



Determinants of effort in Argentine Congress

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Abstract

This study explores the determinants of the effort of Argentine legislators. An index of legislative effort is constructed using four objective measures: floor attendance, committee attendance, number of bills introduced, and number of bills ratified. Results show that serving additional years in Congress has a negative impact on legislative effort. However, effectiveness (as measured by the ration of bills ratified to bills introduced) increases with the time served in Congress. Being part of the majority party has the highest effect on the proportion of bills ratified and bills introduced. It is valuable to have the effort index disaggregated in its components in order to better understand the dynamics of Argentine Congress.

1. Introduction

In every democratic system, citizens want to know how much effort the elected representative will put into her job, once she is in Congress. Political economy literature analyzes the factors that affect the performance of politicians and the goals they seek once they are in the job position.

According to Weissert (1991), “A legislator’s effectiveness is expected to be a function of his or her attributes and skills, the formal position the legislator holds in the legislature and the commitment of personal resources the legislator is willing to make to the legislative process.”

In this thesis I intend to identify the main correlates of the effort of Argentine legislators. To do so, I use data from the Argentine Congress from 1983 to 1995. I measure the effort of politicians using an index similar to the one used in Dal Bó and Rossi (2011). This effort index is constructed using individual legislator data on floor attendance, committee attendance, number of laws introduced and number of bills ratified. I try to identify the determinants of effort using a series of legislators’ characteristics such as age, sex, gender, having a college degree, or being a lawyer. Furthermore, I evaluate the relationship between effort and a set of political characteristics (being leader of the chamber, representing the majority party, the size of the district they come from, and the political security in the office).

My approach is not novel. Vast literature has explored some of these concerns, with different results depending on how effort or effectiveness are defined, the idiosyncratic characteristics of the Chamber and which state the legislators are serving. Legislators’ goals are varied, so it is valuable to have the effort index disaggregated in its components in order to better understand the dynamics of Argentine Congress.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents a quick review on previous literature related to how each of the attributes and skills affects political activity. Section 3 presents the data and main descriptive statistics. Section 4 lays out the econometric approach and reports the main results from the House. Section 5 shows a robustness check. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

1. Previous Literature

1.1. Effectiveness

There are various approaches to the measurement of legislators' performance commitment and effort such as number of bills introduced (Matthews, 1960; Olson and Nonidez, 1972; Frantzich, 1979), number of terms served (Miquel and Snyder 2006), number of bills ratified (Frantzich, 1979), formal leadership position (Miquel and Snyder 2006), public information (Miquel and Snyder 2006; Weissert, 1991). Other authors (Wawro, 2000; Schiller, 1995) use bill introduction and amendment activity to construct "entrepreneurship" scores. Weissert (1991), for instance, measures legislative effectiveness by inviting knowledgeable sources to identify the elite power, by asking legislators to rate every state congressman on a scale of 1 to 10. In his study, the number of bills introduced has a positive significant impact on effectiveness score.

Frantzich (1979) measures power in the U.S. House of Representatives by the ability of a member of Congress to get bills enacted into law. Effort involved in the Chamber is not only reflected in writing and proposing laws, but also in getting approved their projects in the chamber. The author wants to determine the sources of legislative effectiveness, if it comes from diligent effort or depends more on the resources associated with specific positions or characteristics. He proposes that congressmen have a resource allocation problem in the decision to expend effort proposing and promoting legislation. The time and effort required are balanced against the expected personal, political, and public relation payoffs. In sum, this paper focuses on the mental accounting of legislative activity cost-benefit ratio the legislator does to carry out his job. "Legislation may be introduced for purposes unrelated to the desire to see it passed; that is, the act of introduction may serve personal and political goals in and of itself." Frantzich (1979) proposes four theories that imply different underlying goals and distinguishing characteristics of the House members.

First, by the *Partisan Perquisite* theory, members of the majority party are viewed and view themselves as having somewhat more responsibility for the legislative output of the chamber than members of the minority. They may as well foresee their advantage in controlling the legislative process and are encouraged to put their ideas into law. A second possible explanation the author proposes for legislative effort rests on the *Positional Perquisite* theory, which holds that leaders of the House of Representatives are called by interest groups to introduce legislation (Berman, 1964; Wright, 1976). Another theory

(*Experience and Political Security*) claims that if a member serves more years in the House, less he must worry about electoral defeat and can safely expend his effort on internal legislative activities rather than externally oriented reelection ones (Davidson, 1969). For most congressmen, the desire for reelection controls behavior. The *Electoral Strategy* suggested by Mayhew (1975) holds that insecure congressmen use bill introduction as a method of advertising having taken a position on positively evaluated issues, and claiming credit for doing what was expected from them.

There are a few authors that consider attendance as a variable to evaluate legislators' effort into their job. Fett (1996) considers absenteeism mainly as a premeditated strategy. His starting point is in the 1970's when absenteeism on roll call votes in the U.S. House declines sharply. He suggests that this phenomenon is due to the implementation of a "recording teller" in the Committee on the Whole. This evidences that "legislators, as a group, see the potential negative electoral effects of absenteeism on their careers and that they respond accordingly by missing fewer votes." Fett (1996) sustains that when citizens have easier access to their representatives' decisions, they have less room to deviate from what they perceive to be the electorally tenable position.

With the opportunity to register their policy preferences publicly, there are strategic reasons to miss a vote. For instance, the author proposes that "if the president's positions on issues have weight in the voting calculus of legislator, the median percentage of missed votes on issues of presidential concern should be lower than the median percentage of missed votes on nonpresidential votes for each year studied. This result is expected because issues of presidential concern get coverage by their very nature of being presidential." Issues on which the media gets involved, because it has presidential concern or it is a significant national matter, legislators are less willing to miss the roll call.

Other authors claim that the effort of attending Congress is just a decision of distributing their time budget. For instance, Fett (1996) mentions that there were some freshmen that were working hard in their district to secure their seats in the House and as a result they missed votes. Furthermore, Zupan (1991) also investigates roll call attendance rates in Congress and he expects lower attendance rates when votes reflect national policy-making issues, participating in such votes consumes time that the legislator could otherwise devote to local benefit-seeking. He argues that it is generally recognized that with the growth in

the size of the federal government, an increase has come in the time the legislator devotes to local benefit-seeking relative to national policy-making.

1.2. Age

Many authors discuss the effect of age on political activity. Some argue that it is based on biological theory: when a legislator is young, the effect of another year is positive and then, it gradually has a negative impact; expecting legislative effectiveness to be curvilinear (Schubert, 1998; Weissert (1991)). Concerning the investigation, the curvilinear shape reaches its peak in different ages. Generally, there is an increase of effectiveness in the thirties and early forties; it remains stable, and in the late fifties or in the sixties declines. However, Fengler (1980) holds that a legislature with many retirees has the benefit of members able to devote much of their time to legislative duties as compared to younger state legislators who are more likely to be distracted by other responsibilities. In his study which comprised all members serving in the 1973-74 Vermont state legislature, younger legislators proposed twice as much legislation as their older colleagues. He argues that this is because they are more motivated by their career ambitions. According to Eisdorfer (1969) "fear of failure" replaces the "need to achieve" as a motivating force in older persons.

However, if we are interested in the maximization of ratified bills, older legislators have the highest ratio of bills introduced to bills passed. On Fengler's study (1980), he finds that older legislators more than double the average number of terms served by younger ones. Holding more time in a political position results in higher knowledge and experience of the Congress, not only by learning the bureaucratic aspects of the Chamber, but also by establishing useful personal and professional connections that might facilitate the enacting of projects. (For more effects of Tenure, see Section 1.4.)

Regarding attendance rates, Fengler (1980) states that voting records of Vermont legislators show that absenteeism increases with age from less than one absence per young legislator (45 years or less) to approximately one and one-half absences for legislators over 70.

On the other hand, Zupan (1991) expected age to have a positive effect on roll call attendance rates given that older individuals, due to their schooling in an earlier era of

politics, are less willing to pursue narrow, local benefit-seeking at the expense of national policy-making (Fenno, 1982).

1.3. Education

Matthews (1984) states that almost everywhere, legislators are better educated, possess higher-status occupations, and have more privileged backgrounds than the people they represent. He additionally quotes Harold Laski when he says that legislators are far from being "an average assortment of ordinary men".¹

Some of the skills of legislators come from having a college degree. For instance, a large amount of literature refers to the dominance of lawyers in American politics. Hain and Piereson (1975) find that legal skills facilitate these professionals to move from state legislature to other offices at a much greater rate than non-lawyers, as a result of their ability to advance to "lawyers-only" positions. Legislative service has a greater political career value for lawyers than for non-lawyers and they are much more likely to achieve their political goals. Evidently, many lawyers choose to perform their career in legislative matters; since 1789 they have constituted from 40 to 65 percent of the members of the U.S. Congress (Bogue et al., 1976). Fortunately, lawyer legislators possess the qualities or characteristics needed for rating by Martindale-Hubbel to a greater degree than the general law population (Derge, 1962).²

David Derge (1962) analyses the level of activity in the legislative process that these professionals have by examining their bills sponsorship. Lawyers sponsored more than their position share in the Indiana General Assembly for 1957, measured as the percentage of all bills introduced in relationship to the number of seats held. The average number of bills sponsored by lawyers exceeds the average number of bills sponsored by non-lawyers

¹ Harold Joseph Laski (June 30, 1893 – March 24, 1950) was a British Marxist, political theorist, economist, author, and lecturer, who served as the chairman of the Labour Party during 1945-1946, and was a professor at the LSE from 1926 to 1950.

² LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell International Law Directory is the primary source of information on the global legal profession and a trusted and reliable resource for the identification, evaluation and selection of lawyers and law firms around the world. The only attempt to rate the ability of attorneys through the use of opinions of professional colleagues is contained in the annual Martindale-Hubbell listings. Age, practical experience, nature and length of practice, and other relevant qualifications are considered.

in all cases examined. However, legislation sponsored by House lawyers was not much more successful in getting passed into law than those sponsored by non-lawyers.

Weissert (1991) and Haynie (2002) analyze North Carolina's legislature and show that lawyers are more effective. Miquel and Snyder (2006) claim that having a lawyer degree has larger impact on effectiveness than being chair of a powerful committee.

1.4. Tenure

Matthews (1984) stated that national legislators were becoming "professionals" or "careerists". At the sub national level the trend was also turning toward longer periods of service and greater stability of membership (Shin and Jackson, 1979, for American state legislatures).

This practice of achieving seniority could facilitate their way to get an important seat on a committee. Empirically, Fengler (1980) holds that multi-term legislators do initiate more legislation than single-term legislators, but they also have more legislation rejected.

Furthermore, Miquel and Snyder (2006) found in North Carolina's House of Representatives for the period 1977-2001 that effectiveness³ rises sharply with tenure. They analyze where this increase in effectiveness comes from and conclude that it is not simply due to electoral attrition and selective retirement, but to learning-by-doing. These authors have also found evidence that a significant amount of "positive sorting" occurs in the legislature, with highly talented legislators moving faster into positions of responsibility and power.

Weissert (1991) and Haynie (2002) also find that effectiveness increases with seniority: the number of terms served in the legislature has a positive significant impact on effectiveness (between 1.3 and 1.9 points over 10). This last finding coincides with Hamm, Harmel, and Thompson's (1983) work that analyzes Texas and South Carolina's state legislatures. Frantzich (1979) also reports that legislative effort increases with seniority.

³ Effectiveness measured by North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research surveys to legislators, lobbyists and journalists.

Following Lott (1987), Zupan (1991) employs congressmen's tenure in office and age as explanatory variables. His hypothesis was that if tenure reflects security in office brought about by the above-average pursuit of local benefit-seeking, tenure should have a negative impact on roll call attendance rates and involvement in national policy-making.

1.5. Gender

In the United States between 1917 and 1964, only 2 percent of all members of Congress (Matthews, 1984) and only 4.5 percent of all state legislators (1920-1961) were women (Werner, 1966, 1968; Kohn, 1980). Some authors report their theories about the historically low participation of women in Congress. Kirkpatrick (1974), on the basis of her study of U.S. state legislators, suggested a relation between this fact and the sex role system that society establishes, especially in education and the job market. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence on differential performance by gender. Duverger (1955) noted that women's lack of desire to be active in politics is identified as an important factors accounting for the small number of women holding elective office. Some other explanations place the responsibility for participation or lack of it on women themselves ignoring the social context of political behavior. Duverger (1955) suggested that male opposition, similar to that operating in the job market, keeps women out of politics.

1.6. Leader

Party leaders in state legislatures play a fundamental role in daily operations of the session (Rosenthal, 1981). Committee chairmen have an advantage on the control over the agenda, thus over future legislation. Principally, they have considerable authority over the success or failure of legislators' bills (Hamm, 1980; Francis, 1989). Weissert (1991) holds that in addition to formal committee leadership, membership on key committees is expected to be a positive predictor of legislative effectiveness. Weissert (1991) and Haynie (2002) in their analysis of North Carolina's legislature also find that effectiveness is higher for members who hold leadership positions. This last finding coincides with Hamm, Harmel and Thompson's (1983) work that examines Texas and South Carolina's state legislatures, who find that leadership positions are strong predictors of higher legislative activity.

As the positional perquisite approach anticipates, House leaders are somewhat more likely to rank high on bill sponsorship than non-leaders (Frantzich, 1979). In addition, leaders introduce more legislation than non-leaders, with much of these accounted for by subcommittee chairmen. Furthermore, although the numbers are rather small, Frantzich (1979) also finds that the most active members are low seniority leaders, possibly it was their extraordinary commitment to legislative effort that moved them into leadership positions ahead of the normal schedule.

1.7. Majority party

Miquel and Snyder (2006) notice that membership in the majority party has a large, positive impact on effectiveness even higher than the effect of becoming a chamber leader or powerful committee chair. Finally, they find out that effectiveness has a positive impact on incumbents' electoral success and on the probability of legislators moving to a privileged office.

In regard to attendance, Zupan (1991) finds that Members of a minority are more likely to show up to vote than members of the majority. Cohen and Noll (1988) argue that this fact is because constituents notice their representative's legislative role when an issue of concern to them is defeated than when it succeeds. Thus the opportunity cost to a legislator of abstaining when he is on the minority side is higher than the opportunity cost when he is part of the majority. However, in the estimates Zupan (1991) makes with a subsample of roll call votes in 1987, the latter fact does not appear to be driving his results.

These findings coincide with the *Partisan Perquisite* theory mentioned before. Members of the majority party feel as having somewhat more responsibility for the legislative output and foresee their advantage in controlling the legislative process and are encouraged to put their ideas into law.

2. Data

The data set contains yearly information on individual performance and characteristics of Argentine legislators that served Congress during the period February 1984 to December 1995.

In Argentina, the deputies are chosen from closed party lists using D'Hondt method of proportional representation in multimember districts. Deputies are allocated to the provinces based on their population, but each province receives a minimum of five deputies. 254 deputies were chosen in 1983 elections; half of them were randomly selected to serve a two-year term, so in 1985 new elections took place to renew half of the chamber. With two-year renewal of half of the chamber, the database includes 3728 observations corresponding to 833 legislators, one for each year every deputy performed.

The legislators' characteristics included are age, sex, having college degree and being lawyers. Other variables are the district they correspond to and its size, if they were representing the majority party at that moment, the number of terms/years served, if they were in an important position in the chamber and their position in the party ticket.

With the last one, a dummy variable (*Slackness*⁴) was developed to capture electoral safety as in Dal Bo and Rossi (2011). As they mention in their work, "representatives in Argentina are elected through a closed party list at the province level. Under this system, the degree of electoral safety depends on how high up in the party ticket a legislator finds herself." Depending on the party's vote share and the demographic factor of the district she represents, those close to the top positions face less risk of not entering the Congress in the next term if they are reelected.

An index of effort is constructed by principal component method. This includes four measures of legislative performance made available by the Argentine Congress: floor attendance (as percentage of legislative floor sessions), committee attendance (as percentage of committee sessions each legislator should have assisted to), the number of bills introduced by her and the number of those bills that was approved.

As reported in Dal Bó and Rossi (2011), "some legislators may seek to capture the attention of constituents by introducing a high number of bills. Others may care more strongly about policy, so they may introduce fewer bills but focus more on approval or on

⁴ *Slackness* takes the value equal to 1 if the legislator value of $(1 - \text{Order}/\text{Size})^{0.5}$ is over the median. Size is the total number of legislators that entered the House representing the district and Order is the position in which the representative entered the House in her district.

committee work. Floor attendance will reflect general involvement with the daily legislative business.”

Table 1 shows the main statistics of the variables involved in the model.

The average age of representatives in the House from 1983 to 1995 is 49.51 years old, younger than legislators in the U.S. House in 1957 with a mean of 51.73 years old (Zupan, 1991) and Vermont legislators serving in the 1973-74 state legislature, which median age is 58 years old (Fengler, 1980). The important fact of this result is that many of the latter were no longer occupationally active, contrary to most of Argentine legislators. This could have an impact on attendance due to the fact that if they are occupationally active, they could have much more issues to attend, whereas if they are retired they could intensively dedicate to their legislative job. On the other hand, Hain (1974) holds that the mean age of those expressing progressive⁵ ambitions (44.3 years) is significantly lower than of those expressing non-progressive ambitions (54.1 years). This finding could have positive effects on the effort done in the House by younger congressmen against older members.

As many others legislatures, women representation is extremely low in Argentine Congress. For the first 128 years, there were no women in U.S legislature. Until the 107th Congress (2001) less than 2 percent served as members. In that year, women made up 13.6 percent of the House membership (Rosenthal, 2002). The first term served by a woman in U.S Congress was in 1922. When Matthews (1984) was writing his article “*Legislative Recruitment and Legislative Careers*” there were 21 women in Congress (3.9 percent). Evidently, it is an extensive social progress congresses worldwide are doing. In Argentina the first woman being a legislator was in 1934. In December 1991, a “quota law” was established; party tickets should have a minimum of 30% of women running as candidates. Congresses are not statistically representative of population distribution, but it was necessary to implement an affirmative action so women’s substantive interests were strongly represented.

Miquel and Snyder (2006) statistics in North Carolinas’s House of Representatives for the period 1977-2001 note that the average tenure of its legislators is 3.67 years, while in

⁵ Hain (1974) classified a career as progressive if the legislator voluntarily sought or achieved an alternative office.

Argentina for the period analyzed is 3.116 years. However, Zupan (1991) states a mean tenure of 9.09 years for the U.S. House in 1987. Argentina and some Latin American countries have lower reelection rates than most legislatures. This holds what Jones and Saeigh (2002) say that “Argentine legislative careers are still quite short in international comparison, even after many years of sustained democratic rule.” In comparison to Latin American Congresses statistics done by Stein and Tommasi (2005) of legislators’ average experience, Argentina finds itself among the last three positions in the ranking (see Figure 1). Costa Rica and Mexico are in the last positions given that reelection is forbidden by their Constitution. Miquel and Snyder (2006) report a reelection rate of 89% in the period analyzed in North Carolinas’s House of Representatives, similar to Japan’s for 1963 to 1990 (91%) and higher than Brazil’s and Chile’s (70% and 76%), against Argentina’s which mean for the period analyzed is 21%. In contrast, during the twentieth century, the average U.S. House member served between five and six terms (Ornstein, Mann and Malbin, 1998).

In Latin America, the percentage of legislators with university education lies between 49.6% and 93.2% for Stein and Tommasi (2005), see Figure 2. Argentina, for the period 1983 to 1995, has 55.2% of college graduates. For instance, since 1789 lawyers in the U.S. Congress have constituted from 40 to 65 percent of the members (Bogue et al., 1976), higher than Argentine’s rate of 35% for the period analyzed.

There is little in literature about attendance rates in congresses. 87% was the mean roll call attendance rate in U.S. House Congressional for 1953 to 1987 (Zupan, 1991), higher than Argentine’s statistics (around 65%).

To have a reference of the numbers of bills introduced and passed by legislators I compare to Vermont’s statistics for 1973 and 1974 (Fengler, 1980). The average number of bills initiated per congressmen was 2.07 (against 3.072 in Argentina for the period analyzed) and the average of bills passed was 0.68 (against 0.160 in Argentina).

Jones and Saiegh (2002) state that the large number of Chamber committee assignments, 675 committee slots in the 2004 legislative period, required every member to fill an average of 2.63 slots. A typical Argentine deputy served on 4.5 committees, which is the highest in the ranking for Latin American Congresses in Stein and Tommasi (2005), see Figure 3. The authors declare that Argentine electoral rule has reduced legislator’s

incentives to specialize and to develop strong legislative institutions. “Too many committees vie for legislators’ time and attention”. Thus, the high absenteeism rates for committee attendance showed in Table 1 are not surprising, due to congressman time and effort that has to be distributed in attending many legislative issues. Probably, more important committees have lower absenteeism rates, especially, those that handle topics on which the media gets involved or those that deal with subjects of presidential concern (Fett, 1996).

3. The Model

This study estimates how different characteristics of the legislators affect the effort index and its components. I use the following regression model:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 age_i + \beta_2 age_i^2 + \beta_3 male_i + \beta_4 seniority_i + \beta_5 lawyer_i + \beta_6 college\ degree_i + \beta_7 slackness_i + \beta_8 large\ districts_i + \beta_9 small\ ditricts_i + \beta_{10} majority\ parties_i + \beta_{11} leader_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (*)$$

where Y_i represents effort index for every legislator i on every term served in Congress for regression (1), percentage of floor attendance in (2), percentage of committee attendance in (3), number of bills introduced in (4) and number of bills ratified in (5). Table 2 shows the principal results.

Column (6) shows the impact of the independent variables of equation (*) on effectiveness, defined as ratio of bills ratified over bills introduced.

First, age does not appear to have a statistically significant impact on the components analyzed. In Argentina’s Low Chamber I cannot confirm an effect of age or its curvilinear form on the attendance or productivity of bills, as previous literature suggests.

Even though the representation of women is low in the Chamber, men have almost 3% more floor attendance, while their committee attendance drops 6% in comparison to women. If what it is behind this fact is a matter of time budget and attention distribution, women might be attending indiscriminately to every meeting no matter the importance of the committee, while men may choose subjectively which to attend to. Given that women are underrepresented in the Congress they might feel more responsibility to attend the meetings to stand for women’s opinions.

One of the most relevant findings is that the coefficient of *Seniority* is negative for the effort index; this is not what previous literature predicted. Miquel and Snyder (2006) find that effectiveness rises sharply with tenure in North Carolina's House of Representatives. The negativity of the coefficient is due to low attendance rates to floor and committee sessions. However, the coefficient associated to bills ratified is positive for higher seniority in the Congress. These findings are analogous to Fenge's (1980) if instead of measuring the effects of age on effort and effectiveness, the variable analyzed is tenure. "Fear of failure" replaces the "need to achieve" as a motivating force for more experienced legislators in Argentine Congress, rather than older ones as Eisdorfer (1969) claimed. Although it is not statistically significant, congressmen that served more time, introduced fewer bills than freshmen, controlled by party dummies and other political variables. However, as column (6) shows, their rate of ratified to introduced bills is significantly positive, which is considered a measure of legislative effectiveness following Frantzych (1979). Figure 4 also illustrates this fact. Freshmen make much effort, reflected mostly in attendance rates. Those who plan on continuing their legislative career in Congress and later achieve such position, adopt a more relaxed attitude towards effort, probably as an effect of feeling politically safer.

Argentine lawyer legislators make much more effort than those who are not, by attending more to their responsibilities and introducing more legislation, in accordance to previous literature. This work agrees with Derge (1962) findings in Indiana General Assembly in which the number of bills sponsored by lawyers exceeds the number of bills sponsored by non-lawyers. In this study this coefficient is statistically significant, even controlled by different legislators' characteristics. However, legislation sponsored by House lawyers was not significantly more successful in getting passed into law than those sponsored by non-lawyers, as well as in this work. In Table 2 this is reflected in a non significant coefficient for *lawyer* in column (5). The next column shows that lawyers have lower ratio of ratified to introduced bills than a counterpart without this degree. As Hain and Piereson (1975) state, these professionals have more intrinsic incentives to have a good performance in Congress, to achieve their political career goals.

Having a college degree has a statistically significant positive impact in committee attendance and the number of bills ratified. A legislator with a college degree gets passed

0.062 bills more than a counterpart without a college degree and has 4% more attendance to committee sessions.

The variable under the name “Slackness” refers in this work to electoral safety. Previous literature uses different instruments to identify this security in the Chamber. Frantzych (1979) identifies marginal congressmen as those who had less than 60% of the vote in the previous election. “Electoral theory implies that marginal members will take extraordinary efforts to display legislative activity, while the other theories indirectly imply that politically insecure members would not seek out extensive bill sponsorship”. In the same line of this author, the results show that those congressmen less “politically safe” make more effort in the chamber. I corroborate that this is statistically significant, although I can only corroborate that the source comes from the negative relationship between slackness and committee attendance. The legislators more “politically safe” have, on average, an attendance 6% lower against those less “politically safe”. Zupan (1991) uses tenure as reflecting security in office. By this logic, he thinks that tenure should have a negative impact on roll call attendance rates, which is confirmed by this study in Argentine’s Congress.

Small districts make significant statistically more effort than other districts in Argentine Congress. Despite the fact that some provinces are demographically overrepresented⁶ in the Chamber, congressmen feel it is their responsibility to defend their local interests. However, Persson and Tabellini (2006) claim that small districts and strategic voting raise entry barriers and it is more difficult to oust dishonest⁷ incumbents from office.

Being a member of the majority party does not have a significant effect on the effort index; however, they have higher attendance rates in the floor and in committee meetings. “The most common method of opposing the majority party position on a vote is to absent oneself from the floor at the time of the voting” (Jones in Morgencen, Nacif 2002). This argument supports lower attendance rates to floor sessions by the minority parties.

⁶ For instance, the least populous quartile (the six provinces under small districts), contains 3.9% of the population yet possesses 11.7% of the Chamber seats (Jones in Morgenstern, Nacif 2002).

⁷ Persson and Tabellini (2006) refer with “dishonest” to politicians extracting rent, but we could suppose this behavior could affect other irresponsible actions as low attendance or low productivity reflected in the effort index.

According to Frantzich (1979), members of the majority party are viewed, and view themselves, as having somewhat more responsibility for the legislative output of the chamber than members of the minority do –following the Partisan Perquisite-, so this could be another reason that holds Argentine`s fact. This does not coincide with Zupan (1991) findings that it is more probable that members of a minority show up to vote than members of a majority. Cohen and Noll (1988) argue that this is because constituents are more likely to notice their representative's legislative role when an issue that concerns them is defeated than when it succeeds. Thus the opportunity cost to a legislator of abstaining when he is on the minority side is higher than the opportunity cost when he is part of the majority. Surprisingly, the number effect of bills introduced is statistically negative; however, the fewer bills they propose could be ratified at a higher rate. Column (6) on Table 2 shows a positive relation between being member of the majority party and the ratio of ratified over introduced bills. This effect is even larger than having a leadership position in the chamber. One possible explanation is given by Gross (1953) who claims that members of the minority often seek out majority party members to sponsor their crucial legislation realizing the partisan nature of bill consideration.

Finally, the effect of having a leadership position in the chamber has a positive impact on the effort index, statistically significant for bills introduced and ratified, though I could not confirm a significant effect for attendance rates. Having a leadership position has also a positive and significant effect on the ratio between ratified and introduced bills. Previous literature supports this fact. Clearly, powerful members of the chamber have the control of the agenda and of committee chair positions (Jones and Saiegh, 2006). Those legislators that have a high position in Congress are more prone to being in the media focus, which may be an incentive to make more effort in the Chamber. Furthermore, this finding could be argued the Positional Perquisite stated by Frantzich (1979), they could be called by interest groups to introduce legislation. Another fact is that most of those who are in this position have a mean seniority of 3.78 years, and they double the mean reelection rate (16% vs. 34%) against non-leaders.

4. Robustness check

To check these results in a more rigorous way, the data was collapsed to a legislator-term level, reducing the observations to 996, one for each term the legislator served. Table 3

shows the results. Most of the results after collapsing the data base by term-legislator maintain to be statistically significant and even the R-squared increases.

5. Conclusion

Political economy literature analyzes the factors that affect the performance of politicians and the goals they seek. This thesis uses data from the Argentine Congress in order to explore the relationship between legislators' characteristics and legislative performance or effort.

Latin American Congresses are characterized by having low reelection rates. Therefore, congressmen shape their political careers considering this fact. This study validates a notion that Jones, Saiegh, Spiller, and Tommasi (2002) claimed: "Argentine members of Congress are amateur legislators, but professional politicians".

The results show that serving additional years in Congress is negatively correlated to the effort index, especially due to a lower floor and committee attendance. Legislators have to distribute their endowment of time on different political activities; more experienced congressmen work out this problem by lowering their attendance rates, both to floor sessions and committee sessions. A similar pattern is observed in "politically safe" members. However, effectiveness increases with the time served in Congress, measured as the ratio of bills ratified to bills introduced.

Most congressmen are not completely focused on their job because they are not planning a long career in the legislature. If they are not looking for reelection, they prioritize attending floor and committee sessions. By doing so, they can get more access to the media and become better known, facilitating their way to higher positions. Alternatively, those few that are interested in pursuing a career in Congress act in a different manner. Their effort can be seen by having a higher ratio of bills ratified to bills introduced. Legislators' goals are varied, so it is valuable to have the effort index disaggregated in its components in order to better understand the dynamics of Argentine Congress.

Moreover, being part of the majority party has the highest effect on the proportion of bills ratified and bills introduced, even more than having a leadership position, being a lawyer, being "politically safe" in the chamber or having served more years in the Congress.

Further studies could construct a quality index of legislation to improve characterization of legislators. In addition, it would be interesting to disaggregate the attendance rates and evaluate certain patterns between absenteeism rates and the level of policymaking of the committees. Further studies should also improve the mechanisms used to characterize legislators and detect what their intentions are in terms of their political careers.



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Table 1. Descriptive Variables					
Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Observations
Legislators' characteristics					
Age	49.512	9.954	26.25	80	829
Male	0.912	0.283	0	1	833
College Degree (no Lawyers)	0.205	0.401	0	1	833
Lawyers	0.347	0.473	0	1	831
Leader	0.211	0.408	0	1	833
Legislators' performance (per year)					
Floor attendance (in %)	64.981	18.586	0	100	3095
Committee attendance (in %)	64.559	27.492	0	100	3728
Number of bills introduced	3.702	6.080	0	104	3700
Number of bills ratified	0.160	0.477	0	6	3700
Index of Effort	0.000	1.227	-3.555	8.529	3040
Slackness	0.657	0.475	0	1	3326
Seniority	3.116	2.007	1	14	3728
Political characteristics					
From large districts	0.546	0.498	0	1	833
From small districts	0.192	0.394	0	1	833
Majority Parties	0.463	0.449	0	1	833
Number of terms	1.196	0.464	1	4	833

Notes: Large districts are Buenos Aires, Capital Federal, Córdoba, Mendoza, Santa Fe. Small districts are those with less than 6 deputies: Catamarca, Chubut, Formosa, La Pampa, La Rioja, Neuquén, Río Negro, San Luis, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego. Leader refers to those who were chamber, committee or party president or chamber or party vice president.

Table 2. Determinants of the effort index and its components and determinants of the ratio between bills ratified and introduced ones.

	Effort Index	Components of the effort index				Ratio bills ratified and introduced
		Floor attendance	Committee attendance	Number of bills introduced	Number of bills ratified	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Age	0.034 (0.032)	0.103 (0.507)	1.181 (0.731)	0.101 (0.128)	0.003 (0.010)	0.001 (0.003)
Age ²	0.000 (0.000)	0.002 (0.005)	-0.009 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Male	-0.049 (0.115)	2.906* (1.584)	-6.137** (2.472)	-0.431 (0.476)	0.006 (0.041)	0.018 (0.011)
Seniority	-0.039** (0.016)	-1.004*** (0.205)	-0.636* (0.369)	-0.062 (0.054)	0.015* (0.008)	0.004* (0.002)
Lawyer	0.244*** (0.082)	1.901* (1.036)	4.220** (1.779)	0.801* (0.409)	0.016 (0.026)	-0.017* (0.009)
College degree	0.102 (0.087)	0.086 (1.170)	3.744** (1.881)	-0.445 (0.347)	0.062* (0.032)	0.014 (0.011)
Slackness	-0.200*** (0.072)	-1.460 (0.962)	-6.191*** (1.426)	-0.344 (0.355)	-0.015 (0.023)	0.006 (0.006)
Large districts	0.335* (0.201)	0.396 (2.269)	4.131 (4.187)	-0.434 (1.406)	0.110** (0.044)	0.017 (0.018)
Small districts	0.599** (0.278)	-0.784 (3.568)	10.473 (6.607)	0.762 (1.587)	0.258 (0.174)	-0.013 (0.029)
Majority parties	0.071 (0.060)	3.111*** (0.840)	4.376*** (1.326)	-2.182*** (0.296)	0.025 (0.019)	0.036*** (0.007)
Leader	0.238*** (0.092)	1.164 (1.133)	2.582 (2.064)	0.829** (0.396)	0.144*** (0.036)	0.027** (0.011)
Constant	-1.182 (0.829)	59.160*** (12.476)	28.120 (18.048)	3.156 (3.725)	-0.069 (0.266)	-0.030 (0.086)
Party dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,888	2,917	2,906	3,283	3,283	2,410
R-squared	0.076	0.090	0.122	0.060	0.042	0.045

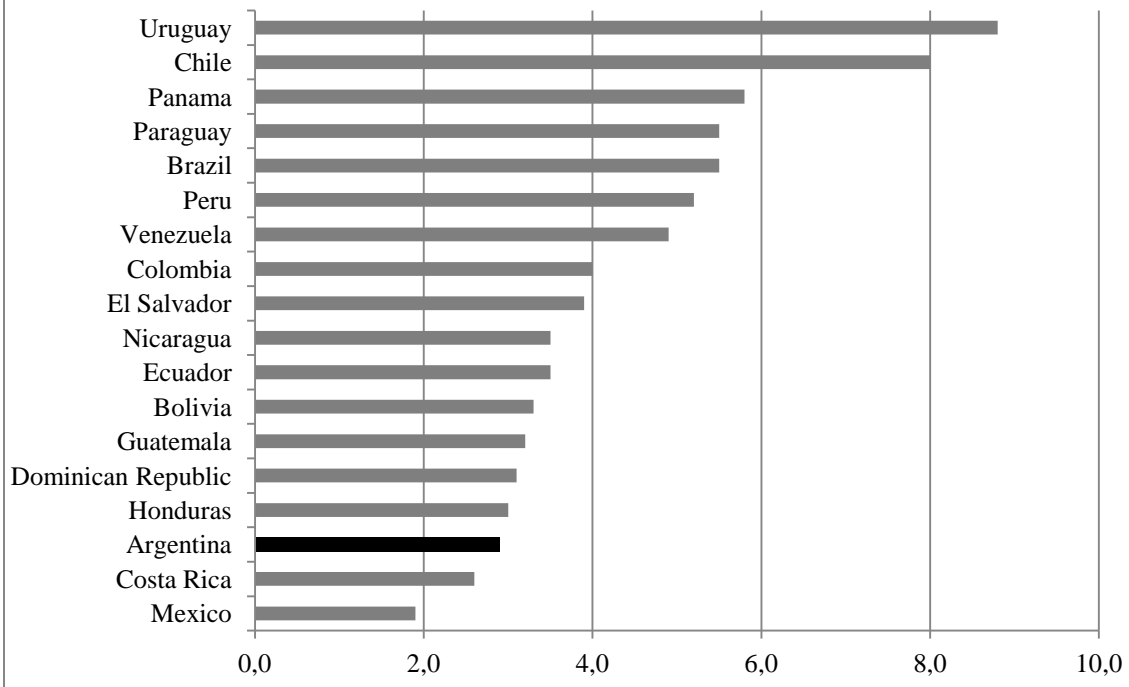
Notes: Robust standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses. All the models were estimated by OLS. Large districts are Buenos Aires, Capital Federal, Córdoba, Mendoza, Santa Fe. Small districts are those with less than 6 deputies: Catamarca, Chubut, Formosa, La Pampa, La Rioja, Neuquén, Río Negro, San Luis, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego. Leader refers to those who were chamber, committee or party president or chamber or party vice president. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Table 3. Index determinants and its components collapse by legislator-term

	Effort Index	Components of the effort index				Ratio bills ratified and introduced
		Floor attendance	Committee attendance	Number of bills introduced	Number of bills ratified	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Age	0.038 (0.029)	0.122 (0.456)	1.099* (0.593)	0.168 (0.134)	-0.000 (0.010)	0.002 (0.004)
Age ²	-0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.004)	-0.008 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Male	-0.074 (0.111)	3.064** (1.542)	-7.020*** (2.405)	-0.415 (0.500)	0.009 (0.041)	0.022* (0.012)
Seniority	-0.081*** (0.020)	-2.380*** (0.290)	-0.522 (0.422)	-0.214** (0.088)	0.015* (0.009)	0.006* (0.003)
Lawyer	0.189** (0.078)	1.356 (1.049)	3.567** (1.596)	0.762* (0.438)	0.006 (0.025)	-0.025** (0.010)
College degree	0.071 (0.084)	-0.629 (1.254)	3.652** (1.710)	-0.423 (0.359)	0.043 (0.030)	0.023 (0.016)
Slackness	-0.183*** (0.069)	-1.278 (0.946)	-5.902*** (1.389)	-0.341 (0.393)	-0.017 (0.022)	0.003 (0.007)
Large districts	0.191 (0.181)	6.940** (3.155)	4.282 (4.154)	0.000 (0.778)	-0.042 (0.060)	0.019 (0.022)
Small districts	0.663*** (0.248)	1.122 (5.121)	6.808 (7.257)	0.682 (1.113)	-0.164** (0.069)	-0.021 (0.027)
Majority parties	0.084 (0.070)	4.438*** (0.980)	5.276*** (1.451)	-2.558*** (0.361)	0.019 (0.021)	0.036*** (0.010)
Leader	0.268*** (0.083)	1.238 (1.139)	2.708 (1.659)	0.454 (0.406)	0.154*** (0.030)	0.042*** (0.015)
Constant	-0.888 (0.774)	59.056*** (11.768)	30.305* (15.548)	1.965 (3.622)	0.121 (0.275)	-0.062 (0.105)
Party dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	882	886	883	889	889	813
R-squared	0.126	0.214	0.169	0.113	0.110	0.096

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses. All the models were estimated by OLS. Large districts are Buenos Aires, Capital Federal, Córdoba, Mendoza, Santa Fe. Small districts are those with less than 6 deputies: Catamarca, Chubut, Formosa, La Pampa, La Rioja, Neuquén, Río Negro, San Luis, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego. Leader refers to those who were chamber, committee or party president or chamber or party vice president. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

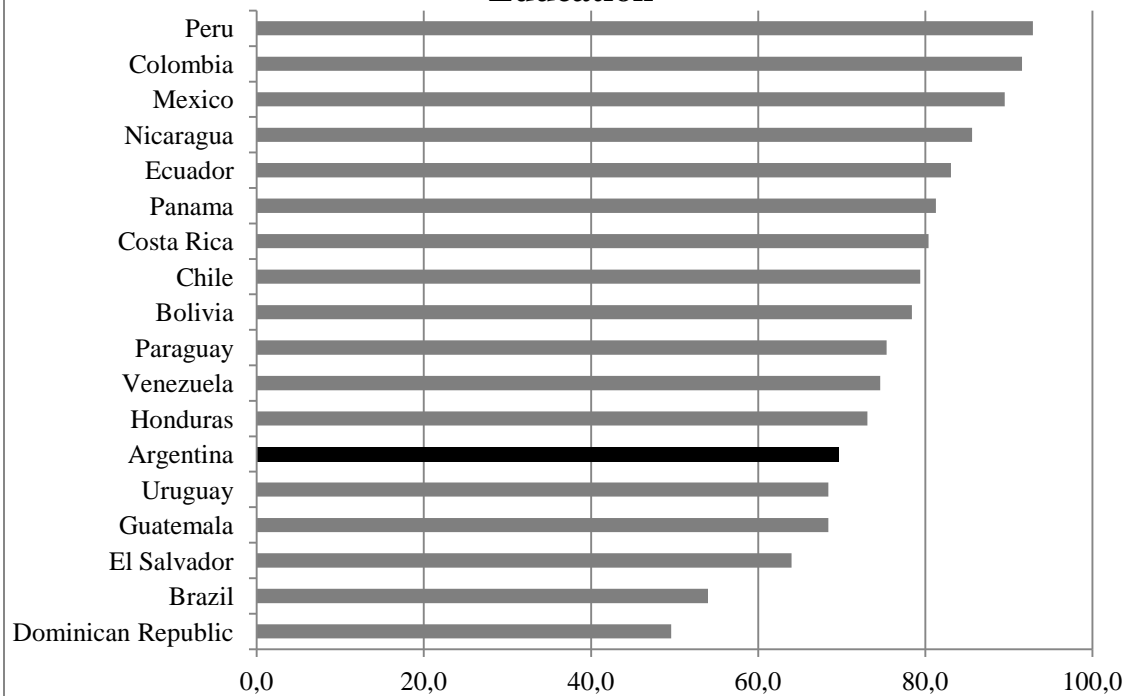
Figure 1: Legislators' Average Experience (Years)



Source: Stein and Tommasi (2005)



Figure 2: Percentage of Legislators with University Education



Source: Stein and Tommasi (2005)

Figure 3: Average Number of Committee Membership per Legislator

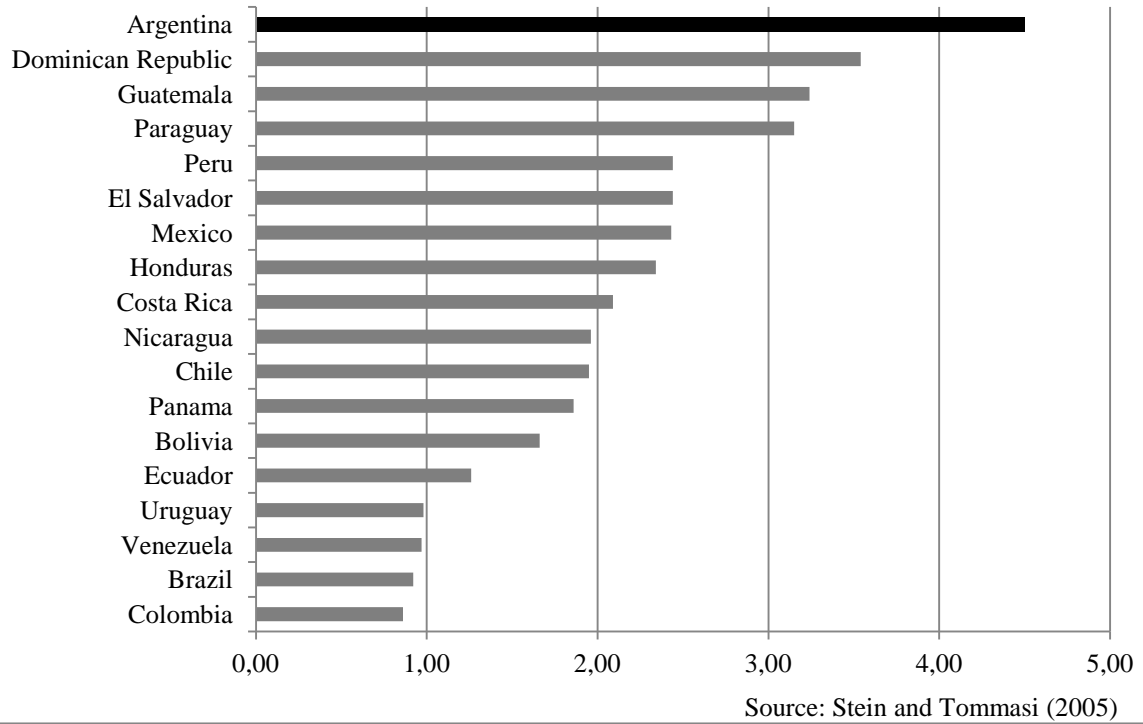


Figure 4: Ratio of bills ratified over bills introduced by tenure

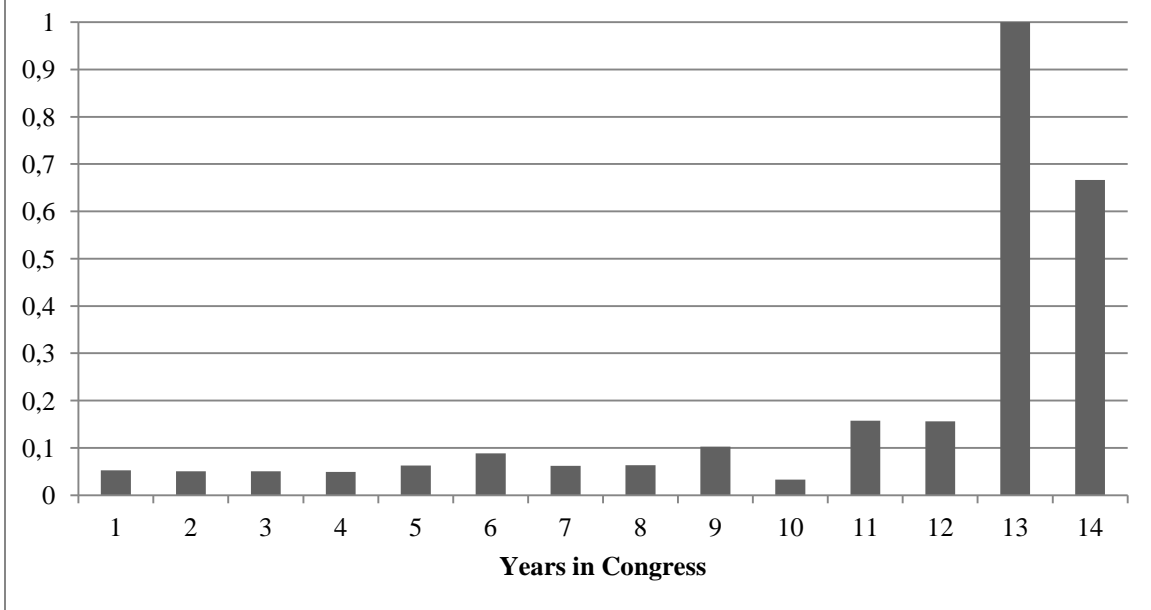
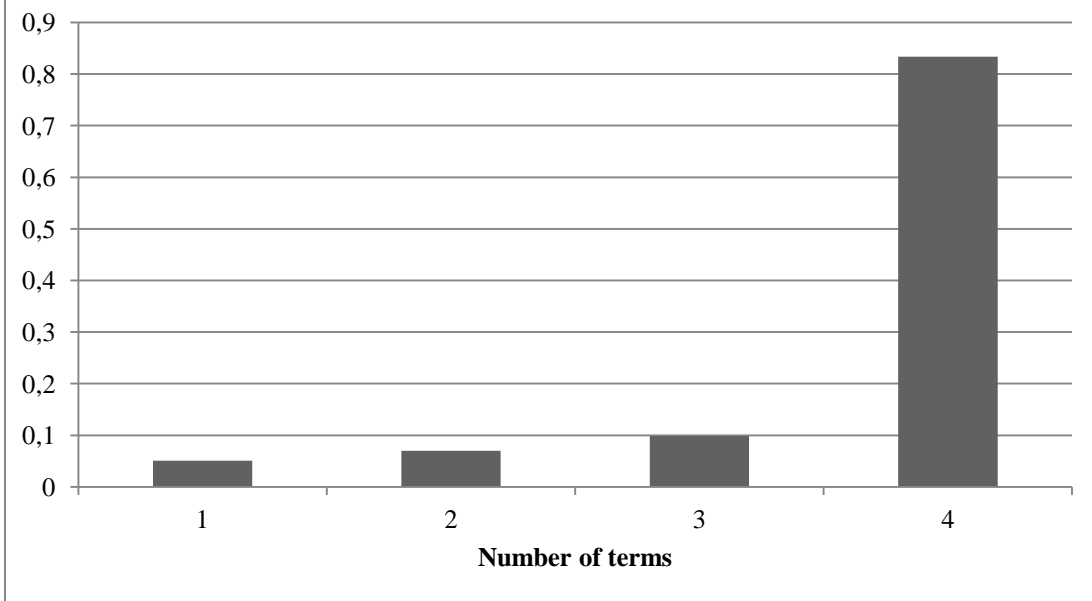


Figure 5: Ratio of bills ratified over bills introduced by number of terms



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