

Washington State Legislature: A Case Study in Civility and Politics

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Washington State Legislative Service Project

Examines the Washington state legislative process and the perceptions and attitudes of a variety of participants and stakeholders connected to the Washington state legislature.

- Legislators who served during the period 1990 to 2009
- Legislative staff
- Legislative interns from the last ten years
- Lobbyists
- Members of the media
- Registered voters
- College students

Legislator Service Perspectives

Benefits

Ability to represent and help their constituents

Learn the legislative process in-depth

Influence the crafting of legislation

Access to important policy influencers

Professional growth

Challenges

Separation from family

Short election cycle

Persistently tight schedules

Hyper-partisanship, too frequent display of disrespect and incivility

Poor public policy outcomes

What is Legislative Civility



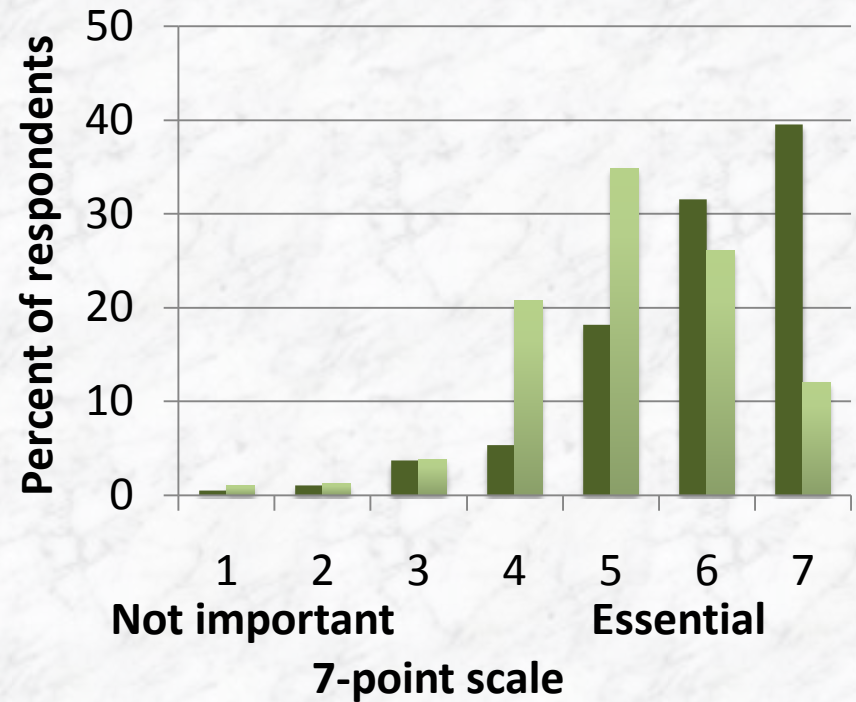
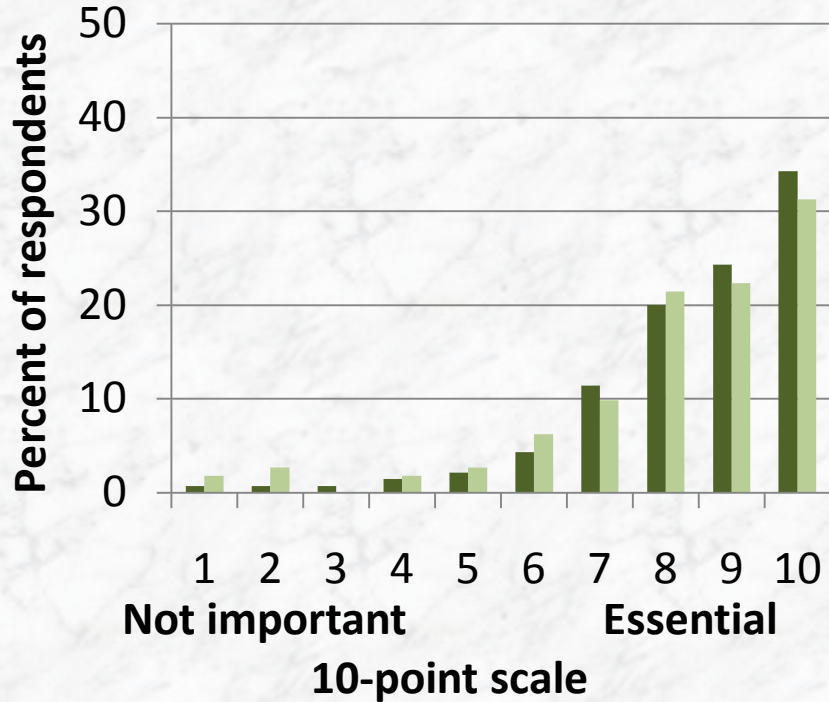
Mutual respect

Interest in other's perspective

Doesn't require agreement

Recognition that you may be wrong

How Important is Civility in Producing Good Policy Outcomes



■ Legislator

■ Lobbyist

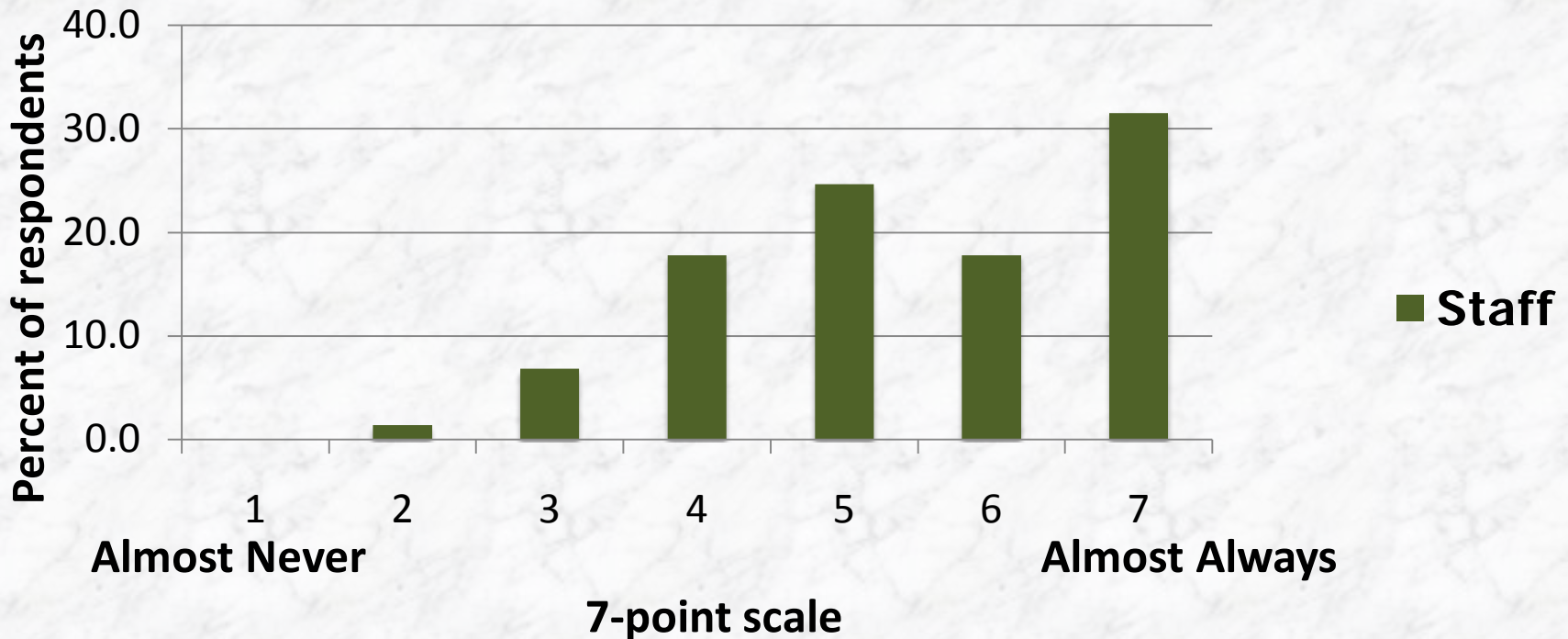
■ Voter

■ Student

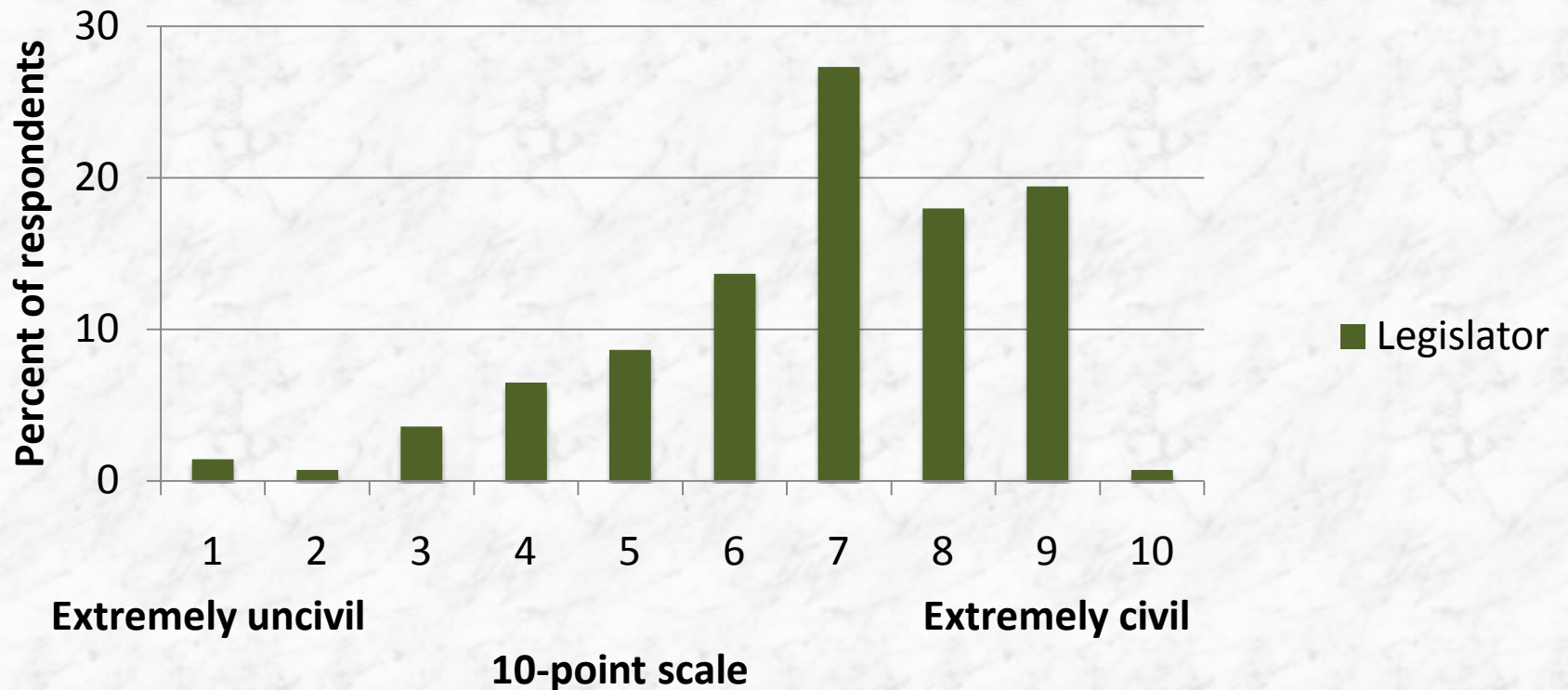
Does Bipartisan Collaboration Improve the Effectiveness of Legislative Sessions?

Legislator: Yes – 95% No – 5%

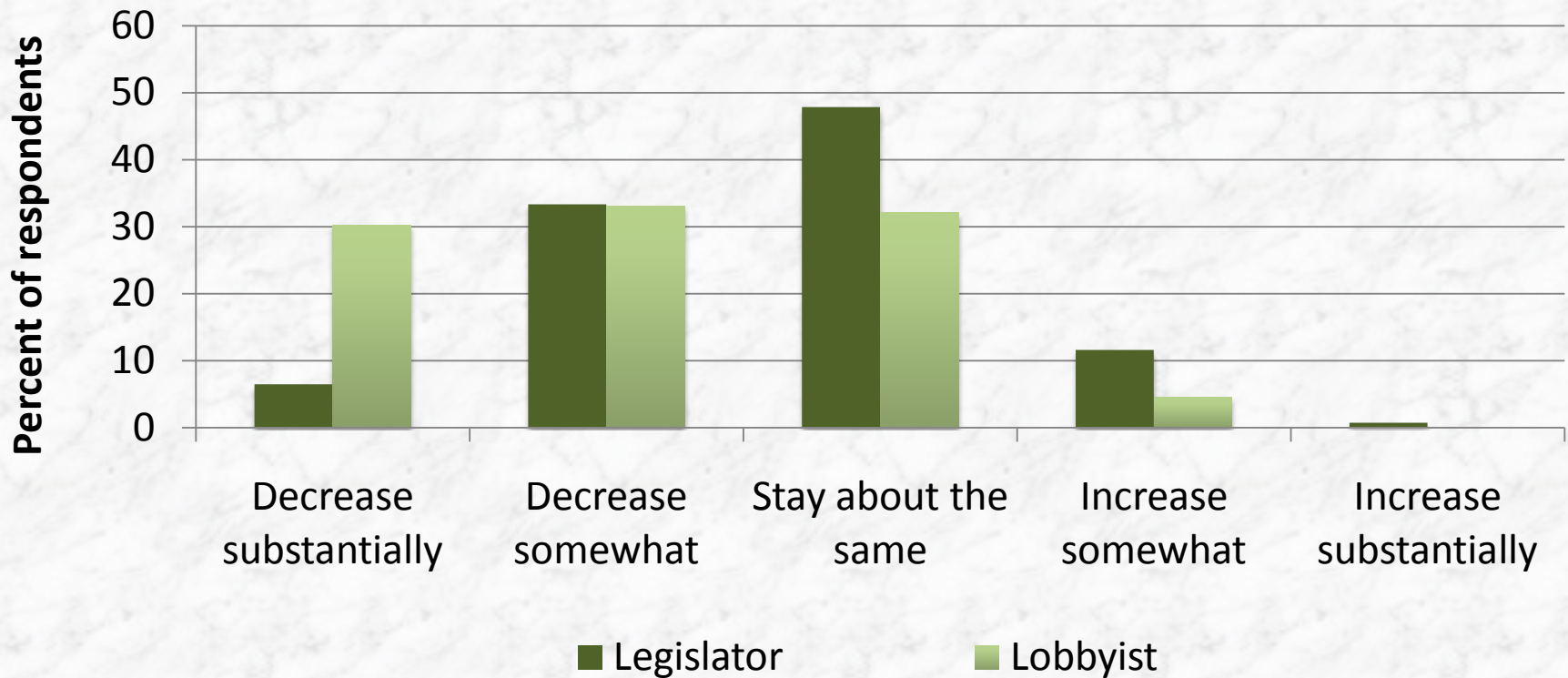
Lobbyist: Yes – 81% No – 19%



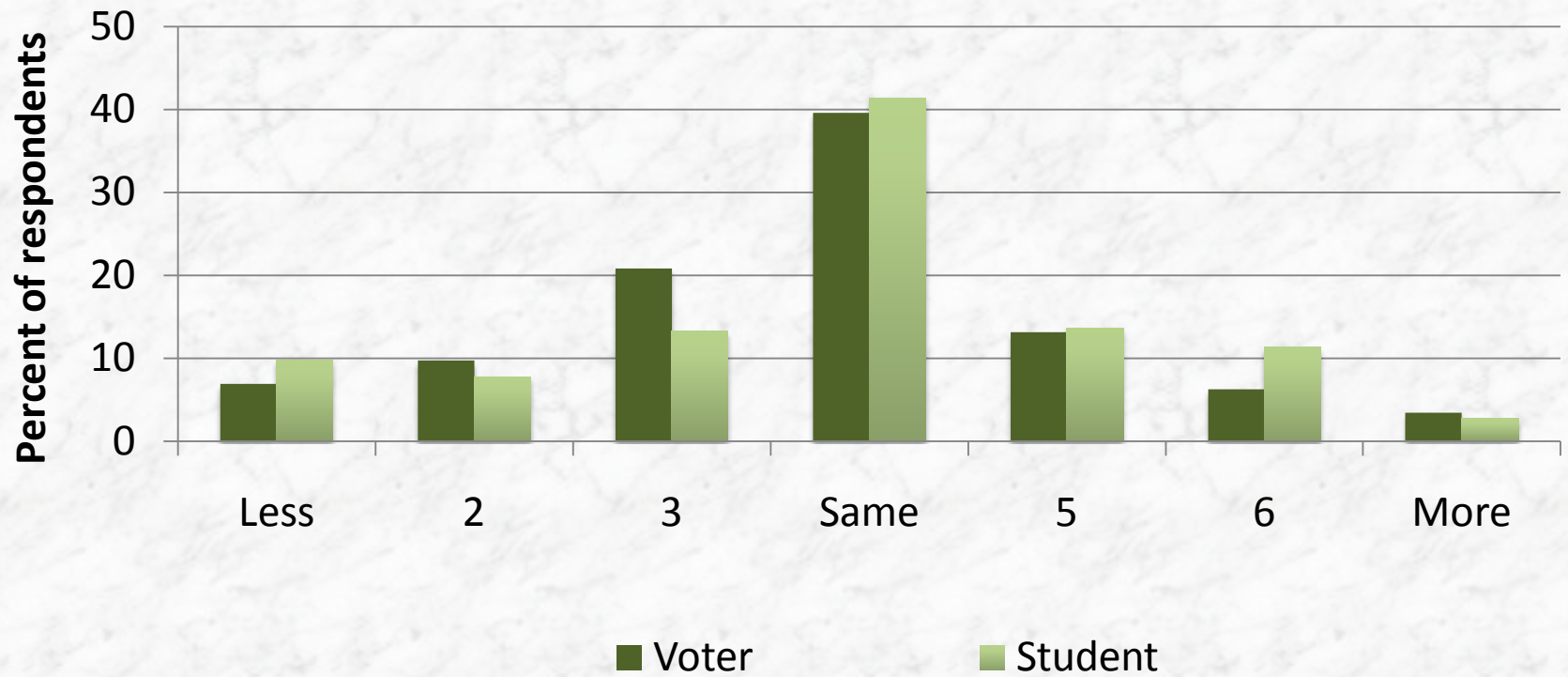
How Civil was the Legislature During the Legislator's Tenure?



Changes in Legislative Civility – During the Legislator’s Tenure



Changes in Legislative Civility – During the Last Ten Years



Bipartisan Collaboration

Hindrances

- Party and caucus leadership influence
- Pressure from lobbyists/special interest groups
- Focusing on re-election
- Majority vs. Minority (especially with super majorities)
- Differences in party ideology and perspective
- Lack of personal relationships between legislators
- Not working in a professional manner/lack of respect for other legislators
- Focusing on making the other party look bad

Bipartisan Collaboration

Encouraged by

- Developing personal relationships with other legislators
- Maintaining mutual respect/courtesy/civility
- Working in committees and study groups
- When the vote separation between majority and minority is small
- Crisis/disasters
- Leadership who are inclusive of both parties
- Legislators who focus on making a difference in their community and state

Civility Factors

Party Caucus

Smaller vote separation between majority/minority increases civility
Plan for ideological differences

Party Leadership

Inclusive leaders are viewed as more civil
Structuring committee seating/ working groups

Legislator Relationships

Importance of personal relationships
View all legislators as valuable

Professionalization of the Legislature

Increased time requirements on legislators
Decrease in non partisan staff

Civility Factors

Legislators' Residences During Session

Legislators' Families Joining Them During Session

Transportation Changes

Technological Changes

Televising of sessions

Computers/e-mail/text messaging

Civility Factors

Legislator Demographics

gender, election vote %, length of service, party

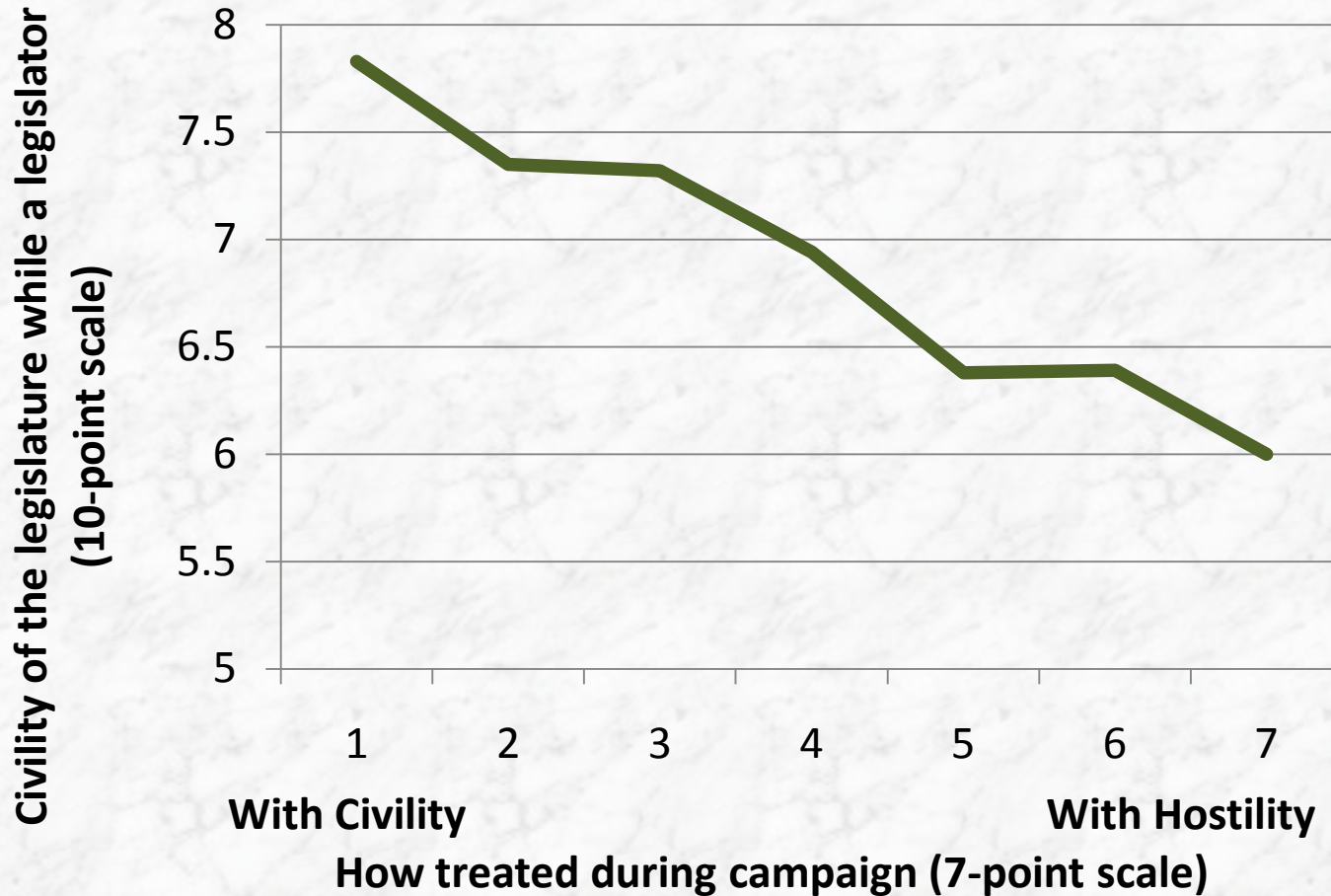
Legislative District Demographics

legislator composition, turnover rate, region, density

Session Demographics

majority/minority, senate/house, date, majority vote lead

Campaign Incivility Carries Over to Legislative Sessions



Civility Factors

Is Being a Legislator a Worthy Calling?

Legislators' Perspective

Citizens' Perspective

Incivility as it Relates to Political Discrimination among New Young Voters

Political discrimination has become the accepted outlet for socially unacceptable discriminatory behavior.

Political Discrimination

What Types of Political Discrimination are Acceptable

How Does Political Discrimination Compare to Other Types of Discrimination

Civility

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Civility starts face-to-face

Civility requires time and effort to produce benefits

Look for opportunities to promote civility

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