be high on all three traditional indicators of professionalism at once.

The results of our analysis appear in Table 1. They suggest that as the first dimension of legislative professionalism increases across states, the gap between the working class representation respondents want and the working class representation they believe they have grows. Put differently, this finding implies that as the first dimension of professionalism increases across states, respon-

[5]Building on the Squire Index (Squire 2017), Bowen and Greene employ multidimensional scaling to uncover the underlying dimensions of commonly used professionalism indicators. The components of the Squire Index, of which Bowen and Greene use slight variants, are (1) the number of days a legislature is in session, (2) the size and/or investment in legislative staff, and (3) legislators' salaries. Their approach yields a two-dimensional structure that varies considerably across states and over time (in contrast to the static, unidimensional Squire Index). We use these scores in this cross-sectional analysis to keep our analyses consistent with the dynamic analyses in the next section.

dents perceive their being more white collar lawmakers than they would want in an ideal world. Again, these effects use actual legislative professionalism scores to predict survey respondents' attitudes. The survey itself contains no information about legislative professionalism, and as we discussed in our theory, we do not expect that most people know very much about the specifics of legislative professionalism itself. However, when asked their preferences for class representation, respondents from states with more professionalized legislatures believe that white collar lawmakers are over-represented in legislatures and working class lawmakers are under-represented.

Table 1: Legislative Professionalism and Perceptions of Class Representation

	Dependent variable
	Gap In Working Class Representation Preferences
Professionalism (1d)	0.967^{**}
	(0.455)
Professionalism (2d)	-0.522
	(1.131)
Respondent Education	-2.683^{***}
	(0.687)
Respondent is Female	-4.158^{**}
	(2.099)
Respondent is Nonwhite	-9.540^{***}
	(2.600)
Democrat Control of State	-2.357
	(3.776)
Republican Control of State	4.821
	(3.071)
Respondent Birth Year	-0.231^{***}
	(0.060)
Respondent is Democrat	2.022
	(2.476)
Respondent is Republican	-1.971
	(2.706)
Family Income	-0.034
	(0.038)
Constant	494.187^{***}
	(119.033)
Observations	886
Adjusted R^2	0.055

Note: Cell entries report regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the difference in respondents' preferences for working class representation and their perceptions of working class representation in legislatures. The survey responses come from the 2016 Duke University Cooperative Election Study module. Team survey weights are included in the analysis. * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

In addition to being statistically significant, these effects are also substantively quite large. A move from one standard deviation below the mean on the first dimension of professionalism to one standard deviation above the mean increases this gap by more than 5 percentage points, or about 17% of a standard deviation in the gap of perceptions. Of course, this analysis only reflects responses to two survey questions at a single point in time, but when paired with our experimental data, this analysis strongly suggests that legislative professionalism is associated with perceptions of class representation. That link is likely implicit, in that most people are unlikely to be aware of how professional their legislature is, but that implicit link leads respondents to believe that white collar lawmakers are over-represented in legislatures (a result supported by our conjoint experiment), and our experimental analysis clearly suggest that respondents believe the over-representation of those from white collar backgrounds is likely to hold negative implications for themselves and society.

Legislative Professionalism and Policy Outcomes

The results so far strongly indicate that respondents dislike professional legislatures not because of their capacity-enhancing institutions, but because they associate them with white-collar lawmakers, whom they expect to pass policies that harm both themselves and society. This naturally raises the question of whether respondents are *correct* in their perception that professional legislatures—populated by white-collar lawmakers—produce policies that are harmful to them. To test this expectation, we examine the relationship between legislative professionalism and economic inequality in all state legislatures over three decades. Specifically, we leverage data on a variety of economic indicators from the Correlates of State Policy Project (CSPP), a comprehensive database containing information on social, economic, and political life in the American states (Grossmann, Jordan and McCrain 2021).[6]

[6]Ideally, we would demonstrate that legislative professionalism affects economic policy outcomes through the percentage of white-collar lawmakers in a chamber. However, there is little overlap between available data on working-class representation in state legislatures (Lollis 2024) and economic policy outcomes. Given the well-established link between professional legislatures

In our analysis, we examine gross state product, the number of registered business firms, income inequality (as measured by the Gini index), and poverty rates. The unit of analysis is the state-year. Summary statistics, along with the years of data coverage for each measure, are reported in Table 2. To measure legislative professionalism over time, we use Bowen and Greene's (2014) dynamic, multidimensional index of legislative professionalism. We assess whether there is an association between legislative professionalism and these economic outcomes using least-squares regression models with fixed effects for states and years.[7] This method isolates the independent influence of each professionalism dimension by estimating the average effect of within-state changes in professionalism. It removes the confounding effects of time-invariant state characteristics correlated with professionalism. Moreover, the design compares states that experienced changes in legislative professionalism to those that did not, controlling for secular temporal trends in the outcomes.

Table 2: Economic and Inequality Outcome Variable Summaries

Outcome	**Measure**	**Years Covered**	**Range**
Gross State Product	Current dollars per state resident.	1987–2010	15,468–65,476
Business Firms	Business organizations consisting of one or more establishments in the same state.	1973–2019	12,229–790,509
Income Inequality	Gini Index measure of income inequality across the U.S. states.	1973–2013	0.439–0.711
Poverty Rate	Percent living in poverty.	1980–2013	2.9–27.2

Note: Cell entries report summaries for each outcome measure. The indicators come from the CSPP (Grossmann, Jordan and McCrain 2021). The range of years covered represents the earliest to most recent years where data are available.

The two-way fixed effects estimator assumes that the model is correctly specified and that the and greater white-collar representation, examining the relationship between professionalism and economic outcomes is a reasonable next step.

[7]It is common practice to cluster standard errors by state in these models. However, this approach inflates variance when most of the population of clusters is observed (see Abadie, Athey, Imbens and Wooldridge 2023). Since our data include all 50 states, we report asymptotic standard errors.

exogenous regressors' effects on the outcome are linear and additive (Imai and Kim 2021). These assumptions are fairly strong compared to those of a natural experiment or other design-based identification strategies. Thus, appropriate caution with regard to interpreting our results as causal estimates is warranted.[8] We include three key time-varying covariates in an attempt to further mitigate confounding of the effects of professionalism. Specifically, we control for whether a state government is under unified Democratic or Republican control in a given year as well as Berry, Ringquist, Fording and Hanson's (1998) measure of state government liberalism. These variables account for the dynamic political contexts within states, which may influence state governments' policy priorities and extralegislative outcomes.[9]

Results of this analysis appear in Table 3. We find that the first dimension of professionalism—primarily driven by legislators' salaries—is associated with higher income inequality, increased poverty rates, and more business firms in a state. However, it is not significantly associated with gross state product. The second dimension of professionalism—driven largely by states' investments in staff or longer legislative sessions—is similarly associated with higher income inequality, increased poverty rates, and more business firms, but it is also positively associated with gross state product. Taken together, these results suggest that states with more professional legislatures tend to have more robust business environments and potentially higher rates of economic growth, but at the cost of exacerbating economic inequality. Professional legislatures are asso-

[8]Two-way fixed effects models have several limitations when it comes to estimating causal effects (Weiss 2024). However, our findings are not necessarily intended to be interpreted as causal. Rather, they demonstrate that citizens' perceptions that professional legislatures populated by white-collar lawmakers produce economic policies that disadvantage them is plausible.

[9]The state politics literature suggests numerous covariates we could include, such as electoral competition, divided government, and other measures. Additional modeling (not shown) reveals that our results are generally robust to these other variables. We select a somewhat parsimonious specification in the interest of avoiding the "garbage can regression" modeling approach critiqued by Achen (2002) and others.

ciated with increases in both income inequality and the proportion of residents living below the poverty line. The estimated associations are substantively large. A one standard deviation increase in the second dimension of professionalism corresponds to a 5–6% standard deviation increase in per capita GSP and nearly a 50% standard deviation increase in the number of business firms (for the first dimension). Similarly, a one standard deviation increase in the first dimension of professionalism is associated with a 15% standard deviation increase in income inequality and a 14% standard deviation increase in the poverty rate. Thus, while greater legislative professionalism is linked to a larger economy and a more expansive business environment, it also correlates with significantly greater economic inequality within a state.

Table 3: Estimated Effects of Legislative Professionalism on Economic Outcomes

	Dependent variable			
	GSP	Business Firms	Income Inequality	Poverty Rate
Professionalism (1d)	0.050	0.465*	0.146*	0.137*
	(0.026)	(0.050)	(0.020)	(0.034)
Professionalism (2d)	0.060*	0.345*	0.102*	0.069*
	(0.022)	(0.046)	(0.021)	(0.034)
Gov't Liberalism	−0.007	−0.017	0.022	-0.050
	(0.016)	(0.038)	(0.019)	(0.030)
Unified Dem Control	0.059*	−0.016	-0.070*	0.028
	(0.024)	(0.056)	(0.027)	(0.044)
Unified Rep Control	−0.073*	0.092	0.078*	-0.061
	(0.031)	(0.071)	(0.036)	(0.055)
State Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	1,176	1,321	1,911	1,568
Adjusted R^2	0.957	0.711	0.893	0.800

Note: Cell entries report regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The outcomes, professionalism variables, and government liberalism are all standardized to facilitate interpretation. * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

Collectively, results from our conjoint experiment, observational analysis of CES survey data, and over-time economic policy indicators demonstrate that 1) respondents associate professional legislatures with white-collar representation; 2) respondents believe white-collar legislators are

least likely to represent their interests and the broader interests of society; and 3) professional legislatures advance and pass economic policies that exaggerate economic inequality while enhancing economic growth. This set of circumstances would create a situation in which citizens appear to dislike more professional legislatures despite the potential representation advantages of those chambers because citizens dislike the class-based implications of increasingly professional political institutions.

Conclusions

Existing research finds that although professional legislatures are best equipped to represent citizens' policy preferences (Harden 2016; Lax and Phillips 2012), Americans overwhelmingly disapprove of them (Squire 1993; Kelleher and Wolak 2007; Richardson, Konisky and Milyo 2012; Fortunato, McCrain and Schiff 2023). In this paper, we explain why: citizens do not dislike capacity-enhancing institutions; rather, they disapprove of white-collar government. Results from a pre-registered conjoint experiment indicate that citizens associate professional legislatures with white-collar representation. Observational evidence from the 2016 CES further supports this inference. Respondents also believe that white-collar representation leads to policy outcomes that do not benefit them or society. Pairing observational analyses with our experimental results, we show that citizens' perceptions of white-collar government are well-founded—states with professional legislatures (and thus, white-collar lawmakers) have higher income inequality and poverty rates.

Our work is in keeping with research on many political reforms in the US, and suggests that citizens often evaluate institutions as a function of their composition rather than their output. Indeed, much of American citizens' support for legislative term limits is a function of their anticipated effects on the composition of legislatures (effects that are largely unrealized), despite those term limits' clear negative consequences for the functioning of legislatures (Olson and Rogowski 2020; Kousser 2005). Similarly, our work suggests that citizens dislike professional legislatures because of the compositional consequences of professional chambers, not because of the clear policymaking and representational benefits those chambers seem to provide (Carnes and Hansen 2016; Harden 2016; Fortunato and Turner 2018). These attitudes are likely to be tied to both gen-

eral American resentment of the wealthy (Piston 2018) and the general dislike of career politicians (Huwyler 2025; Pedersen, Hansen and Pedersen 2022).

Indeed, evidence suggests that citizens value descriptive representation independently of substantive representation (Hayes and Hibbing 2017), and recent survey evidence suggests 55% of survey respondents believe that "ordinary people" would solve public problems more effectively than elected representatives (Doherty, Kiley, Tyson and Jameson 2015). Thus, institutions scholars and scholars of representation studying and advocating for particular political reforms cannot focus their studies exclusively on the policymaking or substantive outputs that institutional changes effect, but must also examine how changing institutional rules effect the composition of policymaking bodies. Any institutional reform that enhances the capacity of policymaking bodies in the US while generating a more professional political class of policymakers drawn largely from wealthy candidates is likely to harm institutional approval.

Our choice-based conjoint experiment offers a unique methodological opportunity to assess individuals' attitudes toward both legislatures' institutional features (staff size, time in session, salary, bill introduction limits, etc.) and the composition of lawmakers (white-collar versus working-class). When paired with our observational evidence, our approach allows us to resolve a paradox in the literature: citizens do not dislike professional legislatures because of the institutions that increase their ability to respond to constituent opinion—they are averse to the consequences of white-collar government. These findings are an important first step in understanding how citizens' attitudes toward legislative institutions and lawmakers' descriptive identities converge. Challenges remain, however, for institutional reform efforts and legislative approval. Reform efforts aimed at increasing legislatures' capacity may worsen the decline in legislative approval rather than boost public favorability toward legislative institutions. They also risk crowding out the very lawmakers whom citizens expect would represent them most effectively. As a result, reform efforts that hope to enhance the functioning of legislatures without hurting institutional approval must simultaneously prioritize increasing legislative capacity while facilitating the emergence of working-class candidates.

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Online Supplemental Appendix

Contents

1 Preregistered Research Design for Conjoint Survey

This section describes a preregistered choice-based conjoint survey experiment. This experimental design and pre-analysis plan were registered as the Open Science Framework on February 14, 2024, and can be found at LINK REMOVED FOR ANONYMITY.

Ethics Information

This research complies with ethical regulations for research involving human participants. The proposed experimental study protocol has been approved by the Internal Review Board (reference # IRB-SBS-6131) by the UNIVERSITY NAME REDACTED FOR ANONYMITY. Informed consent will be obtained from all respondents prior to participation. Participants will be compensated for their participation.

Expectations

We hypothesize that white-collar Americans are more likely than working-class Americans to indicate approval of professional legislatures. Conversely, we expect working-class Americans to prefer amateur legislatures rather than professional legislatures. Given that professional legislatures are more likely than amateur legislatures to be comprised of legislators from a white-collar background (Carnes and Hansen 2016), we expect white-collar citizens to be comfortable with the idea that legislatures are comprised primarily of the economic elite.

We expect that the primary reason citizens prefer legislatures comprised of lawmakers from their own class background is because they believe these lawmakers are best suited to create effective public policy that benefits members of their own social class group. Specifically, we plan to test the set of hypotheses listed below.

> **H1:** White-collar Americans are more likely than working-class Americans to indicate approval of professional legislatures.

> **H2a:** White-collar Americans are more likely than working-class Americans to believe that professional legislatures create effective public policy for white-collar Americans.

H2b: Working-class Americans are more likely than white-collar Americans to believe that amateur legislatures create effective public policy for working-class Americans.

These hypotheses formalize the logic we laid out in our theoretical development earlier, indicating that preferences over legislative capacity are tied to Americans' own class backgrounds. That link arises because of their beliefs about the kinds of policies likely to be enacted by the lawmakers in those chambers.

Conjoint Experiment

To test our expectations, we propose administering a choice-based conjoint experiment. This experiment provides a better design than our pilot survey experiment because it will allow us to observe whether citizens' preferences toward legislative professionalism and the class composition of legislatures are multidimensional. For example, the proposed conjoint experiment will allow us to discern whether citizens' preferences regarding the class composition of legislatures is related to individual components of legislative professionalism, in addition to other potentially important variables like majority party status. By estimating component-specific treatment effects (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto 2015), we can better understand the relationship between citizens' social class backgrounds and their attitudes toward legislative capacity.

Respondents will view two profiles of hypothetical legislatures that are randomly created from a set of attributes. They will then be asked to select the profile that they most prefer. From this information, we can estimate the average marginal component effect (AMCE), which represents the "degree to which a given value of a conjoint profile feature increases, or decreases, respondents' support for the overall profile relative to a baseline, averaging across all respondents and other features" (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley 2020, 207). We can also estimate the marginal mean (MM), which "conveys information about the preferences of respondents for all feature levels" instead of using a reference category (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley 2020, 210).

Before completing the conjoint survey experiment, the survey will ask respondents a series of demographic questions (listed in Table 2). Respondents will also be asked questions probing their social class identity, measured holistically with income, education, and occupation questions (see

below).

Table 2: Demographic Questions and Possible Responses

Demographic Question	Possible Responses and Format
In what year were you born?	Select one: Drop down option of large year span
Which of the following best describes you?	Select one: A. Male, B.Female ,C. Non-binary, D. Prefer not to say
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Select one: A. Did not graduate from high school, B.High school graduate, C. Some college, but no degree, D. 2-year college degree, E. 4-year college degree, F. Post-graduate degree (e.g. MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD)
What race or ethnic group best describes you?	Select all that apply: A. White, B. Black or African American, C. Hispanic or Latino, D. American Indian or Alaska Native, E. Asian, F. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, G. Middle Eastern, H. Mixed Race, I. Other
Which of the following best describes your current employment status?	Select one: A. Working full-time now. B. Working part-time now, C. Temporarily laid off, D. Unemployed, E.Retired, F. Permanently disabled, G. Taking care of home or family, H. Student, I.Other
At any time over the past five years have you had a job?	Select one: A. Yes, B. No
Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?	Select one: A. Democrat, B. Republican, C. Independent, D. Other
What is your state of residence?	Select one: Drop down list of all US states and territories
Would you say that over the past year your household economic situation has…	Select one: A. Increased a lot, B. Increased somewhat, C. Stayed about the same, D. Decreased somewhat, E. Decreased a lot
What is your total household income?	Select one: A. $0 to $19,999, B. $20,000 to $49,999, C. $50,000 to $89,999, D. $90,000 to $129,999, E. $130,000 to $149,000, F. $150,000 +, G. Prefer not to say
Are you currently or have you ever been employed in construction, office or clerical work, retail, or in a skilled trade?	Select one: A. Yes, B. No
What is your current occupation?	Text box

In the experiment itself, respondents will view information about two legislatures (Legislature

A and Legislature B). Respondents will view seven features describing each legislature with multiple randomly assigned attributes (see Table 3). The features vary concepts related to legislative capacity such as legislative session length, total legislature staff, and legislator salary. We also include other relevant features such as the social class composition and partisan control of the legislature. For an example of a randomly assigned profile that a respondent may view, please refer to Table 4. After reading the feature and attribute information, respondents will be asked to evaluate each legislature relative to one another by responding to the following questions:

Q1: Which legislature is best positioned to benefit society?

Q2: Which legislature is best positioned to benefit people like you?

Q3: Which legislature is most professional?

We have revised our outcome questions following the pilot survey experiment to more directly probe how respondents' preferences are related to political representation. In the pilot survey experiment, we asked respondents to indicate what level of professionalism they thought their state legislature should have. Though this question asks respondents their preferences toward legislative professionalism, it does not connect their preferences toward professionalism to the quality of political representation they expect to receive. In the conjoint experiment, we will ask respondents to indicate which legislature is best positioned to benefit (1) *society* and (2) *people like them*. This strategy will allow us (and respondents) to distinguish between gains for the mass public as well as people who share characteristics similar to them.

First, respondents are shown the following definition of legislative capacity: "Legislative capacity is the resources a legislature needs to function. Legislative capacity varies across legislatures, with some legislatures having many resources and other legislatures having few resources." Respondents then answer a set of demographic questions. In the middle of the demographic question block, we ask a pre-treatment manipulation check question. To gauge how respondents conceptualize legislative capacity, we provide them information about two legislators (session length, salary, staff, occupation, etc.) and ask which legislator serves in the higher capacity legislature.

This allows us to isolate the respondents that did not internalize our definition of legislative capacity. We choose to ask respondents about two legislators (rather than two legislatures) to distance this question from the question format of our conjoint, which reduces the likelihood of priming effects. Finally, we follow the advice of Aronow, Baron and Pinson (2019) and ask our manipulation check question prior to the experimental manipulation to avoid biased estimates.

Respondents will iterate through five randomly assigned pairwise comparisons. Next, to ensure that respondents internalized the treatment, we will include a manipulation check. In line with existing literature, we plan to use a list-based manipulation check. After respondents iterate through all five comparisons, we will ask them to read a list of statements consisting of information specific to the profiles they viewed and check all the responses that are true (Zhang, Kreps, McMurry and McCain 2020). For example, respondents will be asked to indicate whether each legislature was controlled by the same party. This information will allow us to determine whether respondents processed and internalized the various manipulations throughout the experiment.

Table 3: All Potential Attributes for Choice-Based Conjoint Random Assignment

Feature	All Possible Options
Legislative session length	"1 month" OR "3 months" OR "6 months" OR "Unlimited"
Total legislature staff	"50 legislature staff members" OR "200 legislature staff members" OR "750 legislature staff members"
Legislator's salary	"$0" OR "$30k" OR "$50k" OR "$100k"
Class	"The newly elected legislature is made up primarily of white-collar legislators who formerly worked as lawyers, doctors, or educators." OR "The newly elected legislature is made up primarily of working-class legislators who formerly worked as farmers, factory workers, and in clerical occupations." OR "The newly elected legislature includes legislators from a variety of occupation backgrounds."
Party in Control	"Democrats" OR "Republicans"
Bill introduction limits	"5 bill limit" OR "Unlimited"
Session calendar posting Requirements	"Session calendars must be posted 24 hours before session convenes." OR "Session calendars are not required, permitting legislators to take up any desired issue."

Table 4: Example of a Randomized Choice-Based Conjoint Profile

Feature	Legislature A	Legislature B
Legislative session length	1 month	Unlimited
Total legislature staff	50 legislature staff members	200 legislature staff members
Legislator's salary	$0k	$30k
Class	The newly elected legislature is made up primarily of white-collar legislators who formerly worked as lawyers, doctors, and educators.	The newly elected legislature is made up primarily of working-class legislators who formerly worked as farmers, factory workers, and in clerical occupations.
Party in Control	Democrats	Republicans
Bill introduction limits	5 bill limit	Unlimited
Session calendar posting Requirements	Session calendars must be posted 24 hours before session convenes.	Session calendars are not required, permitting legislators to take up any desired issue.

Planned Data Collection

We introduce two sets of restrictions to our design. We restrict the possibility that respondents will view identical profiles across the legislatures that are being compared. Additionally, we restrict the possibility that respondents will view a profile where legislators' salary is listed as $0 and time in session is listed as unlimited. We restrict this comparison because it will likely be perceived as illogical by respondents. All other attribute pairings will be randomized.

Survey Vendor

We will administer the conjoint survey experiment through Prolific, a commonly used survey provider among political scientists that includes a nationally-representative sample among its product offerings. Prolific maintains its own survey pool and researchers then directly pay for their service as respondents. Respondents will be compensated for their time.

Sample

We will field our experiment on a nationally-representative sample of 1,500 U.S. Prolific respondents. To predict the statistical power of our design we used Stefanelli and Lukac (2020) power analysis Shiny application. With 1,500 respondents viewing 7 variable levels and completing 5 tasks at an AMCE effect size of 0.05 the predicted statistical power for our design is 93%. The probability of a Type S error occurring (incorrect sign) is 0% and the exaggeration ratio (Type M error) is 1.17.

Given that we are fielding a nationally representative sample, we largely expect our target population to align with our sample population. To ensure that this is the case, we have included several demographic questions that will allow us to empirically test the representativeness of our sample. In the demographic portion of the survey, we plan to ask respondents to disclose their age, state of residence, racial identity, and partisan identity. We will include a table in the manuscript listing the proportion of respondents for each of the categories.

Data Quality

To ensure that we are collecting the highest quality data from respondents, our survey includes both attention and comprehension checks, in addition to the manipulation check noted above. First, to ensure that respondents are paying attention while completing the survey, an attention check question will be randomly assigned to appear between one of the five comparisons. The question is: "What are the names of the two legislatures you are evaluating?" If respondents are paying attention, they should respond with "Legislature A and Legislature B." Given that conjoint experiments are cognitively taxing for respondents, we deliberately chose an easier attention check.

Second, to ensure that respondents understand the required tasks within the survey, we will include an outcome question gauging their overall comprehension of the assignment. The final question respondents are asked to answer after reading the two legislature profiles for each task is: "Which legislature is more professional?" This question will allow us to empirically evaluate the percentage of our respondents who accurately conceptualize legislative professionalism while completing the survey. Finally, the survey vendor will drop any incomplete responses.

Analysis Plan

Variables

The independent variables in our analyses measure respondents' social class background. We take a holistic approach to measuring social class by including questions about respondents' income, occupation, and education. The dependent variables in our analyses measure citizens' attitudes regarding varying levels of capacity and social class composition within legislatures. We ask respondents three questions gauging whether a given legislature is capable of crafting effective public policy. We also plan to include several control variables, including respondents' racial identity, gender identity, partisan identity, state of residence, and age. Each variable and its resulting coding structure is listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Variable List

Variable Type	Question	Variable Name	Coding Scheme
Dependent	Which legislature is best positioned to benefit society?	dv_1	0 = Legislature A 1 = Legislature B
Dependent	Which legislature is best positioned to benefit people like you?	dv_2	0 = Legislature A 1 = Legislature B
Dependent	Which legislature is most professional?	dv_3	0 = Legislature A 1 = Legislature B
Independent	Are you currently or have you ever been employed in construction, office or clerical work, retail, or in a skilled trade?	white_collar	0=Yes, 1=No
Independent	What is your total household income?	inc	0 = $0 to $19,999, 1= $20,000 to $49,999, 2= $50,000 to $89,999, 3 = $90,000 to $129,999, 4 =$130,000 to $149,000, 5= $150,000 +, 6= Prefer not to say
Control	What year were you born?	age	Age = 2023 - birth year reported
Control	Which of the following best describes you?	sex	0 = Male, 1 = Female, 2= Non-binary, 3= Prefer not to say
Control	What race or ethnic group best describes you?	race	0= White, 1=Black/African American, 2=Hispanic/Latino, 3=American Indian/Alaska Native, 4=Asian, 5=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 6=Middle Eastern, 7=Mixed Race, 8=Other
Control	Which of the following best describes your current employment status?	work	0=Working full-time now, 1= Working part-time now, 2= Temporarily laid off, 3= Unemployed, 4=Retired, 5= Permanently disabled, 6=Taking care of home or family, 7= Student, 8=Other
Control	Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?	PID	0=Democrat, 2= Independent, 3=Republican, 4= Other
Control	At any time over the past five years have you had a job?	job_5yrs	0=No, 1=Yes
Control	What is your state of residence?	state	String variable re-coded as state_fips

Evaluating Expectations

Given that we are interested in subgroup preferences (working-class v. white-collar), our primary estimand will be the difference between the conditional marginal mean for white-collar respondents and the conditional marginal mean for working-class respondents across our three outcome variables (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley 2020). Though AMCEs are the typical estimand for conjoint analyses, marginal means are optimal for researchers interested in subgroup preferences (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley 2020). The conditional marginal mean is calculated relative to a reference category, and is averaged across all other features (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley 2020).

Evidence in support of our expectations would show that, averaging across the other features of the profiles, working-class respondents prefer amateur legislatures, particularly when professional legislatures are comprised of white-collar lawmakers. On the other hand, white-collar respondents will prefer professional legislatures, especially when they are comprised of white-collar legislators. To ensure that the observed effect sizes are substantively meaningful, we will use a two one-sided test (TOST) to test for equivalence (Lakens, Scheel and Isager 2018). A TOST allows us to specify the effect size that would be negligible, and thus falsifying our hypotheses. We have chosen a 5 percentage point marginal mean change as the threshold for a non-negligble effect size.

Simulated Data

We use DeclareDesign to specify expectations and simulate potential effects and diagnostics (Blair, Cooper, Coppock and Humphreys 2019). DeclareDesign allows researchers to define a model, an inquiry, a data strategy, and an answer strategy (Blair et al. 2019, p. 838). We declare a forced-choice conjoint design where respondents select one of two profiles. The model is set as a normal distribution with a sample size of 1,500. We pre-define two probability estimations. We expect that respondents will have a 95% probability of favoring a working-class legislature when session, staff, and salary variables are all consistent with the components of a citizen legislature. Conversely, we expect that respondents will have a 50% probability of selecting a white-collar legislature when session, staff, and salary variables are consistent with a professional legislature.

We specify these probabilities because they are consistent with our expectations, however, we are more interested in the resulting diagnostics than the estimand. All assignment declarations can be found in the appendix.

Using DeclareDesign allows us to estimate various diagnosands prior to administering our survey. We present four diagnosands relevant to the feasibility of our design—bias, RMSE, power, and coverage. Bias is zero in all conditions and coverage ranges from 94% to 96%. Power is greater than 50% in most conditions. These results, taken together with the power analysis presented in the sample portion of the report, broadly suggest that the number of features, attributes, and sample size of our design is sufficient to detect meaningful effects.

Table 5: DeclareDesign Diagnostics

Estimator	Sims	Bias	RMSE	Power	Coverage
Class (Working-Class Condition)	500	0.00	0.01	0.26	0.94
Class (Control Condition)	500	0.00	0.01	0.92	0.94
Salary ($100k)	500	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.94
Salary ($30k)	500	0.00	0.01	0.42	0.95
Salary ($50k)	500	0.00	0.01	0.23	0.95
Session (3 months)	500	0.00	0.01	0.64	0.94
Session (6 months)	500	0.00	0.01	0.21	0.95
Session (Unlimited)	500	0.00	0.01	0.79	0.95
Staff (200)	500	0.00	0.01	0.55	0.95
Staff (700)	500	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.96

Design Table

Table 6 summarizes our design. This table aims to provide a succinct overview of our proposed research design. Specifically, it is organized around the research questions—and our expectations for those questions—-featured in the manuscript. For each research question and subsequent set of expectations, we preview how we will administer our choice-based conjoint experiment. In doing so, we provide a discussion regarding the sampling protocol and the statistical power of our

design. Finally, we specify our primary estimand for each hypothesis and discuss the various ways in which results will be interpreted.

Question	Hypothesis	Sampling Plan	Analysis Plan	Interpretation Given to Different Outcomes
Does social class drive one's support for legislative professionalism and increased legislative capacity?	H1: Americans are more likely than working-class Americans to indicate approval of professional legislatures.	We will field a nationally representative survey of 1,500 U.S. respondents through Prolific. We also ask several demographic questions that will allow us to empirically test the representativeness of our sample. Given this, we expect that our target population will align with our sample population. We predict the statistical power of our design by using Lukac and Stefanelli's (2020) power analysis Shiny application. With 1500 respondents viewing 7 variable levels and completing 5 tasks at an effect size of 0.05, the predicted statistical power for our design is 93%. The probability of an Type S error occurring (incorrect sign) is 0% and the exaggeration ratio (Type M error) is 1.17.	Our primary estimand will be the difference between the conditional marginal mean for white-collar respondents and the conditional marginal mean for working-class respondents across our three outcome variables (Leeper et al. 2020). The conditional marginal mean is calculated relative to a reference category, and is averaged across all other features (Leeper et al. 2020).	We will interpret a statistically significant treatment effect in the predicted direction (see ***H1***) as evidence that support for professional legislatures (at least partly) is driven by social class. If we observe no statistically significant treatment effect, we will test whether the treatment effect is small enough to be considered negligible, using equivalence testing. To ensure that the observed effect sizes are substantively meaningful, we will use a two one-sided test (TOST) to test for equivalence (Lakens et al. 2018). A TOST allows us to specify the effect size that would be negligible, and thus falsifying our hypotheses.
Does social class motivate the perception of how effective a legislature is at solving public problems?	H2A: White-collar Americans are more likely than working-class Americans to believe that professional legislatures create effective public policy for white-collar Americans. H2B: Working-class Americans are more likely than white-collar Americans to believe that amateur legislatures create effective public policy for working-class Americans.	We will field a nationally representative survey of 1,500 U.S. respondents through Prolific. We also ask several demographic questions that will allow us to empirically test the representativeness of our sample. Given this, we expect that our target population will align with our sample population. We predict the statistical power of our design by using Lukac and Stefanelli's (2020) power analysis Shiny application. With 1500 respondents viewing 7 variable levels and completing 5 tasks at an effect size of 0.05, the predicted statistical power for our design is 93%. The probability of an Type S error occurring (incorrect sign) is 0% and the exaggeration ratio (Type M error) is 1.17.	Our primary estimand will be the difference between the conditional marginal mean for white-collar respondents and the conditional marginal mean for working-class respondents across our three outcome variables (Leeper et al. 2020). The conditional marginal mean is calculated relative to a reference category, and is averaged across all other features (Leeper et al. 2020).	We will interpret a statistically significant treatment effect in the predicted direction (see ***H2A*** and ***H2B***) as evidence that income is related to respondents' believing that legislatures sufficiently solve public problems. If we observe no statistically significant treatment effect, we will test whether the treatment effect is small enough to be considered negligible, using equivalence testing. To ensure that the observed effect sizes are substantively meaningful, we will use a two one-sided test (TOST) to test for equivalence (Lakens et al. 2018). A TOST allows us to specify the effect size that would be negligible, and thus falsifying our hypotheses.

2 Conjoint Survey Experiment Demographics

	Conjoint Sample
Partisanship	
Democrats	48%
Independents	28
Republicans	20
Gender	
Women	49
Men	49
Non-binary	2
Race and ethnicity	
White	70
Black	14
Hispanic	11
Other	5
Level of education	
Less than high school	1
High school	12
Some college	19
Two-year degree	10
Four-year degree	41
Advanced degree	15
Income level	
$29,999 or lower	18
$30,000-59,999	27
$60,000-89,999	22
$90,000-119,999	13
$120,000-149,999	10
$180,000-209,999	4
$210,000-239,999	2
$240,000-269,999	1
$270,000-299,999	1
$300,000 and above	1
Average age	58.7

Note: Cell entries are percentages except for the bottom row, which shows the mean age for each survey.

3 Conjoint Survey: Pre-manipulation check

As a part of our conjoint survey, in the middle of the demographic question block, we ask a pre-treatment manipulation check question. To gauge how respondents conceptualize legislative capacity, we provide them information about two legislators (session length, salary, staff, occupation, etc.) and ask which legislator serves in the higher capacity legislature. This allows us to isolate the respondents that did not internalize our definition of legislative capacity. We choose to ask respondents about two legislators (rather than two legislatures) to distance this question from the question format of our conjoint, which reduces the likelihood of priming effects. Finally, we follow the advice of Aronow, Baron and Pinson (2019) and ask our manipulation check question prior to the experimental manipulation to avoid biased estimates. We examine whether the results of our analyses differ for those who answer the pre-treatment check correctly or not in Figure 1. We can see that for those who failed the pre-treatment check, the effects of the conjoint features are much less certain across all features. However, we still see for both those who passed and failed the pre-treatment check, there remains a lower likelihood of selecting a legislatures of mostly white collar lawmakers as being good for society or people like respondents.

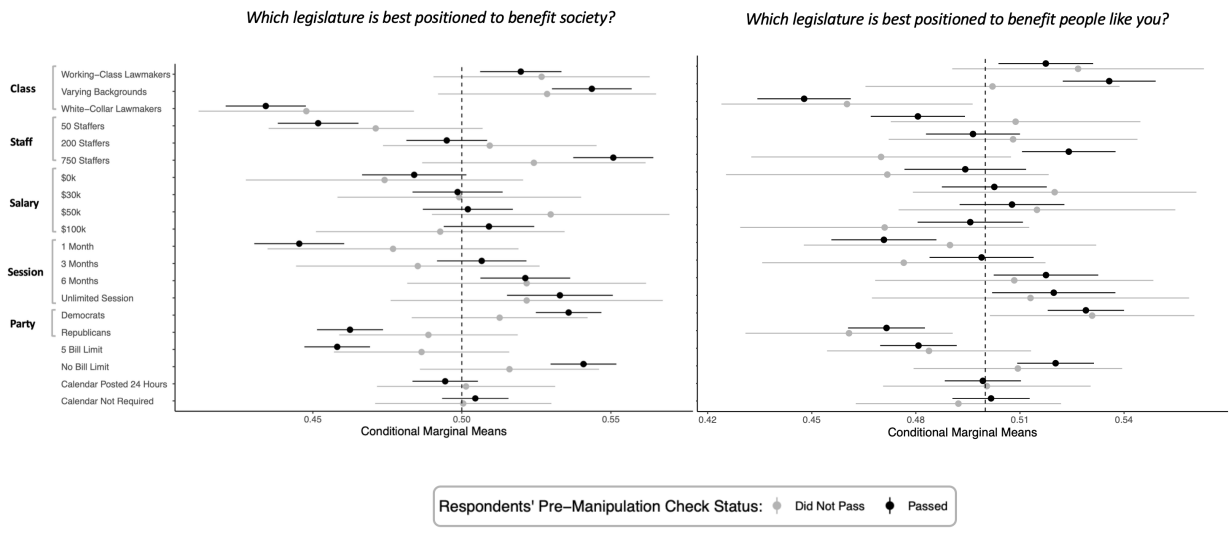

Figure 5: Conditional Marginal Means of Respondents' Selection of Which Legislature is Most Likely to Benefit Society and Themselves by Passage of Pre-treatment Check