

Cashing in on Capacity? Social Class and Attitudes Toward Professionalized Legislatures

August 6, 2024

Abstract

The steady professionalization of legislatures in the American states has given rise to a key tension regarding political representation. Legislative capacity is positively associated with lawmakers' ability to provide policy responsiveness but negatively correlated with legislative approval among state publics. Why would Americans dislike the legislatures that respond to their policy interests most effectively? Although legislative capacity is linked to higher-quality policy representation, it is also correlated with a wealthier class of representatives. We argue that citizens' disapproval of professional legislatures is rooted in their aversion to white-collar politicians. We analyze data from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) and a pre-registered conjoint experiment to disentangle citizens' preferences for capacity and class-based representation. Our results suggest that citizens are not opposed to legislative capacity, but rather to white-collar government which is most commonly found in high-capacity legislatures. Our findings highlight a stark misalignment between citizens' representational preferences and the social class composition of American legislatures.

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

Word Count: 6,100

Public approval of legislatures in the United States continues to plummet (Durr, Gilmour and Wolbrecht 1997; Bae and Algara 2022; Langehennig, Zamadics and Wolak 2019). Professional legislatures—chambers that are equipped with the most resource capacity—face the lowest public approval (Squire 1993; Richardson, Konisky and Milyo 2012; Fortunato, McCrain and Schiff 2023). This is perhaps surprising, given that existing research suggests policy in the United States reflects public opinion (Caughey and Warshaw 2018), that legislatures tend to adapt most quickly to public opinion (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002), and that more professional state legislatures generally provide better policy representation than their more amateur counterparts (Harden 2016; Lax and Phillips 2012).

Why would citizens hold their most responsive institutions in government in such poor esteem, especially as those institutions becomes more professionalized (and by implication *more* responsive)? We argue that Americans dislike upper-class, white-collar politicians, who they believe privilege policies and solutions that aid the wealthy at the expense of the rest of society. While it appears that Americans dislike high-capacity chambers, their disapproval is rooted in their dislike of white-collar politicians which are most commonly represented in professional chambers (Carnes and Hansen 2016).¹ Given this, Americans' disapproval of professionalized legislatures does not reflect opposition to the policymaking tools that increased capacity provides, such as more staff, higher salaries, and more time in session (see Fortunato, McCrain and Schiff 2023). Instead, it is a reaction to the typical composition of professionalized chambers, which are frequently populated with legislators from white-collar backgrounds (Maestas 2000, 2003; Carnes and Hansen 2016).

To test these expectations, we leverage data both from several years of the Cooperative Election Study (CES) and from a pre-registered conjoint experiment fielded in March 2024 through Prolific (n = 1,996). Our CES results suggest that legislative professionalism and working-class

¹We define legislative capacity as the accumulation of resources that legislatures have at their disposal to address public problems. Legislative studies operationalize these resources with legislative professionalism, a tripartite metric of legislator salary, legislative staff, and time in session. (e.g., Squire 1993).

representation work in opposition to one another. Increased professionalism diminishes citizens' approval of legislatures, while increased working-class representation enhances citizens' attitudes toward them. We then turn to our experimental approach, which presents respondents with information about legislatures' institutional features (salary, staff, and session length) alongside information about the chamber's social class composition. Results from this conjoint experiment strongly suggest that respondents do not oppose the resources commonly found in high-capacity legislatures. Instead, respondents associate high-capacity legislatures with representatives from white-collar backgrounds and believe legislatures made up of lawmakers from mostly white-collar backgrounds are problematic for society and themselves. Both white-collar and working-class respondents believe that a legislature made up of primarily working-class lawmakers is more likely than a white-collar legislature to pass policies benefiting themselves and society.

Our results point to several broad implications related to representation and the design of political institutions. First, our findings highlight a stark misalignment between citizens' representational preferences and the social class composition of American legislatures. Working-class and white-collar respondents collectively favor being represented by a working-class legislature rather than a white-collar legislature because they expect that working-class legislatures will best represent their interests. In reality, however, working-class lawmakers are drastically underrepresented in all American legislatures. Recent evidence indicates that fewer than 2% of state legislators are from working-class backgrounds (Carnes and Hansen 2024). Second, while high-capacity legislatures may have the institutional tools needed to effectively represent citizens, our results suggest that citizens perceive these white-collar legislatures as ill-suited to represent the broader interests of society.

Social Class and Attitudes Toward Legislative Capacity

Existing research demonstrates that citizens value race- and gender-based representation in legislatures (Tate 2003; Brunell, Anderson and Cremona 2008; Reingold and Harrell 2010). A newer body of work suggests that the public also prefers social class similarities with their representatives (Carnes and Lupu 2016). Citizens demonstrate class affinity when selecting between candidates

(Vivyan, Wagner, Glinitzer and Eberl 2020) and hold representatives' social roots against them when politicians do not come from humble origins (Griffin, Newman and Buhr 2020). Moreover, political efficacy is strongly linked to social class, with wealthier citizens feeling more agency in shaping the work of government (Hayes and Bean 1993; Marx and Nguyen 2018). Therefore, we may expect working-class citizens to react negatively to any factors that cause or contribute to the over-representation of the wealthy in government.

Why might Americans prefer representatives of similar class backgrounds? Citizens may use lawmakers' social class as a heuristic to infer other important attributes like ideology or partisanship (Hoyt and DeShields 2021). They could also harbor a general resentment of the rich regardless of their class backgrounds (Piston 2018). We suggest a new argument about the origins of class-based affinity in representation. Building on the extant work on external efficacy and substantive representation, we argue that citizens believe representatives from their own social class background will emphasize and address policy problems related to their class identity. That is, working-class citizens believe that working-class representatives will prioritize public policy related to working-class Americans. Conversely, white-collar citizens believe that white-collar lawmakers will promote policies benefiting the wealthy.

Research indicates that state legislators in most professionalized chambers are more ambitious and career-oriented (Maestas 2000, 2003). Recent work also suggests that increasing state legislators' salaries attract *more* wealthy representatives to the institution (Carnes and Hansen 2016). Thus, high-capacity legislatures in the states are disproportionately populated by wealthy, career-oriented representatives. These are precisely the types of lawmakers that many working-class citizens do not wish to see in office. Working-class Americans believe that representatives from white-collar backgrounds are unlikely to solve the problems of the average American. We argue that working-class Americans' distrust of white-collar lawmakers manifests as disapproval toward professionalized legislatures, which are most commonly populated by white-collar politicians.²

²This point also aligns with a large body of research emphasizing that American citizens hold positive attitudes toward legislative term limits (which impede political careers), even though

If true, white-collar Americans would be more likely than working-class Americans to indicate approval of professional legislatures, while at the same time, working-class Americans would be more likely than white-collar Americans to indicate approval of amateur legislatures.

We do not argue that citizens have strong preferences about the institutional foundations of legislative capacity or professionalism. That is, we do not think citizens have strong preferences over things like legislators' salaries, staff sizes, or days in session. Indeed, we suspect voters do not have strongly held attitudes about legislative institutions. Instead, we argue that most citizens dislike the notion of white-collar politicians. As a result, while it may seem that citizens dislike professional legislatures, they are responding to the white-collar composition of these legislatures. Put differently, citizens have preferences over legislative professionalism because they have preferences over the types of legislators that represent them. Citizens from wealthy, white-collar backgrounds themselves are comfortable with representatives from wealthier backgrounds, and thus, are comfortable with professional legislatures where these types of policymakers are common. Citizens from working-class backgrounds prefer lawmakers from working-class backgrounds and as such, have higher approval of less professional legislatures. If this were so, in the aggregate, it would appear as though the public disliked high-capacity legislatures, when in fact, most citizens simply dislike the types of politicians that come with high-capacity chambers.

Further, we suggest that this dislike of white-collar politicians (and by extension the seeming dislike of professional legislatures) by working-class citizens is linked to their beliefs about the types of policies those politicians are likely to enact. Citizens from working-class backgrounds are likely to dislike white-collar lawmakers because they believe those lawmakers will enact public policy that primarily privileges the wealthy. Citizens from white-collar backgrounds agree, and thus, support having wealthy, white-collar representatives. Our pre-registered hypotheses are listed below:³

term limits often hold negative consequences for policymaking and representation (see Sarbaugh-Thompson and Thompson 2017).

³The online supplemental appendix describes the pre-registration plan.

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.

It is important to note that citizens may not entirely prefer to be represented by legislators who share their class identity. For instance, perhaps a broad majority of citizens prefer white-collar representatives because they interpret wealth as a signal of intelligence, sophistication, or success. If such a consensus existed, our empirical analyses would reveal no association between citizens' social class and their preferences for representatives. As such, our contention that citizens believe that representatives who share their class backgrounds are more likely to emphasize their problems than representatives who do not is a falsifiable proposition.

Observational Survey Analysis

We leverage over-time data from the CES to empirically examine the relationship between legislative capacity, legislatures' social class composition, and legislative approval. The CES is a cooperative, nationally representative survey that is administered every other year by a collective of universities. From 2008 through 2018, the CES asked respondents to rate their approval of their own state legislature on a four-point scale. We pair these responses with data on legislative professionalism (Squire 1993) and the working-class composition of state legislatures (Makse 2019; Lollis 2023). This allows us to assess the relationship between professionalism, working-class representation, and legislative approval on a high-quality sample of over-time data.⁴

⁴The CES reports varying sample sizes each year as a function of the number of university teams involved in the survey and success in contacting respondents. Our smallest sample size is 26,000 respondents in 2008. Our largest sample size is 58,000 in 2016.

Table 1 presents the results of a fixed effects regression where we regress the percentage of working-class lawmakers, Squire’s professionalism index, and a set of controls on respondents’ legislative approval in the CES. We incorporate state and year fixed effects in our models. Column (1) reports the effects with professionalism included, and column (2) includes the percentage of a legislature from a working class background.

Table 1: Working Class Representation, Legislative Professionalism, and Legislative Approval

	State Legislative Approval	
Squire Index	−2.031*	−2.070*
	(0.090)	(0.091)
Percent Leg Working Class	—	0.005*
	—	(0.001)
Respondent is Democrat	0.040*	0.040*
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Respondent Education	−0.018*	−0.018*
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Respondent Gender	0.078*	0.078*
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Respondent Race	0.067*	0.067*
	(0.004)	(0.004)
State Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Observations	237,277	237,277
Adjusted R ²	0.047	0.047

Note: Cell entries report coefficients from an OLS regression. The dependent variable is a four-point scale measuring respondent’s approval of their state legislature. Standard errors are reported in parenthesis. *p<0.05

As Table 1 indicates, increases in legislative professionalism are associated with declining legislative approval. Working-class representation, however, is positively correlated with citizens’ approval of legislatures. It is important to note that because we include state fixed effects, these estimates are based on the within-state variance in both professionalism and working-class representation. So, when a state receives a higher score on the Squire Index of professionalism, that same state tends to experience lower levels of approval. At the same time, when a state elects more working-class lawmakers, that state tends to have higher legislative approval. This implies

that, all else equal, citizens favor legislatures with more working-class lawmakers. The substantive effects of professionalism are much larger in these estimates than those of working-class representation. A standard deviation increase in professionalism is associated with a decrease in legislative approval of about 26% of a standard deviation, while a standard deviation increase in the percentage of working-class legislators only increases legislative approval by a roughly 2% of a standard deviation.⁵

The results of this observational analysis of legislative approval suggest a few important things. First, it indicates that working-class representation is related to legislative approval. Respondents approve of legislatures with more working-class lawmakers and disapprove of professional legislatures. Second, given that legislative professionalism is related to working-class representation, the underlying causal relationships between approval, professionalism, and class composition may be difficult to untangle in observational work. Therefore, an experimental approach is warranted.⁶ We administered a pre-registered conjoint experiment to more carefully untangle these causal relationships.

Pre-Registered Conjoint Survey Experiment

We fielded a choice-based conjoint survey experiment via Prolific from March 28, 2024 through April 6, 2024. After basic data cleaning to remove incomplete responses, our sample size is 1,996 respondents.⁷ Our sample was matched to national samples on age, gender, and race. Basic de-

⁵We should also note here that the association between the Squire index and state legislative approval does not attenuate when we include the percentage of a legislature from a working-class background, which we might expect if the mediated relationship that we hypothesize were present.

⁶Additionally, the CES does not ask respondents for their occupation, meaning we cannot use the observational data to examine whether preferences for working-class representation vary by respondent.

⁷It is important to note that prior to fielding our conjoint experiment, we fielded a pilot vignette experiment in February of 2023. This pilot experiment was not pre-registered. Some design choices of the vignette were not optimal. For example, we utilized respondent income, rather than

mographic data for our sample can be found in the supplemental appendix. In the conjoint survey experiment, respondents were first 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 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 economic status. 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 chose 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 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.

occupation as our modifier in the experiment. Thus, it is not necessarily a perfect test of our hypotheses. The results of our pilot experiment largely comport with those we report in the conjoint experiment. In the interests of full disclosure, we include the pilot study results in our supplemental appendices.

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]

From this information, we estimate conditional marginal means for each of the three outcome questions. We estimate conditional marginal means rather than average marginal component effect (AMCE) given that we are interested in subgroup preferences (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley 2020). We code respondents as working class if they reported that they currently or previously worked as a contractor, construction worker, office or clerical worker, public safety worker, retail or service worker, or in a trade job (e.g. plumber, mechanic). All other respondents are coded as white collar.

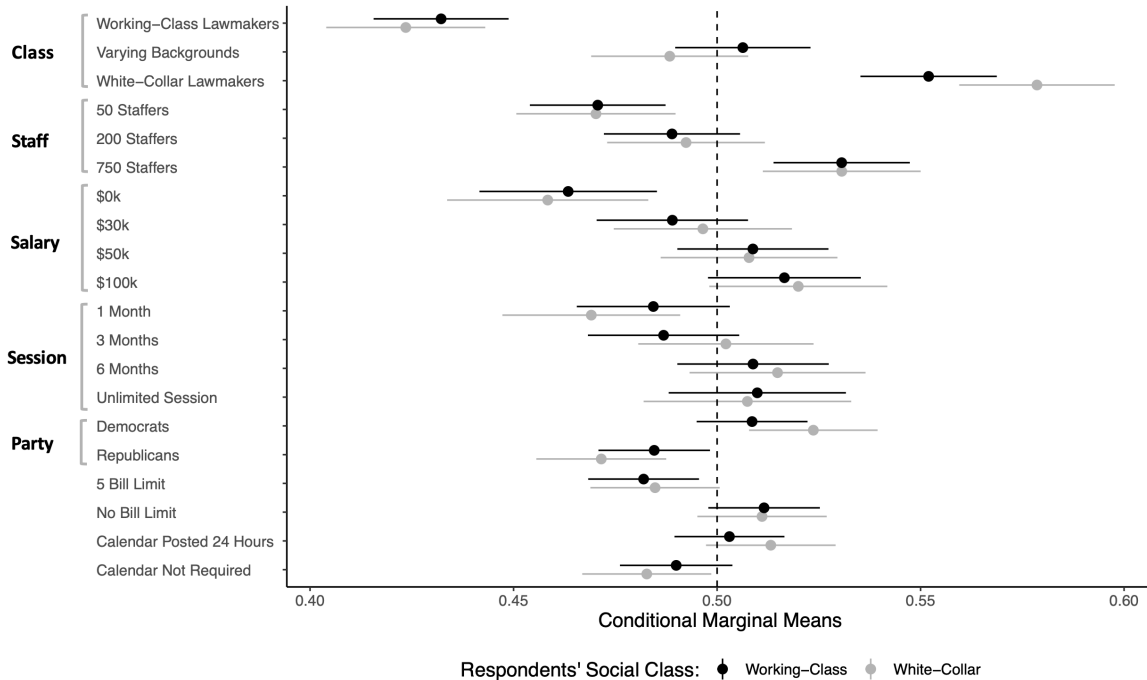


Figure 1: Respondents Associate Professional Legislatures With White-Collar Lawmakers

First, we estimate the conditional marginal mean for responses to the question “Which legislature is most professional?”

Figure 1 indicates that both working-class and white-collar respondents view legislatures mostly comprised of lawmakers from working-class backgrounds as less likely to be professional. Legislatures made up of lawmakers from mostly white-collar backgrounds are viewed by both working-class and white-collar respondents as more likely to be professional. Legislatures with lawmakers from varied backgrounds fall between the two. This strongly suggests that respondents tie the class makeup of a legislature to their perception of the legislature’s level of professionalism. We can also see that respondents view other features of the legislature as reflecting its professionalism. For example, larger staff sizes lead respondents to suggest a legislature is more professional. Additionally, paying legislators no salary makes respondents unlikely to select a legislature as being professional, though increases in salary from \$30K to \$100K did little to affect respondents’ choices of which legislature is professional. Interestingly, few of these results varied across the working-class and white-collar groups in our sample.

These results suggest two things. First, as we stated, it strongly suggests respondents tie the class of lawmakers to the professionalism of a chamber. Respondents' associating legislative capacity with legislatures' class composition is central to our argument. Citizens do indeed perceive lawmakers from a certain class background as reflecting a chamber's professionalism. Second, they also associate legislative professionalism with other institutional features that political scientists often associate with professionalism. Both salary and staff size are common elements in measures of legislative professionalism and affect citizens' views of professionalism also.

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 who have held working-class occupations are very unlikely to select a legislature mostly comprised of white-collar lawmakers as likely to benefit society. White-collar respondents are also unlikely to choose a legislature comprised primarily of white-collar lawmakers as good for society, though by a smaller margin than working-class respondents. That is, those from working-class backgrounds are more resistant to the idea that legislatures with white-collar lawmakers will be good for society than those from white-collar backgrounds themselves.⁸ Likewise, the conditional marginal means also suggest that respondents from both working-class and white-collar backgrounds are more likely to select a legislature made up of legislators from working-class backgrounds as likely to be good for society, and both groups show the strongest preference for a legislature comprised of lawmakers from varied professional backgrounds.

Our results also suggest that respondents believe that unlimited bill introductions, larger staff sizes, longer times in session, and legislatures in control of Democrats are better for society.⁹ We again see little heterogeneity in these results by respondent class. This suggests that respondents

⁸Though we should note here that our pre-registered expectations suggested that those from white-collar backgrounds would support white-collar lawmakers, this result is somewhat at odds with our preregistered expectations.

⁹This result suggests that our sample is comprised of mostly Democrat respondents. We examine treatment heterogeneity by party in the next subsection. Our sample included 968 Democrat respondents, 420 Republican respondents, and 572 Independent respondents based on self-reported

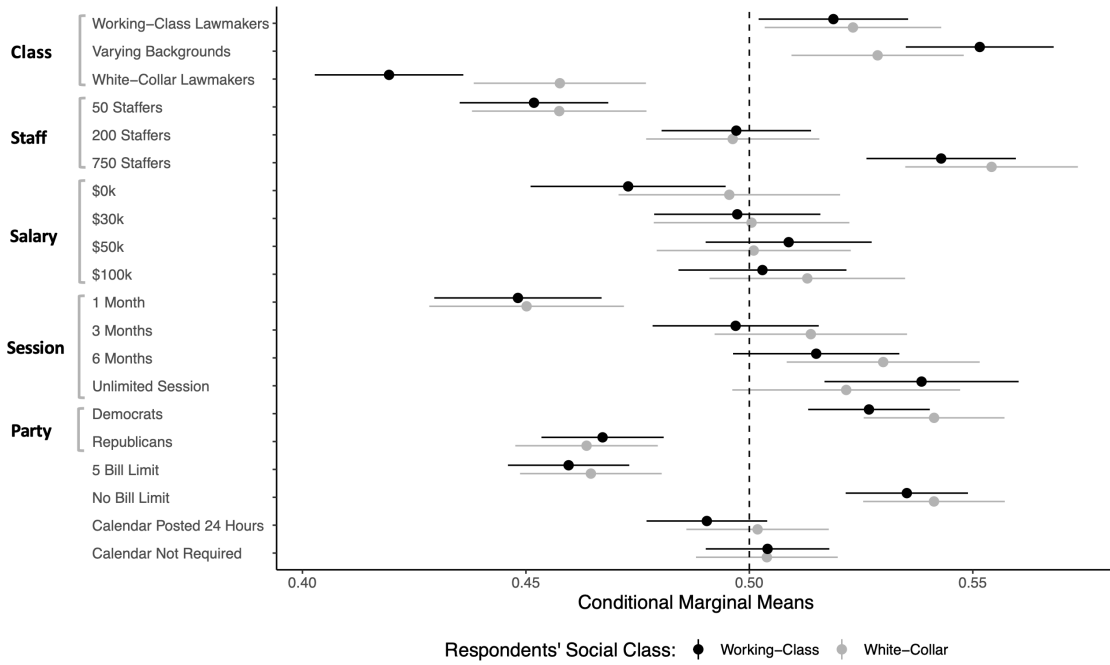


Figure 2: Respondents Think Working-Class and Mixed-Class Legislatures Are Most Likely To Benefit Society

see the institutional features that generate high legislative capacity as being a benefit to society, but dislike the types of lawmakers typically found in high-capacity chambers.

Finally, we examine responses to the question “Which legislature is best positioned to benefit people like you?”. We considered both this question and the preceding question about society in case respondents recognize that things that may materially benefit themselves may not benefit the whole of society. For example, those from privileged means may recognize that having lawmakers from white-collar backgrounds would be good for themselves but not others. If that were so, distinguishing which legislatures would benefit society from which legislatures would benefit people like the respondent may aid us in understanding that distinction. The conditional marginal means for each feature of the conjoint experiment appear in Figure 3.

Once again, we see that both working-class respondents and those who have never held working-class jobs are unlikely to select a legislature made up of lawmakers from working-class back-partisanship.

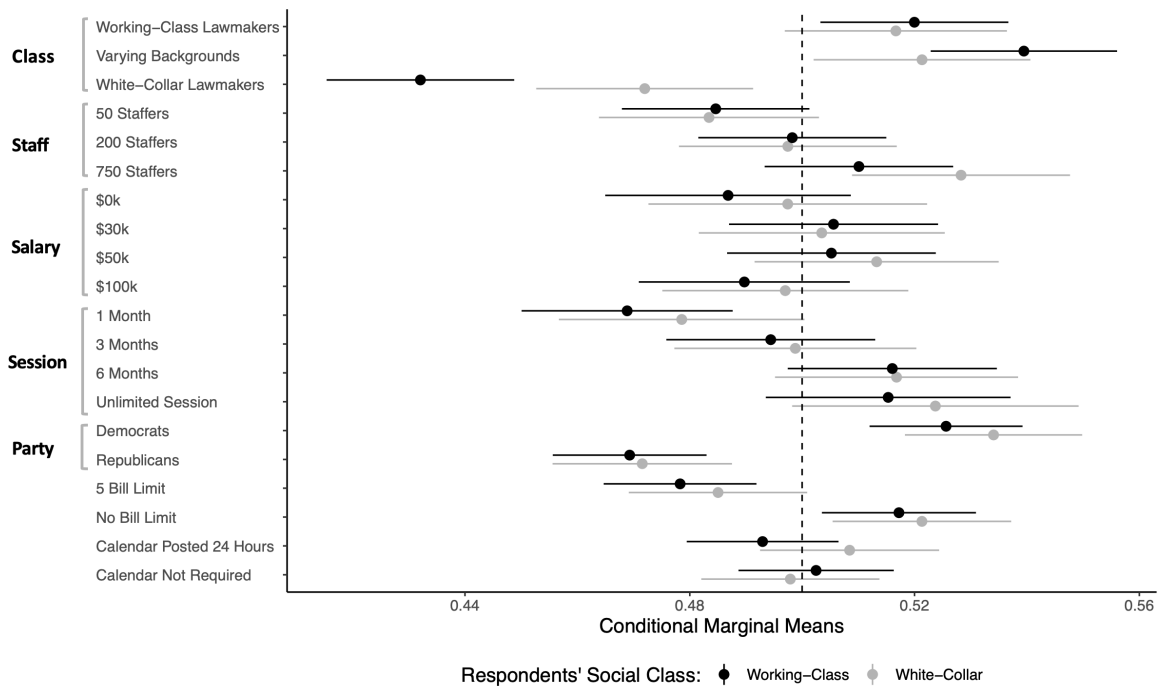


Figure 3: Respondents Think Working-Class and Mixed-Class Legislatures Are Most Likely To Benefit People Like Them

grounds as likely to be good for people like themselves. However, those from working-class backgrounds are much less likely to make that choice. Those from working-class backgrounds are more likely to select a legislature made up of lawmakers from either working-class backgrounds or varied occupations as being good for people like themselves. Those from white-collar backgrounds are not significantly more likely to select a legislature made up of lawmakers from working-class backgrounds as being good for themselves but are more likely to select a legislature with lawmakers from varied occupations.

This suggests again that most respondents are opposed to the idea of legislatures populated by lawmakers from white-collar backgrounds, though again we see less heterogeneity in this preference by respondent class. Other institutional features of a legislature that affect respondents' choice of a legislature being good for people like themselves include bill introduction limits and the partisanship of a legislature. Generally speaking, however, the institutional features of a legislature had less clear effects on the probability that respondents would select a legislature as being

good for people like themselves.

Respondent Income

While our preregistered hypotheses focus on the class backgrounds of respondents as traditionally defined by their occupations (Carnes 2013; Makse 2019; Lollis 2023), we might also imagine that the effects of the class of lawmakers on perceptions of a legislature are related to respondents' income. In addition to class-based analyses, we also conduct secondary analyses by respondents' income. If the results are consistent across respondents' occupations and income, this would suggest further support for our expectations. Our survey asks respondents to report their household incomes as a part of 11 categories. We recode this variable to a binary variable coded 1 for respondents who report a household income of more than \$150,000 and 0 otherwise.¹⁰ In these additional subgroup analyses, we focus on the outcome questions assessing whether respondents think a legislature is good for society or good for people like them, as these are the outcome questions most strongly tied to our arguments about why citizens dislike high-capacity legislatures.

The left panel of Figure 4 plots the conditional marginal means of respondents' evaluations of which legislature is most likely to benefit society conditioning on whether respondents report a household income over \$150,000 per year. Because the high-income category is much smaller than other subgroups we analyze, the confidence intervals around these marginal means are much larger. Nevertheless, we see that for those earning less than \$150K per year, there is a strong belief that legislatures comprised of lawmakers from working-class backgrounds or varied backgrounds will be better for society. Respondents whose households make more than \$150K per year do not have a statistically significantly higher chance of choosing a legislature as being good for society as a function of the class of the lawmakers in that chamber. This is, of course, in part due to the large confidence intervals around those estimates, but the effect of the legislature being compromised of working-class lawmakers is slightly negative and very close to zero (well within the 5% point negligible effect size we specify in our preregistration). Thus, there is reason to believe that the

¹⁰This places these high-earning respondents in the 78th percentile of households in the US. This corresponds to roughly 9.5% of our sample.

class of lawmakers in a legislature affects the evaluation of legislatures by high-earning households somewhat differently than households from lower income levels.

The right panel of Figure 4 plots the conditional marginal means of respondents' evaluations of which legislature is most likely to benefit people like themselves conditioning on whether respondents report a household income over \$150K per year. We again see that those who report household incomes lower than this threshold believe that legislatures made up of white-collar lawmakers are less likely to benefit people like them than legislatures comprised of lawmakers from varied or working-class backgrounds. Respondents whose households earn more than this amount are no more or less likely to select a legislature as being good for people like them as a function of lawmakers' class. Thus, while our earlier analysis suggests that the occupational backgrounds of respondents were not significant moderator responses to legislators' class backgrounds, there is some minimal reason to believe that respondent household income might be such a moderator.

In sum, our results suggest that respondents believe legislatures made up of lawmakers from working-class or varied backgrounds are good for people like themselves and for society, while legislatures comprised of lawmakers from white-collar backgrounds are less likely to be selected as fulfilling those roles. These beliefs are held most strongly by those from more humble origins themselves (having either held working-class jobs or having lower household incomes), though they are also held by many of those from other backgrounds, such as those who have never held a working-class job.

Respondent Party

Our results suggest notable partisan differences. Respondents report legislatures composed of Republican lawmakers as less likely to benefit people like themselves and society and to be less professional across subgroups in most of our analyses. Our survey is matched nationally representative on age, gender, and race, but not on party.¹¹ This could lead to concerns that respondent partisanship could be a significant moderator of our results. Indeed, partisanship is correlated with

¹¹This option was not available to us from our survey vendor at the time we purchased our survey.

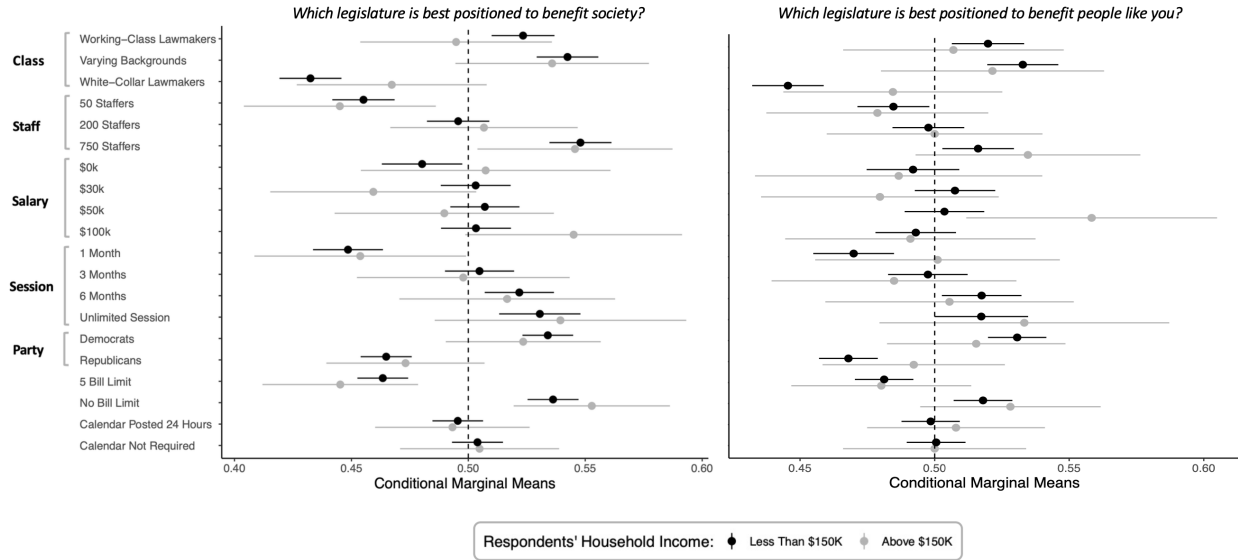


Figure 4: Respondents Earning Less Than \$150,000 Per Year Think Working-Class and Mixed-Class Legislatures Are Most Likely To Benefit Society

both occupational backgrounds and household incomes, which could lead us to conclude that our subgroup analyses so far are driven by partisanship rather than respondents' class backgrounds. To ensure that our results are on solid footing, we again examine whether respondents select a legislature as being good for people like themselves or society, but condition our results on respondents' self-reported partisanship (Democrat, Republican, Independent).

This subgroup analysis was also not preregistered as a part of our experiment, but given our earlier results, it appears to be a critical check of our inferences given the eccentricities of our sample. The results of this additional subgroup analysis appear in Figure 5. Figure 5 suggests that once again, across parties, respondents are unlikely to select a legislature comprised of lawmakers from white-collar backgrounds as likely to benefit society (left panel) Figure 6 also suggests that respondents are unlikely to select such a legislature as being good for people like themselves (right panel). Once again, across subgroups, we see that respondents are unlikely to believe lawmakers from white-collar backgrounds are beneficial.

We do, however, see slightly more partisan heterogeneity in the selection of legislatures made up of lawmakers from working-class or varied backgrounds. Figure 5 suggests that both Democrats

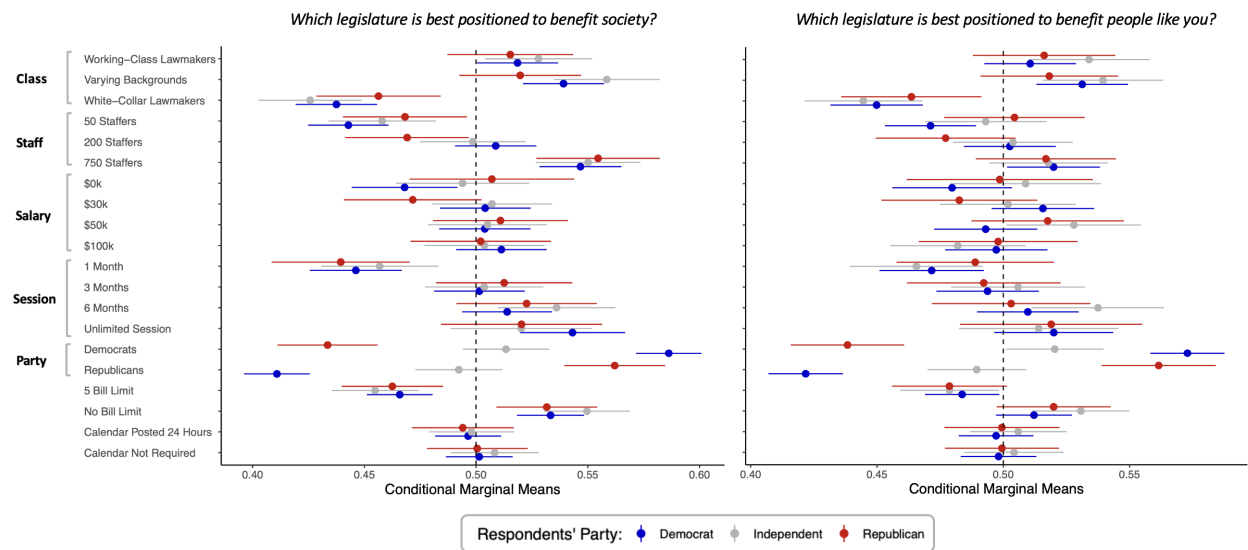


Figure 5: Respondents Think Working-Class and Mixed-Class Legislatures Are Most Likely To Benefit Themselves and Society Regardless of Party ID

and Independents view legislatures made up of lawmakers from working-class backgrounds as good for society, but Republicans are not significantly more likely to select such legislatures than random chance. Both Democrats and Independents are also more likely to select legislatures comprised of lawmakers from varied backgrounds as good for society, though once again Republicans are not statistically significantly more likely to select such a legislature. Republicans are also not statistically significantly more likely to select legislatures made up of lawmakers from varied or working-class backgrounds as being good for people like themselves, while self-reported Independents are more likely to select both types of legislatures as being good for themselves. Democrats, however, seem to be more likely to select a legislature made of lawmakers from varied backgrounds as being good for people like themselves, but not a legislature comprised of lawmakers from working-class backgrounds.

Our results suggest there is some partisan heterogeneity in how people view legislatures as a function of the class of lawmakers in that chamber. However, across all of our subgroup analyses, there is consistent evidence that most people believe that legislatures made up of lawmakers from exclusively white-collar backgrounds are bad for both themselves and society (despite being

perceived as most professional). The only exception to this finding is those whose households make more than \$150K per year. Other consistent results across analyses suggest that respondents generally think that legislatures with unlimited bill introductions and larger staff sizes are good for society and people like themselves. This indicates that while Americans do support investing in legislative capacity, they are generally opposed to the types of legislators that are often found in high-capacity chambers. This supports our expectations and clarifies why citizens in the US often disapprove of the most professional legislatures. Citizens do not oppose professional legislatures *per se* but instead oppose the types of lawmakers typically found in professional chambers.

Discussion

While the findings from our survey experiment support our professionalism hypothesis—both working-class and white-collar respondents perceive white-collar legislatures to be more professional and working-class legislatures to be less professional—there is some disagreement between our findings and our other two pre-registered hypotheses. We expected to observe congruence between respondents' social class identity and their attitudes toward which legislatures would provide the best representation for themselves and society. That is, we expected white-collar respondents to favor white-collar legislatures and working-class respondents to favor working-class legislatures. Our findings suggest that, while working-class respondents favor working-class legislatures, so do white-collar respondents. The magnitude of the effect is smaller for white-collar respondents, which indicates that working-class respondents favor working-class legislatures more than white-collar respondents. Contrary to our pre-registered expectations, however, both working-class and white-collar respondents are hesitant to support representation by the rich. This finding persists even when we operationalize social class using respondents' income rather than their occupational background. Respondents who earn an annual household income greater than \$150,000 do not favor representation by a white-collar legislature any more than they favor representation by a working-class legislature.

Why might white-collar respondents not want to be represented by white-collar legislatures? A substantial literature, which we engage with to develop our pre-registered hypotheses, suggests

that white-collar Americans should prefer white-collar representation. In an era of increasing polarization, social identity groups have begun to sort on party lines, leading individuals to strongly favor their in-group while disapproving of individuals in their out-groups (Mason 2018*b,a*). This translates to the types of lawmakers individuals want to be represented by. Citizens prefer to be represented by politicians who share similar identities and experiences as they do (Mansbridge 1999; Tate 2001; Gay 2002), often because they expect that these lawmakers will better represent their interests. Consistent with this line of reasoning, wealthy Americans should take no issue with white-collar government.

Our findings, as we note, are more nuanced. Working-class and white-collar respondents collectively prefer to be represented by working-class and mixed-class legislatures. Though this finding stands in contrast to arguments suggesting that citizens should prefer in-group representation, it is not entirely inconsistent with recent scholarship concerning social class and economic inequality. Piston (2018) finds that a large segment of the American electorate, both rich and poor, holds a deep resentment toward the rich. For example, on a feeling thermometer scaled from zero to 100, respondents (both from working-class and white-collar backgrounds) rated “poor people” 26 points higher than “rich people” (Bartels 2012). Likewise, most Americans feel as though the poor are overtaxed and the rich are undertaxed, which is rooted in concern over increasing economic inequality (Bartels 2012). Americans’ attitudes toward the rich translate to how they think about representation. While Americans are not biased against working-class candidates (Carnes and Lupu 2016), they do oppose ultra-wealthy candidates (Griffin, Newman and Buhr 2020). Our findings are consistent with these arguments. Americans are resentful of the rich, oppose extremely wealthy political candidates and, as we demonstrate, do not wish to be represented by white-collar legislatures.

Conclusion

The motivation of this research was to address an important tension in legislative studies: citizens receive better policy representation from professional, high-capacity legislatures that are equipped with institutional resources to facilitate policy responsiveness (Harden 2016; Lax and

Phillips 2012). At the same time, professional legislatures often elicit disapproval from citizens (Squire 1993; Richardson, Konisky and Milyo 2012; Fortunato, McCrain and Schiff 2023). Why, then, do citizens dislike the very chambers that are best positioned to represent their interests effectively? We leverage observational data from the CES and experimental evidence from a pre-registered conjoint to test our argument. We find that a significant factor contributing to citizens' disapproval of professional legislatures is their aversion to being represented by white-collar politicians. Moreover, working-class citizens believe that professional legislatures, comprised of white-collar politicians, are ineffective in using public policy to solve their problems. This logic holds that a negative association between legislative approval and legislative professionalism is not driven by citizens' dislike of institutional resources provided to high-capacity legislatures, but rather is driven by the changes in legislature *composition* that professionalism induces.

Our choice-based conjoint experiment provides a unique methodological opportunity to concurrently 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 and working-class). In doing so, we demonstrate that lawmakers' aversion to professional legislatures is driven by white-collar lawmakers rather than features associated with high-capacity legislatures.

These findings are an important first step in understanding how citizens' attitudes toward legislative institutions and lawmakers' descriptive identities converge. Challenges remain, however, when considering institutional reform efforts and legislative approval. Our findings can inform reform discussions, demonstrating that simply maximizing legislative capacity is not associated with improving the representation of society as a whole. After all, altering legislative institutions to enhance capacity is likely to change the types of politicians seeking office. Situating our findings alongside the existing literature on class composition and legislative professionalism, enhancing legislative capacity increases the pool of candidates and lawmakers from white-collar backgrounds (Carnes and Hansen 2016). Reform efforts aiming to increase legislatures' capacity may worsen the trending decline in legislative approval rather than increase the public's favorability of legisla-

tive institutions. It also crowds out the very type of lawmakers citizens' expect would represent them most effectively. Instead, state governments should contend with these complexities. Reform efforts need to prioritize strategies aimed at facilitating the entry of lawmakers from outside the economic elite into their legislatures. While a clear path forward to enhance legislative capacity while also prioritizing working-class government in US legislatures is yet to be forged, Americans clearly oppose representation by white-collar government.

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Online Supplemental Appendix

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1 Pilot Survey Experiment: Social Class and Attitudes' Toward Professional Legislatures

To understand whether citizens' class backgrounds and their attitudes toward elected officials are related to legislative capacity, we began our research by fielding a simple vignette survey experiment in February 2023. The experiment was administered online to 1,006 respondents through Prolific, a US-based survey firm.¹² Following some brief demographic questions, respondents were randomly assigned to one of four experimental treatment conditions or a control condition. In each experimental condition, respondents were instructed to read a brief fictional news article discussing the demographic makeup of their state legislature. The first two conditions randomized whether the fictional legislature was primarily made up of working-class or white-collar lawmakers. The class composition was also randomized in the third and fourth experimental conditions, but information about increasing economic inequality was included.

¹²The sample was not designed as representative of the population, although it reflected a reasonable amount of heterogeneity. Among the 1,006 respondents, 502 identified as male, and 715 self-identified as white. The average age of respondents was 40.4 years old, and the average reported income was between \$50,000 and \$89,999 per year.

Working-Class Condition

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The New York Times

A New Legislative Session

The newly elected legislature meets for the first time since recent elections.

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By Michael Sorrow
October 3, 2020

A new class of state legislators met in the Capitol today for the first time since the recent election. The newly elected legislature is made up primarily of working-class legislators who formerly worked in retail and clerical positions.

White-Collar Condition

POLITICS

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Working-Class + Inequality Condition

POLITICS

The New York Times

An Unequal Economy

Data shows that the economy is growing, but only for the rich.

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White-Collar + Inequality Condition

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Note: The four experimental conditions respondents were randomly assigned to in the pilot survey. Two items were randomized between conditions: whether the legislature is primarily comprised of white-collar or working-class lawmakers and the presence of information about increasing economic inequality.

The economic information was intended to cue respondents to the possibility that the legislature may be helping the economy grow, but that less wealthy citizens may have been left behind

in that growth. Our intention was that this point would cue poorer respondents to consider the possibility that the legislature was attempting to solve public problems, but was doing so in a way that might disadvantage working-class citizens. Our experimental treatments appear in Section 2 of the supplemental appendix. The control condition reported a brief paragraph about the success of a former college athlete. Every respondent had an equal probability of being assigned to each of the five conditions. We then asked participants the following question:

“Political observers sometimes classify state legislatures based on their level of professionalism, where citizen legislatures are the least professional and professional legislatures are the most professional. What level of professionalism do you think your state legislature should have?”

The response options were 1) Citizen Legislature, 2) Hybrid Legislature, and 3) Professional Legislature. We suspected that the effects of our treatments on respondents’ preferences for the professionalism of their state legislature would vary by respondent income. Consistent with our first hypothesis, we expected poorer respondents to prefer citizen legislatures to professional legislatures and that this effect would be most pronounced when the legislature was described as working-class and when income inequality was mentioned. Alternatively, we expected that wealthy respondents would prefer professional legislatures, especially when the legislature was described as white-collar and economic growth was mentioned.

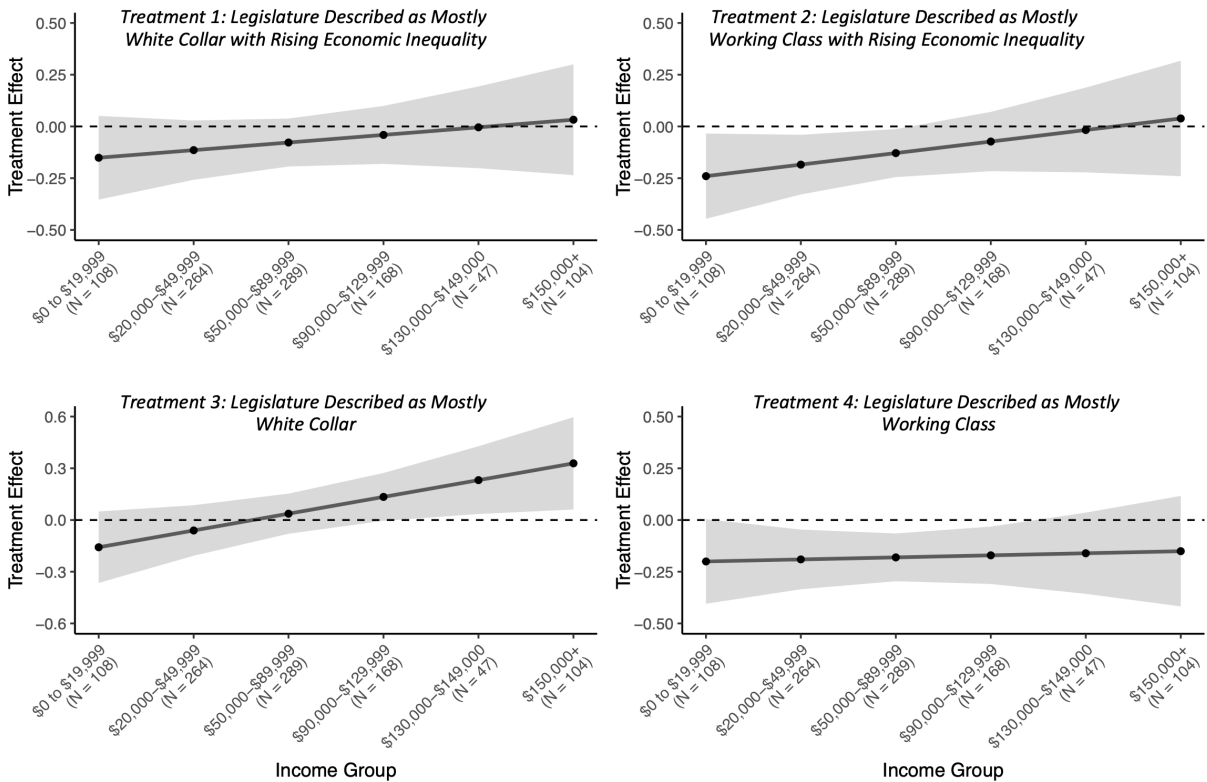
This pattern of results would be consistent with the notion that respondents from poorer backgrounds want working-class legislators in office to tackle the particular problems faced by poorer citizens (economic inequality), while wealthy respondents prefer to have professional politicians in office from wealthy backgrounds who will continue to grow the economy, regardless of its effects on inequality. We model respondents’ answers to the professionalism preference question with a linear regression that includes indicators for the treatment conditions interacted with respondents’ self-reported income.¹³

¹³Treatment effects are estimated relative to the control condition for each treatment (rather than

The marginal effects of each treatment condition vary considerably by respondent income, as shown in Figure 1. For example, relative to the control condition, the treatment that informs citizens that their legislature is white-collar and that income inequality is growing does not have a significant effect on respondents' preferences for legislative professionalism at any income level. However, the treatment that informs citizens that their legislature is working-class and inequality is rising diminishes the support for high legislative professionalism among the poorest respondents (a negative and significant marginal effect at the lower end of the income variable). Thus, informing poor respondents that their legislature is comprised of wealthy lawmakers and that inequality is rising does little to their support for professionalism, but telling respondents that their legislature is made up primarily of working-class legislators and inequality is rising leads to more aversion to professionalization among that group.

relative to each other).

Figure 1: Marginal Effects of Survey Treatments as Income Increases



Note: Poorer Americans prefer a less professionalized legislature when the chamber is made up mostly of working-class lawmakers and economic inequality is increasing, while the richest Americans prefer a professional legislature when the legislature is described as primarily white-collar. The graphs present the estimated marginal effects and 95% confidence intervals of each experimental condition across respondents' reported level of income.

These two conditions utilized information about growing economies and rising inequality to cue respondents to consider certain sets of problems that might be solved by legislatures. The other conditions provided only information about the class backgrounds of legislators. Wealthy respondents who randomly received the treatment signaling a white-collar legislature *favor* legislative professionalism (as evidenced by a positive and significant marginal effect). And the working-class legislature condition reduced support for professionalism among the poorest respondents. Indeed, among the poorest respondents, the largest effect comes from the condition that describes a legislature as working-class and cues respondents to think about income inequality. The largest effect for the wealthiest respondents comes from describing the legislature as mostly white-collar without discussing income inequality.

These findings suggest that opposition to professional legislatures has class roots, which is

likely tied to how respondents believe certain types of lawmakers will work to solve problems. For example, wealthy citizens may like a professionalized legislature that is largely white-collar politicians precisely because white-collar legislators are likely to work to solve the problems of the wealthy. Less wealthy respondents may oppose professionalizing a legislature that is largely working-class because they believe that ordinary Americans, rather than career-oriented politicians, are more likely to solve the problems of poorer Americans. Again, these preferences are unlikely to be a function of the tools or capacity of the chamber itself, and more likely to be tied to the types of politicians, and thus, types of policies that emerge from professional, high-capacity chambers. Thus, our preliminary evidence suggests that citizens' social class background is meaningfully related to their preferences regarding the capacity of their legislature.

To examine whether citizens' attitudes towards legislative capacity are shaped by their expectations of white-collar and working-class legislators' policy priorities and whether these attitudes are unrelated to the resources and tools associated with high-capacity legislatures, we conduct a pre-registered choice-based conjoint survey experiment. In the conjoint experiment, we improve the design of our original survey experiment by 1) fielding the study on a larger, nationally representative sample to increase statistical power and generalizability and 2) reframing our outcome questions to focus on citizens' attitudes regarding the policies legislatures pass.

2 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 <https://osf.io/t3mdv/>.

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 of Virginia. 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 mul-

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-negligible 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.	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	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).	<p>We will interpret a statistically significant treatment effect in the predicted direction (see <i>H1</i>) 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.</p> <p>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.</p>
Does social class motivate the perception of how effective a legislature is at solving public problems?	<p>H2A: White-collar Americans are more likely than working-class Americans to believe that professional legislatures create effective public policy for white-collar Americans.</p> <p>H2B: Working-class Americans are more likely than white-collar Americans to believe that amateur legislatures create effective public policy for working-class Americans.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	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).	<p>We will interpret a statistically significant treatment effect in the predicted direction (see <i>H2A</i> and <i>H2B</i>) 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.</p> <p>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.</p>

3 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.

4 Conjoint Survey: Additional Subgroup Analyses

While the main body of our research focuses on class and partisanship as potential modifiers to our conjoint analysis, we could imagine other subgroups being of interest. Below we conduct subgroup analysis of the marginal mean responses to our conjoint experiment for 1) our pre-manipulation check, 2) respondent gender, and 3) white vs. non-white respondents.

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.

White vs Non-White Respondents

It is also possible that racial minorities, who have long histories of political disenfranchisement and systemic economic disadvantage in US, may be particularly unlikely to support white collar politicians or high capacity government institutions. To see if our results vary between those who self-identify as white and those who come from racial minority groups, Figure 2 present conditional marginal mean responses to the experimental features of our conjoint across these two groups.

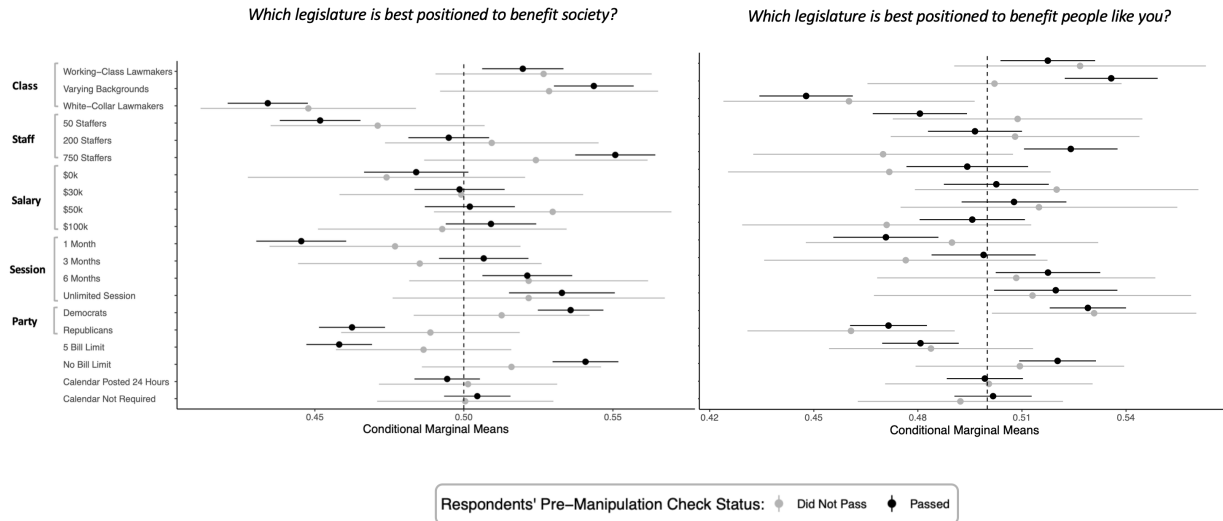


Figure 6: Conditional Marginal Means of Respondents' Selection of Which Legislature is Most Likely to Benefit Society and Themselves by Passage of Pre-treatment Check

These results suggest there is very little difference between white and non-white respondents in how they respond to the various experimental features of the conjoint.

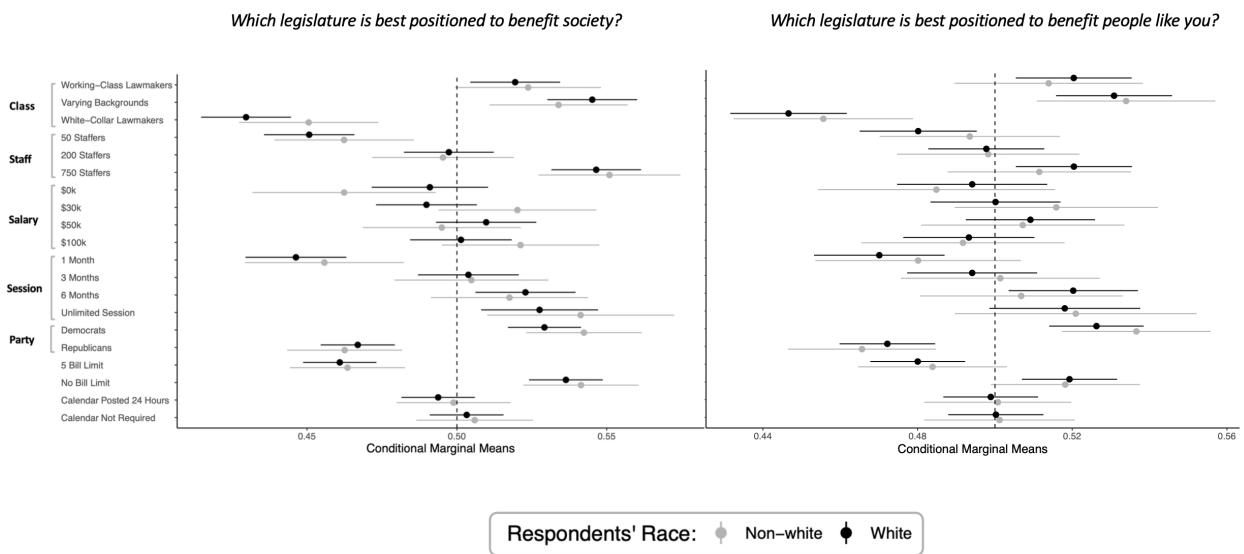


Figure 7: Conditional Marginal Means of Respondents' Selection of Which Legislature is Most Likely to Benefit Society and Themselves by Race

Gender

For similar reasons, we may worry that our main results may be conditioned by gender. To see whether women respondent differently to the conjoint's features than men do, Figure 3 presents subgroup analyses as a function of respondent gender. Again, we see little to no real differences in how men and women respond to the various features of the conjoint.

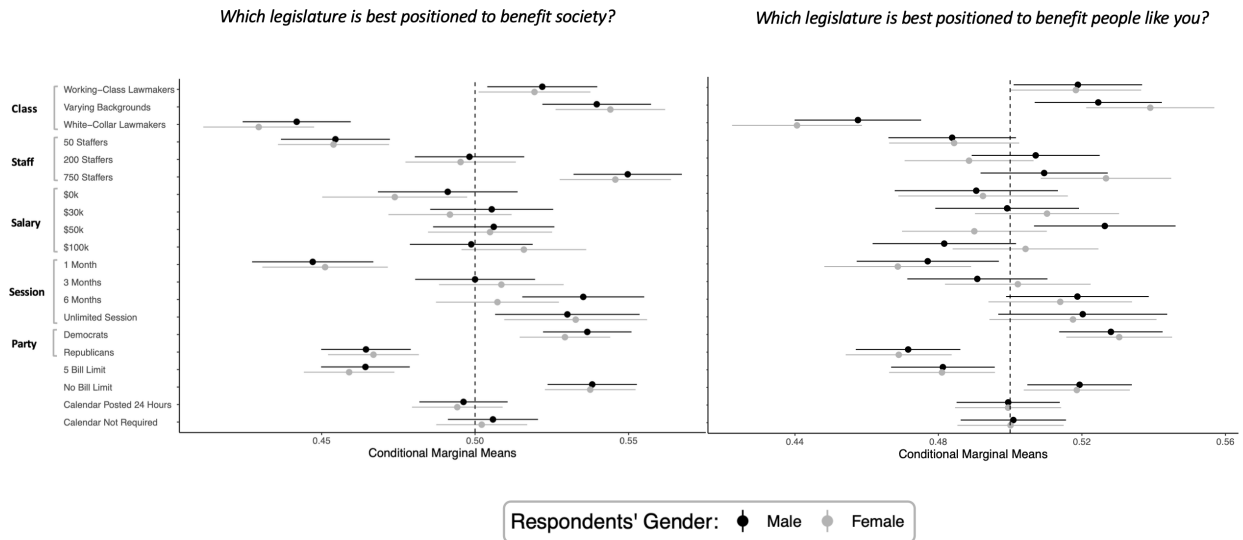


Figure 8: Conditional Marginal Means of Respondents' Selection of Which Legislature is Most Likely to Benefit Society and Themselves by Gender