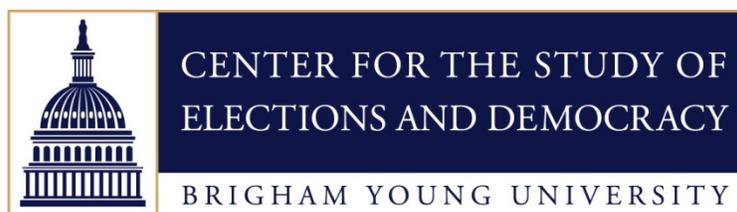


2013 Utah Legislator Survey: Topline Report

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This report gives an overview of the survey's methods and question wording. It does not offer much in the way of analysis. For analysis, watch for updates in the "Utah Legislator Survey" category of the Utah Data Points research blog: <http://utahdatapoints.com/tag/utah-legislator-survey/>



Overview

All 104 legislators serving in the 2013 General Session of the Utah Legislature were invited to complete a brief questionnaire consisting of a single sheet of paper printed front and back. (Legislators were also given the option of completing the survey online.)

Questionnaires were distributed through the four party caucuses (during lunchtime caucus meetings) between February 19th and February 26th. Caucus staff assisted in compiling the anonymous responses, which were then collected and analyzed by this report's author. Most responses were received by February 28th; a handful trickled in as late as March 5th.

The Utah Constitution empowers the Utah Legislature to convene for seven weeks each winter. Typically, the first two weeks are somewhat relaxed, while the final two weeks are hectic and hurried. Administering the questionnaire during the first or last two weeks would likely have led legislators to over- or underestimate their responses to certain questions. By administering this questionnaire mid-session (during the fourth and fifth weeks), those problems should be minimized.

Response rate and margin of error

Many legislators generously took time to complete the questionnaire. Overall, the survey received a respectable 44% response rate, drawing 46 responses from the 104 legislators invited. Many surveys struggle to receive as much as a 10-20% response rate. Despite the high response rates in percentage terms, the small numerical size of the Legislature overall means that margins of error are nevertheless large. In a typical survey, such as one sampling from the entire population of Utah voters, 46 responses would produce a margin of error of ± 14.5 percentage points. In this particular survey, however, 46 responses represents a sizeable portion of the overall population of 104 legislators. Taking this small population into account leads to an estimated margin of error of ± 11.5 percentage points.

Participation was reasonably high across several subgroups, as shown in the table below. The "margin of error" column below shows how large the margin is for various subgroups, taking account of each subgroup's population. These calculations assume a dichotomous question where opinion is evenly split at 50-50; when opinions are more lopsided, the margin of error declines.

Category	Responses	Population	Response rate	Margin of error
All legislators	46	104	44%	± 11.5
Utah House	27	75	36%	± 15.2
Utah Senate	18	29	62%	± 14.5
Republicans (either chamber)	34	85	40%	± 13.1
Democrats (either chamber)	12	19	63%	± 17.6
0-4 years experience in Legislature	15	n/a	n/a	n/a
5-9 years experience in Legislature	17	n/a	n/a	n/a
10+ years experience in Legislature	12	n/a	n/a	n/a

Question wording and survey goals

The purpose of this questionnaire was to help constituents understand what legislators actually do. Students learn about the origins, structure, and functioning of the American federal government repeatedly in elementary school, junior high, high school, and college, but Utah's curriculum requirements do not mandate meaningful instruction in state or local politics. This is an unfortunate oversight, as state governments pass far more of the laws that influence voters' lives than the federal government does.¹

I stress that the primary purpose of this questionnaire is to inform voters about what the job of a legislator is like. It was not intended as a political exercise. For this reason, I did not include questions about specific policy issues or bills. I have conducted previous research aimed at understanding Utah legislators' ideology and legislative habits; readers interested in that sort of analysis should examine that other research.² The purpose of the present research was to understand what legislators do, from their own perspective. The questionnaire sought to address the following:

- How many hours do legislators work? How do they spend this time?
- Broadly speaking, how do legislators choose which bills to support?
- What are the most effective ways for constituents to communicate with legislators?
- Do constituents exert meaningful influence, or must legislators rely on their own judgment?
- Which steps in the legislative process do legislators find most influential?

Exact question wordings are available in an appendix included at the end of this report.

Summary of responses

Here I present two numbers for each question: The mean (average) response, and the number of responses received. For items using a +1 to +5 scale in the questionnaire, responses have been rescaled to a -2 to +2 scale; see the appendix for details. This section is not meant as a definitive analysis of the results. It provides only a very brief preview. These results will be discussed more thoroughly in future posts to UtahDataPoints.com and in other forthcoming publications. Note that the questions are not necessarily formatted the same here as on the actual questionnaire; for exact question wording and formatting, see this report's appendix.

¹ For a quick demonstration of this point, see <http://wp.me/p1czTf-fk>. For a more thorough discussion, see Alan Rosenthal's book, *Heavy Lifting: The Job of the American Legislature*.

² A general portal to my research looking at legislators' voting behavior is online (<http://adambrown.info/s/utleg>). See, in particular, entries on floor voting patterns, ideology scores, party batting averages, and party support scores. Voting profiles of individual legislators are available by clicking on "Legislator profiles."

How many hours per week do you devote to your work as a state legislator? This includes any activities you would not engage in if not for your elected position, including time spent meeting with constituents, planning a campaign, researching bills, and so on.

How many hours per week during the General Session?	64.6 hours (n=46)
How many hours per week in the month before the General Session?	25.5 hours (n=46)
How many hours per week during the interim?	13.3 hours (n=39)

How many hours per week during the General Session do you spend on the following activities?

Meeting with activists, lobbyists, and other stakeholders	9.4 hours (n=45)
Interacting with constituents (in person or otherwise)	9.4 hours (n=45)
Researching and crafting legislation (bills, amendments, etc)	11.4 hours (n=45)
Attending committee hearings or floor time	31.6 hours (n=45)
Attending other meetings with legislators (including caucuses)	9.1 hours (n=45)

How many hours per week during the interim do you spend on the following activities?

Meeting with activists, lobbyists, and other stakeholders	3.3 hours (n=38)
Interacting with constituents (in person or otherwise)	4.7 hours (n=38)
Researching and crafting legislation (bills, amendments, etc)	3.3 hours (n=36)
Attending interim committees and other required meetings	4.8 hours (n=39)
Attending other meetings with legislators (including caucuses)	2.8 hours (n=36)

On what percentage of the bills considered by the Utah Legislature would you estimate that your constituents have an opinion? Please write a number between 0 and 100 for each type of bill.

On most bills?	23.1% (n=45)
On bills dealing with firearms?	51.1% (n=45)
On bills dealing with taxation?	55.0% (n=45)
On bills dealing with gay rights?	41.7% (n=45)
On bills dealing with education?	62.4% (n=45)
On bills dealing with immigration?	43.2% (n=44)

Suppose many of your constituents were urging you to vote one way on a bill, but your own judgment was leading you the other way. How would you vote? Please circle a number [where -2 means “follow constituents,” 0 is neutral, and +2 means “follow own judgment”]. Answer separately for each type of bill.

On most bills?	+0.43 (n=44)
On bills dealing with firearms?	+0.52 (n=43)
On bills dealing with taxation?	+0.40 (n=43)
On bills dealing with gay rights?	+0.73 (n=44)
On bills dealing with education?	+0.23 (n=44)
On bills dealing with immigration?	+0.50 (n=44)

Suppose a constituent wanted you to know his or her feelings about a particular issue. How effective would each of the following methods be? Please circle a number [where -2 means “totally ineffective,” 0 is neutral, and +2 means “highly effective”].

Speaking with you on the telephone	+1.22 (n=45)
Sending an email to your @le.utah.gov account	+0.98 (n=44)
Communicating with you via Facebook or Twitter	-0.05 (n=44)
Joining a group like the NRA, UEA, PCE, or SUWA	-0.65 (n=43)
Attending your town hall meeting or other event	+1.40 (n=45)
Speaking with you one-on-one	+1.71 (n=45)
Sending you a letter by postal mail	+0.67 (n=45)
Participating in a large rally outside the capitol	-1.14 (n=44)

Suppose a particular group took a clear position for or against a particular bill. How influential would that position be on your floor vote? Please circle a number [where -2 means “not at all influential,” 0 is neutral, and +2 means “highly influential”].

Your party’s state chair	-0.32 (n=44)
Your party’s chamber leadership team	+0.30 (n=44)
A constituent who is also a party delegate	+0.36 (n=44)
A constituent who belongs to your party	+0.18 (n=44)
A constituent who does not belong to your party	-0.34 (n=44)
Your local newspaper’s editorial board	-0.66 (n=44)
A relevant interest group	-0.05 (n=44)

How important is each of the following in shaping the bills that the Utah Legislature passes (or does not pass)? Please circle a number [where -2 means “not at all influential,” 0 is neutral, and +2 means “highly influential”].

Your chamber’s Rules Committee	+0.38 (n=45)
The standing committee that hears the bill	+1.38 (n=45)
Discussions of the bill in party caucus meetings	+0.42 (n=45)
Discussions of the bill in party leadership meetings	+0.30 (n=44)
Floor debate about the bill in the House	+0.71 (n=45)
Floor debate about the bill in the Senate	+0.70 (n=44)

Appendix

On the following two pages you will find the question wording exactly as it was presented to legislators.

Several questions use a 5-point response scale. To make the written questionnaire simpler to complete, these were presented to legislators using a 1 to 5 scale. For purposes of analysis (including in this report), those responses were rescaled to a -2 to $+2$ scale. This rescaling simplifies analysis and interpretation greatly, since 0 becomes the neutral point, with negative and positive numbers reflecting a preference for one side or the other of the scale.

How many hours per week do you devote to your work as a state legislator? This includes any activities you would not engage in if not for your elected position, including time spent meeting with constituents, planning a campaign, researching bills, and so on.

How many hours per week during the General Session?	_____	hours per week
How many hours per week in the month before the General Session?	_____	hours per week
How many hours per week during the interim?	_____	hours per week

How many hours per week **during the General Session** do you spend on the following activities?

Meeting with activists, lobbyists, and other stakeholders	_____	hours per week
Interacting with constituents (in person or otherwise)	_____	hours per week
Researching and crafting legislation (bills, amendments, etc)	_____	hours per week
Attending committee hearings or floor time	_____	hours per week
Attending other meetings with legislators (including caucuses)	_____	hours per week

How many hours per week **during the interim** do you spend on the following activities?

Meeting with activists, lobbyists, and other stakeholders	_____	hours per week
Interacting with constituents (in person or otherwise)	_____	hours per week
Researching and crafting legislation (bills, amendments, etc)	_____	hours per week
Attending interim committees and other required meetings	_____	hours per week
Attending other meetings with legislators (including caucuses)	_____	hours per week

On what percentage of the bills considered by the Utah Legislature would you estimate that **your constituents** have an opinion? Please write a number between 0 and 100 for each type of bill.

On most bills?	_____	%
On bills dealing with firearms?	_____	%
On bills dealing with taxation?	_____	%
On bills dealing with gay rights?	_____	%
On bills dealing with education?	_____	%
On bills dealing with immigration?	_____	%

Suppose many of your constituents were urging you to vote one way on a bill, but your own judgment was leading you the other way. **How would you vote?** Please circle a number between 1 and 5. Answer separately for each type of bill.

	Follow constituents					Follow own judgment				
On most bills?	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
On bills dealing with firearms?	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
On bills dealing with taxation?	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
On bills dealing with gay rights?	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
On bills dealing with education?	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
On bills dealing with immigration?	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Suppose a constituent wanted you to know his or her feelings about a particular issue. **How effective would each of the following methods be?** Please circle a number between 1 and 5.

	Totally ineffective					Highly effective				
Speaking with you on the telephone	1	2	3	4	5					
Sending an email to your @le.utah.gov account	1	2	3	4	5					
Communicating with you via Facebook or Twitter	1	2	3	4	5					
Joining a group like the NRA, UEA, PCE, or SUWA	1	2	3	4	5					
Attending your town hall meeting or other event	1	2	3	4	5					
Speaking with you one-on-one	1	2	3	4	5					
Sending you a letter by postal mail	1	2	3	4	5					
Participating in a large rally outside the capitol	1	2	3	4	5					

Suppose a particular group took a clear position for or against a particular bill. **How influential would that position be on your floor vote?** Please circle a number between 1 and 5 for each group.

	Not at all influential					Highly influential				
Your party's state chair	1	2	3	4	5					
Your party's chamber leadership team	1	2	3	4	5					
A constituent who is also a party delegate	1	2	3	4	5					
A constituent who belongs to your party	1	2	3	4	5					
A constituent who does not belong to your party	1	2	3	4	5					
Your local newspaper's editorial board	1	2	3	4	5					
A relevant interest group	1	2	3	4	5					

How important is each of the following in shaping the bills that the Utah Legislature passes (or does not pass)? Please circle a number between 1 and 5.

	Not at all influential					Highly influential				
Your chamber's Rules Committee	1	2	3	4	5					
The standing committee that hears the bill	1	2	3	4	5					
Discussions of the bill in party caucus meetings	1	2	3	4	5					
Discussions of the bill in party leadership meetings	1	2	3	4	5					
Floor debate about the bill in the House	1	2	3	4	5					
Floor debate about the bill in the Senate	1	2	3	4	5					

To assist us in analyzing the results, please circle your party: Republican Democrat

Please also circle your chamber: House Senate

How many years have you served in the Legislature? 0-4 years 5-9 years 10+ years