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Representation in State Legislatures: A Focus on Missouri¹

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In Summer 2003, the Institute of Public Policy conducted a mail survey of state legislators in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and South Dakota. We found that the number of requests for casework a legislative office receives in an average week during session varied greatly by state. Pennsylvania reported 107 cases on average, which was more than four times that of any other state (North Dakota, 24; South Carolina, 17; Arizona, 16; Missouri, 15; New Jersey, 12; South Dakota, 8; and Colorado, 7).

Table 1

Respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the below statements on constituency services	Missouri	All Other States
Constituency service is an important method of building trust with the public	89%	85%
Constituency service is the most important method of maintaining electoral support	85%	82%
Constituency service is the most important thing they do	83%	66%
Effective constituency service allows them to take stands that may alienate some voters	65%	57%
Increase constituency service if they had more staff members	64%	68%
They put more emphasis on constituency service than the typical legislator in their state	58%	47%

¹ Financial support provided by the University of Missouri Research Board. A copy of the full report can be found at <http://www.truman.missouri.edu/ipp/Publications/briefs.html>

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Table 2

	Missouri	All Other States
Responding legislators spend a good deal of time		
Keeping in touch with constituents	78%	72%
Helping constituents solve problems with government	74%	66%
Studying proposed legislation	66%	70%
Building coalitions within their own party to pass legislation	42%	50%
Making sure their district gets its fair share of government money	39%	47%
Campaigning and fundraising	34%	27%
Developing new legislation	33%	44%
Building coalitions across parties to pass legislation	32%	37%

Table 3

When asked how the use of e-mail affects their ability to keep in touch with various groups, the following percentage of legislators felt e-mail has an extremely positive or positive effect with:

	Missouri	All Other States
Constituents	70%	64%
Staff members	64%	48%
Interest groups	51%	54%
Other legislators	48%	56%
Journalists	25%	25%
Officials in the governor's office	21%	38%

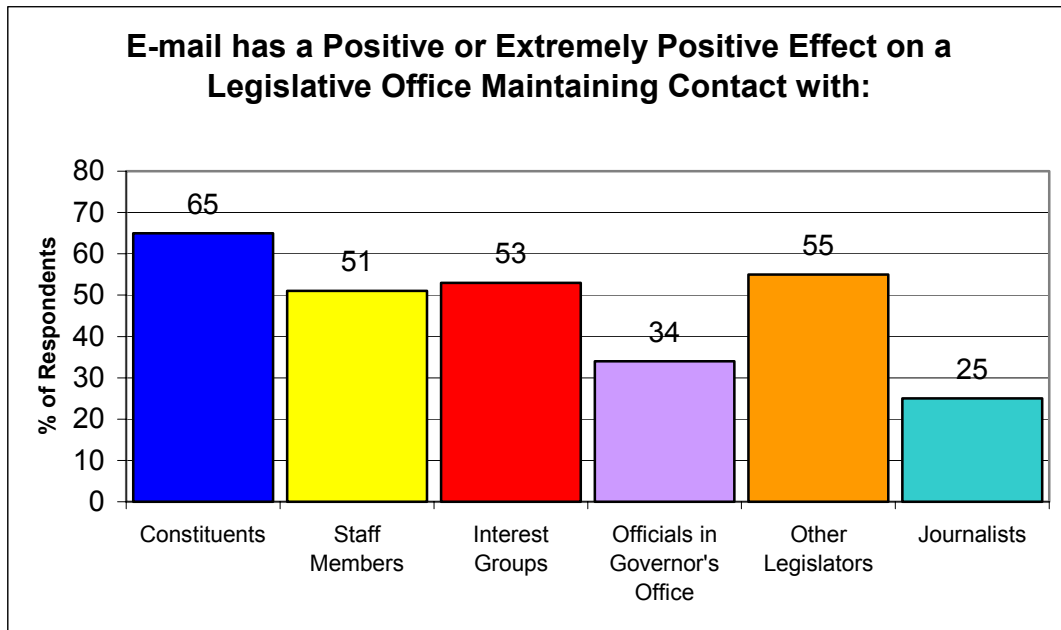


Table 4

Respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements on e-mail:	Missouri	All Other States
E-mail makes it easier for special interests to orchestrate single issue campaigns	79%	77%
Questioned the confidentiality of e-mail communication	54%	54%
They were not certain if an e-mail sender was one of their constituents	52%	54%
E-mail creates unrealistic expectations for an immediate response	38%	50%
E-mail places an undue burden on their staff	29%	30%
E-mail provides a biased representation of their district	26%	36%

Table 5

Legislators agreed or strongly agreed with the following about the impact of the Internet:	Missouri	All Other States
Increases the pace of the legislative process	53%	51%
Improves their ability to consider policy actions in other states	52%	57%
Increases deliberation about legislative issues	38%	28%
Decreases the demand on legislative staff to get current information	25%	30%
Causes staff to worry about information being leaked prematurely or taken out of context	15%	13%

About the Survey

The overall response rate was 42%, and it varied by state with New Jersey at the low end with 32%, followed by Pennsylvania with 34%, South Carolina with 35%, North Dakota with 47%, Missouri with 48%, Colorado with 48%, South Dakota with 52%, and Arizona with 53%. The average age of the respondents was 54 with 36% classified as freshman in the legislature. 16% described their views as liberal (extremely liberal, liberal, or slightly liberal), 23% as moderate, and 54% as conservative (extremely conservative, conservative, or slightly conservative).

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