

***Representation & Accountability in American Legislatures***  
**Book Outline**

Steven Rogers  
Post-Doctoral Fellow  
Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions  
Vanderbilt University

*CSDI Participants: On Friday, I look forward to sharing my plans for the book project I intend to pursue in the coming year. This document outlines planned chapters of the manuscript. I welcome feedback and comments on all chapters. Thoughts on Chapters 2 through 5 would be particularly helpful, as these are largely incomplete and will be the focus of my research in the coming year.*

State legislators have recently been recalled for controversial collective bargaining agreements while making headlines for redefining the institution of marriage. Theories of elections predict that legislators should represent their constituents' interests on these issues. Otherwise, voters will hold them accountable for their actions. For most legislatures in the United States, we, however, know relatively little regarding whether or not this is the case. Despite the importance of state-level policy making, it is largely unclear the extent to which elections are a sufficient mechanism for representation in American legislatures.

In *Representation & Accountability in American Legislatures*, I explain legislators' and voters' behavior as they relate to state legislative elections. Using the largest collection of state legislative roll-call data and surveys, I evaluate the levels of representation in American legislatures and whether legislators are held accountable for how they perform. The manuscript's introduction presents the book's argument that state legislators have little control over their elections and empirically outlines the puzzles regarding legislative representation, voter knowledge, and electoral accountability that the subsequent chapters more systematically address. The following describes each of these chapters.

The first three substantive chapters focus on representation in American legislatures. Chapter 2 examines how well state legislators across the country represent their individual districts. I compare district-level measures of state legislator and voter ideology from every state across a ten year period to evaluate theories of representation. First, I use state legislators' ideal points to assess how representation varies under different institutional settings, such as legislatures that are more professional or have more powerful Speakers. Second, I assess how legislators represent their districts concerning recent issues prominent in state legislatures such as collective bargaining, payday loans, and gay rights. I collect and analyze votes in the legislature and electorate related to statewide referenda to directly compare state legislators' roll-calls with their district's opinion on the

exact same issues. These analyses will provide a comprehensive cross-state study of representation in American legislatures.

Chapter 3 investigates district-level representation in greater detail for a subset of legislatures by taking advantage of state-level surveys. I link thousands of voters' reported positions on state-level legislation to the roll-call records of their state representatives to estimate ideal points for both legislators and voters on a common ideological scale. If elections produce representative state legislators, measures of state representatives' ideology should be indistinguishable from their constituencies. This portion of the book manuscript has already been funded, approved by the IRB, and had polls fielded. I am currently identifying the legislative districts of survey respondents to create district-level measures of ideology.

Chapter 4 uses variation in state-level electoral institutions to evaluate whether elections serve as a solution to an adverse selection (e.g. Fearon 1999) or moral hazard problem (e.g. Ferejohn 1986). I use state legislative term limits to identify if state legislators' ideological representation changes when the threat of electoral sanction is absent. If legislators' ideology is stable - regardless of whether they can seek reelection due to term limits - it supports the proposition that successful representation is due to selection rather than sanction. If a term limited legislator's ideology changes when he or she no longer faces the threat of electoral punishment, it serves as evidence that legislators' representation is attributable to the fear of electoral sanction from their current constituency. All data for this portion of the book has already been collected.

Having established whether state legislators act in accordance with their constituents' preferences, the focus of the book shifts to evaluating the extent to which elections remove unrepresentative legislators from office. To effectively sanction or select their representatives, voters first must know who is responsible for making policy. The analyses in Chapter 5 employ both state and national surveys to evaluate what voters know about their state legislature and why. Only 11% of Tennesseans, for example, can identify their state legislator, and approximately half of voters across the country do not know which party controls their state house. In this chapter, I show how institutional and media contexts influence levels of voter knowledge. Voters are less likely to identify the state house majority party under divided government, but they often confuse which party controls their legislature for the party that controls Congress. A federalist system of government that employs separation of powers, therefore, appears to make it difficult for voters to identify who to blame or reward at the state-level.

The final four chapters address state legislators' reelection prospects. Chapter 6 begins where electoral competition typically starts: a candidate's decision to challenge the incumbent. Rarely do more than 60% of state representatives face a major party challenger, providing voters relatively

few opportunities to hold their state legislator accountable. This chapter shows how institutional and dynamic political factors affect whether an incumbent faces an opponent. State legislators from professionalized legislatures and ideologically moderate districts encounter opposition candidates more frequently, but my analysis uniquely provides evidence that challengers also take strategic advantage of favorable economic and political conditions, such as unpopular presidencies.<sup>1</sup>

Following this study of why challengers run, I evaluate the extent to which voters hold state representatives accountable. In Chapter 7, I use new district-level measures of public opinion and voter ideology to determine if state legislators who cast unpopular roll-call votes or provide poor ideological representation of their districts receive lower vote shares. I find evidence of a relationship between legislators' ideological positions and electoral outcomes in less than half of states, and in most of these states, safe state legislative seats make it difficult to throw unrepresentative state legislators out of office. Overall, there is little evidence that most state legislators face meaningful electoral ramifications for unrepresentative legislative behavior.<sup>2</sup>

I probe the issue of accountability further in Chapter 8 where I investigate how voters take advantage of party cues to reward or punish state legislative parties and their members for how they perform. I use election results and surveys since the 1970s to show that state-level economic conditions, state policy performance, and voters' assessments of the legislature matter relatively little in state legislative elections, and presidential evaluations better predict election outcomes. Levels of voter information appear to further diminish the prospects for electoral accountability in state legislatures. Even when perceiving the legislature to have performed well, misinformed voters mistakenly reward the minority party. Together, the analyses from Chapters 6 through 8 provide little evidence that how state legislators perform in office matters for how they perform in elections.<sup>3</sup>

*Representation & Accountability in American Legislatures* will be the most comprehensive study of dyadic representation and accountability in state legislatures. Three of the four chapters that focus on electoral accountability are nearly finished, and I have collected most of the necessary data for Chapters 2 - 5.

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<sup>1</sup>Draft of Chapter: [www.stevenmrogers.com/Statements/Rogers-Challenger.pdf](http://www.stevenmrogers.com/Statements/Rogers-Challenger.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Draft of Chapter: [www.stevenmrogers.com/Statements/Rogers-IndividualAccountability.pdf](http://www.stevenmrogers.com/Statements/Rogers-IndividualAccountability.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Draft of Chapter: [www.stevenmrogers.com/Statements/Rogers-CollectiveAccountability.pdf](http://www.stevenmrogers.com/Statements/Rogers-CollectiveAccountability.pdf)