

# *Media Tactics in the State Legislature*

Christopher A. Cooper, *Western Carolina University*

---

## **ABSTRACT**

Do state legislators use media tactics in policy-making? If so, which legislators, how often, and to what ends? Despite a number of recent studies asserting the importance of the media in American politics, we still have not answered these basic questions. Using a survey of state legislators from California, Georgia, and Iowa, I find that state legislators frequently use media tactics in policy-making, although they still prefer traditional forms of legislating. While the bulk of their media tactics is aimed at constituents, state legislators also target policy elites. This suggests that state legislators use the media for more than just aiding in their re-election. Finally, my analyses suggest that the frequency with which legislators use media tactics is largely a function of the resources at their disposal.

DO STATE LEGISLATORS USE MEDIA TACTICS IN POLICY-MAKING? If so, which legislators, how often, and to what ends? Despite a recent spate of research examining the relationship between the media and national political institutions (Cook 1998; Kedrowski 1996; Kernell 1986; Sparrow 1999), we have not answered these basic questions about the relationship between the media and state legislators.

These questions are theoretically and politically important. Congressional scholars have established that members of Congress and their staff expend considerable energy trying to affect the news (Cook 1989, 1998; Kedrowski 1996), with a marked impact on Congress as a whole. For example, Ranney (1983) argues that the media's increased presence around Congress has led to a more decentralized body, where members use the media to bypass the traditional norm of seniority. This has changed the way Congress works and the way its members behave. Is the same process at work in state legislatures?

The potential impact of the media is not limited to institutional changes. Rosenthal (1998, 109) suggests that media influence is increasing in state legislatures, claiming that for legislators, "the urge to play to the media is virtually irresistible." At the same time, legislators have become more defen-

sive when dealing with the media. As a result of the tendency of journalists to cover conflict and scandal, “legislative politics has become more confrontational and less adept at building consensus through compromise” (Rosenthal 1998, 109). Rosenthal (1998) goes so far as to argue that this increase in the use of media tactics, along with increased polling and constituency contact, has resulted in a “decline of representative democracy.”

#### WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT LEGISLATORS AND THE MEDIA

What reasons do we have for thinking that the media might be important in state legislative politics? A number of anecdotal accounts suggest that it is so. More than 30 years ago, Dunn noted that “public officials often begin their days by examining the local newspaper for stories about themselves and other officials and agencies, ‘combing it daily for messages about their work’” (quoted in Kaniss 1991, 160). *State Legislatures* magazine recently listed “working with the media” as one of the 15 most important tips for being an effective state legislator (“15 Tips” 1999). However, there is little systematic evidence about the place of the media in state legislative politics. Using what we do know about congressional and state legislative media use, I will sketch out how, why, and when we might expect state legislators to use the media in policy-making.

First, legislators likely use the media to achieve more than one goal. We know that legislators use the media to pursue re-election, both in Congress (Hernnson 1998) and in the state legislature (Hogan 1997). But recent evidence suggests that legislators also use the media to achieve good public policy (Kedrowski 1996) and power inside the legislature (Ranney 1983).

When does a legislator use media tactics? A number of factors have been shown to help predict media entrepreneurship (Kedrowski 1996). Fico (1984) found that a state legislator’s personal goals help determine how he or she feels about the media. Legislators interested in internal influence often use the media to help publicize their activities. On the other hand, policy-oriented legislators do not use the media as often and do not see the media as particularly influential. Finally, legislators concerned primarily with election often use reporters as a source for information, but they do not believe these reporters are influential in making policy.

Cook (1998, 191) hypothesizes that “the amount of time and energy that officials spend on getting into the news rises with the gap between resources directly at their disposal and expectations of their task.” In other words, policy-makers may see the media as an alternative resource to use

when their institutional resources are inadequate. While it is impossible to test this hypothesis with cross-sectional data from Congress, the varying institutional contexts and resource bases of the state legislatures provide a prime opportunity to do so.

Who are legislators attempting to reach through the media? First and foremost, congressional scholars believe that legislators use the media to reach their constituents (Hess 1986). Reaching constituents through the media aids re-election (Hernnson 1998) and constitutes one component of representation (Jewell 1982). Do legislators attempt to reach audiences in addition to their constituents? Early studies suggested they do not (Hess 1986), but more recent studies have challenged this view. For instance, Kedrowski (1996) argues that legislators often use the media to reach other legislators and a variety of policy elites as part of their legislative strategies. Cook (1998, 150) agrees, noting that “Congress has shifted in the last fifty years from an institution where its members dealt almost exclusively with the press back home in their constituencies for electoral purposes (with a few high-profile exceptions of investigations or mavericks) to one where both backbenchers and leaders routinely seek national publicity to influence national policy” (Cook 1998, 150). Lipinski (2001b) even finds that legislators often coordinate their communication strategies to further the policy goals of their political parties. Thus, it appears that as the media have become more important in American politics as a whole, members of Congress have come to realize that using the media can be an effective way to aid in legislating.

Of course, just because a legislator wants media coverage does not mean that he or she will get it. Likewise, news stories do not always take the shape the legislator intends. In short, a legislator does not make a unilateral decision to receive positive media coverage. The final news product is developed through a “negotiation of newsworthiness” in which both legislator and journalist bargain with each other to achieve their desired outcomes (Cook 1989). Although neither the press nor the legislator dominates this relationship, there are certain things the legislator can do to help tip the scales in his or her favor. Astute legislators work hard to cultivate a close relationship with journalists (Matthews 1960). *State Legislatures* magazine suggests that legislators should “be aggressive. Call reporters regularly—know your local newspapers’ deadlines. Call writers back promptly” (“15 Tips” 1999, 31). Legislators do not gain coverage merely because they want to—media coverage is earned through work and skill.

## QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

I address a number of questions regarding the relationship between state legislators and the media. First, do state legislators use media tactics in law-making? It is well understood that state legislators use the media to aid in

re-election, but we do not know much about whether media tactics are also used as a tool in law-making. Although some studies suggest that they are (Fico 1984; Rosenthal 1998), we have little systematic evidence to support this assertion.

I also compare the relative frequency with which legislators use media tactics and more traditional legislative tactics. While many political commentators have expressed concern that media politics are overtaking traditional means of legislating (Ranney 1983), the balance of scholarly evidence from Congress suggests that although media tactics are important, they remain less important than the time-honored, traditional means of accomplishing legislative goals, such as talking with other legislators, speaking on the floor, and the like (Kedrowski 1996). I also examine legislators' opinions on the effectiveness of these tactics. Are the tactics legislators use the same as those they feel are most effective? I hypothesize that state legislators will use most often those tactics that they feel are the most effective.

Next, I explore whom state legislators seek to reach with their media efforts. Some congressional scholars have suggested that legislators target only their constituents with their media efforts (Hess 1991), while others suggest that they also use the media to reach other legislators and members of the policy community (Cook 1989; Kedrowski 1996; Lipinski 2001b). While the literature is somewhat divided on this point, most recent evidence tends to support the latter assertion. As a result, I hypothesize that state legislators attempt to reach a variety of audiences with their media efforts, not just constituents.

Finally, I ask, which state legislators use the media? What factors predict whether a legislator perceives the media as a useful legislative tool? I hypothesize that the same factors affect both legislators' perceptions of effectiveness and their frequency of media use, since if a legislator feels a certain media tactic is effective, he or she will be more likely to use it. I hypothesize that the following factors affect legislators' use of media tactics: gender, age, majority/minority party membership, chamber, leadership position, electoral vulnerability, media market congruence, and state. Below, I review each of these independent variables, its hypothesized relationship to a legislator's use of the media, and how it is coded.

### *Gender*

The few studies of media coverage of women politicians suggest that these stories typically focus on trivial issues, such as their appearance, family, and personal life (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994). When the media do cover the policy positions of female politicians, they tend to focus on traditional

“women’s issues,” such as health care and education (Carroll and Schreiber 1997). Scholars have also established that female candidates’ campaigns are covered less often than those of male candidates, and that when women’s campaigns are covered, the stories tend to focus more on their viability as candidates than on issues or substantive policy positions (Kahn 1994, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). Certainly earning media coverage is a complex process. Legislators must make the decision to pursue coverage actively, and journalists must then decide whether and how to cover them. The evidence suggests that female officeholders are covered less. Unfortunately, we do not know if they perceive their coverage as less frequent. As a result, I hypothesize no specific direction for this relationship, but include a dichotomous variable (1 = male, 0 = female) for gender in my model.

### *Age*

There is a conflicting picture in the literature of the relationship of a legislator’s age to his or her use of the media. For instance, Kedrowski finds that “media entrepreneurs are younger, but not necessarily junior members of Congress” (1996, 50), whereas Hess notes that the senators who receive the most media coverage are “fast approaching sixty years of age and are in their third term” (1986, 29). Kedrowski’s argument suggests that young legislators are naturally more aggressive in their approach to the media and are more likely to see the benefits of actively using media tactics (Loomis 1988). Although Hess may be correct in noting that older legislators receive more coverage, this does not mean that younger legislators will not aim to gain more coverage. To measure age, I divided legislators’ ages into one of four categories (1 = 65 and older; 2 = 50–64; 3 = 34–49; 4 = below 34).

### *Majority/Minority Party Membership*

Cook (1989) and Kedrowski (1996) find that legislators often use the media to direct the legislative agenda by circumventing formal channels. Thus, the media may allow members of the minority party to influence the legislative process even though their party is out of power. I hypothesize that state legislators who are members of the minority party are more likely to use the media than legislators who are members of the majority party. This is a dichotomous variable (1 = majority party; 0 = minority party).

### *Leadership*

Newscasts and newspapers have limited time and space to devote to government news, and those legislators who are considered most newsworthy will likely get more coverage. Hess (1986) found that in the U.S. Senate, those

who are most newsworthy are in leadership. Legislative leaders are more visible, have political credibility, and are more powerful. I hypothesize that state legislative leaders are more likely to use the media than members who are not in leadership. Leadership is a dichotomous variable (1 = legislative or party leader; 0 = not a legislative or party leader).<sup>1</sup>

### *Media Market Congruence*

“Media market congruence refers to the degree of overlap between a television market and a legislative district” (Hogan 1997, 557). This has been found to be related to mass media advertising (Hogan 1997) and constituent knowledge of representatives (Campbell, Alford, and Henry 1984; Lipinski 2001a). I hypothesize that state legislators whose districts are closely congruent with a media market will find it both easier to garner media coverage and an efficient way to reach constituents and policy-makers, and thus, that they will use media tactics more often. If a legislator’s district crosses into a number of different media markets or is only a small part of a large media market, the media will be a less effective and efficient means of reaching constituents and policy-makers.

I gave each state legislative district in my sample a media market congruence score of from 1–100. A score of 1 signifies that the district does not line up well with a single media market. A score of 100 signifies that the media market and district have identical boundaries. For media market information, I used the *Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook* (1999). For details on the construction of this congruence index, see Hogan (1997) and Campbell, Alford, and Henry (1984).

### *Electoral Vulnerability*

Re-election is a major reason legislators use media tactics (Hernnson 1998). Given this, a legislator who has recently won a close election, should be motivated to use media tactics to communicate with his or her constituents on a regular basis. I measure this variable as the percent of the vote the legislator received in his or her last election. I gathered this information from the websites of the California, Georgia, and Iowa state boards of elections.<sup>2</sup>

### *State*

One advantage of studying state legislatures is that they provide a number of institutional contexts in which to test hypotheses. I examine the media activities and attitudes of legislators in California, Georgia, and Iowa, states whose institutions vary on many dimensions. Most important, California state legislators have a more professional orientation to their position (King

2000), and they each represent far more people than do legislators in Georgia and Iowa. I hypothesize that these differences in professionalism and resources will make California state legislators more likely to use the media in policy-making than legislators in Georgia and Iowa. I include a dummy variable for California (1 = California legislator; 0 = not California legislator) and a dummy variable for Georgia (1 = Georgia legislator; 0 = not Georgia legislator) in my model.

## THE DATA

I collected data with a mail survey of state legislators in three states: California, Georgia, and Iowa. Although cost prohibited a survey of all 50 states, the states in my sample were chosen to provide a broad array of political and geographic characteristics. These three states differ on legislative professionalism (King 2000), political culture (Elazar 1966), policy liberalism (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993), region, and population. They also have vastly different media structures. California has several media markets with over a million households, including San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Georgia is dominated by one major media market—Atlanta. Iowa has no media markets with over a million households (*Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook* 1999).

All state legislators in these states were sent a first wave of surveys in January 2000. Legislators who did not respond were then sent a second survey. Responses from the two waves showed no significant differences as to party, sex, chamber, or other measurable demographic characteristics. A response rate of 38.2 percent was achieved for the entire survey.<sup>3</sup> This response rate surpasses that of recent published work using surveys of state legislators (Richardson, Daugherty, and Freeman 2001).

Due to constraints on state legislators' time, their staff often fill out survey instruments for them (Hess 1984; Kedrowski 1996). Following Kedrowski (1996), I asked respondents whether they were legislators or staff members. Staff members who completed the instrument were instructed to respond based on their knowledge of the opinions and strategies of the legislator for whom they worked, rather than their own personal opinions. Legislators completed 77 percent of the surveys, while staffers completed 23 percent. The average staff member filling out the instrument had worked for his or her current legislator-employer for 2.5 years. The results from legislators and staffers did not differ significantly on any substantive measures.

The legislators who returned the surveys were representative of all legislators in the sampled states on three important characteristics. Table 1 shows

that the two groups differ little as to party, sex, or chamber. The sample only differs substantially in that the sampled legislators from California and Iowa were slightly more Republican than their colleagues.

### THE USE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDIA STRATEGIES

Do media tactics play an important part in state legislative behavior? Rosenthal (1998, 109) recently stated that “the urge to play to the media is practically irresistible” reflecting the widespread assumption among commentators that media strategies are important. In this section, I assess the validity of this assumption and describe the factors that affect a state legislator’s tendency to

*Table 1: Comparing the Sampled Legislators to the Population of Legislators in the Sampled States*

	California		Georgia		Iowa	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Male	75%	75%	80%	77%	80%	78%
Democrat	63%	58%	58%	57%	41%	32%
Senate	33%	32%	24%	22%	33%	35%
N	119	37	235	74	150	76

*Note:* Population = all state legislators (Senate and House) serving in a state.

Sample = the state legislators in a state who responded to my survey.

be an active “media entrepreneur” (Kedrowski 1996) or a low-profile member who eschews media tactics for more traditional legislative methods.

Four questions on my survey asked legislators about their attitudes toward using the media in the policy process. Table 2 summarizes the responses. The data suggest that state legislators generally believe that the use of media tactics is frequent and effective. Over half of the respondents either strongly agree or agree that state legislators often solicit media exposure and that soliciting media exposure is an effective way to put an issue on the legislative agenda, to convince other legislators to support policy proposals, and to stimulate discussion of policy alternatives. These results suggest that state legislators, like their congressional counterparts, often use media tactics in their law-making efforts.

The data in Table 2 also suggest that there are important differences in these attitudes between states. California state legislators agree and strongly agree with these statements much more often than their counterparts in Georgia and Iowa. Most remarkably, 100 percent of the California respondents believe that members often solicit media exposure to stimulate discussion about policy proposals.



Thus, two lessons emerge from these data. First, state legislators use media tactics in legislating. While Hogan (1997) and others have found that the media are important in helping state legislators gain re-election, these data show that media tactics are also important in legislating. Second, while media tactics are important in legislative politics in all three states surveyed, they appear to be most pervasive in the highly professional, high resource legislature in California.

TYPES OF MEDIA ACTIVITIES

In this section, I assess how often state legislators engage in specific media activities and compare this to the frequency with which they use more traditional legislative tactics. Each respondent was asked two questions about media legislative tactics (defined as writing OP-ED articles, appearing on television programs, issuing press releases, and appearing on public access television) and traditional legislative tactics (defined as contacting other

Table 2: Percentage of Legislators Who Agree or Strongly Agree with the Following Statements

Statement	All States	CA	GA	IA
1) Members often solicit media exposure as a way to stimulate discussion about policy proposals.	87%	100%	79%	90%
2) Soliciting media exposure is an effective way to put an issue on the legislative agenda.	74%	94%	65%	73%
3) Media exposure is an effective way to convince other legislators in both chambers to support policy proposals.	56%	76%	50%	51%
4) Media exposure is an effective way to stimulate discussion on policy alternatives and issues among executive branch officials.	76%	94%	72%	71%
N	179	34	68	67

Note: The samples' sizes do not add up to 187 because eight legislators scratched out their ID numbers. It was impossible, therefore, to identify the state of origin for those eight respondents.

legislators directly, proposing legislation, contacting government agencies, contacting the governor's office, speaking on the floor, meeting with lobbyists, and meeting with the party caucus). Respondents were asked 1) how frequently they engage in each activity and 2) how effective they believe that activity to be. Responses for the frequency questions were coded as follows:

- 4 = The legislator frequently engages in that activity.  
 3 = The legislator engages in that activity occasionally.  
 2 = The legislator rarely engages in that activity.  
 1 = The legislator never engages in that activity.

The results are summarized in Table 3.

I find that traditional legislative tactics are still used most frequently. My respondents report that they contact other legislators, meet with lobbyists, meet with their party caucus, and propose legislation more often than they use any media tactic. Issuing press releases is the most frequently used media activity, more frequent than even some traditional legislative tactics, including speaking on the chamber floor and contacting the governor's office. Writing OP-ED articles is used next most frequently, followed by appearing on television news and public access cable television. In short, although state legislators engage in media activities in law-making, they still use traditional legislative tactics more frequently. This is consistent with research on the media and Congress (Cook 1998; Sparrow 1999; Kedrowski 1996).

Across-state comparison once again suggests that California state legislators are more media savvy than their counterparts in Iowa and Georgia. California

*Table 3: Frequency with Which Legislators Engage in Traditional and Media Legislative Tactics*

	All States Mean	CA Mean	GA Mean	IA Mean
<i>Traditional Tactics</i>				
Contacting other legislators directly	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.8
Proposing legislation	3.4	3.7	3.4	3.4
Contacting government agencies	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.3
Contacting the governor's office	2.9	3.1	3.1	2.8
Speaking on the floor	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.2
Meeting with lobbyists	3.5	3.7	3.4	3.7
Meeting with party caucus	3.5	3.6	3.3	3.7
Average for traditional tactics	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.4
<i>Media Tactics</i>				
Appearing on TV news	2.3	2.8	2.3	2.3
Writing OP-ED articles	2.7	3.3	2.5	2.8
Issuing press releases	3.2	3.7	3.2	3.1
Appearing on public access TV	2.2	2.8	2.3	2.0
Average for media tactics	2.6	3.1	2.6	2.6
N	179	34	68	67

*Note:* 4 = frequently; 3 = occasionally; 2 = rarely; 1 = never. The samples' sizes do not add up to 187 because eight legislators scratched out their ID numbers. It was impossible, therefore, to identify the state of origin for those eight respondents.

legislators' penchant for writing OP-ED articles and issuing press releases may be attributed to their larger staffs and districts, but their greater use of television news and public access television is somewhat surprising considering the size of many of California's media markets. It is much more difficult to attract the attention of the television news in large media markets like Los Angeles and San Francisco than in those of Des Moines or Valdosta.

Next, I asked the respondents about how effective the same activities were for achieving their legislative goals. Responses were coded as follows:

- 4 = The legislator rates the activity as very effective.
- 3 = The legislator rates the activity as effective.
- 2 = The legislator rates the activity as somewhat effective.
- 1 = The legislator rates the activity as not effective.

Average results are displayed in Table 4.

My respondents believe that writing OP-ED articles and appearing on public access television are the most effective media tactics and that these two tactics are even more effective in achieving legislative goals than most traditional legislative tactics. This stands in stark contrast to the data on the use of legislative tactics in Table 3. While state legislators use most traditional legislative tactics more than media tactics, they generally believe that media tactics are more effective. This inconsistency may be due to legislators wishing to use media more often but not having the resources to do so. My data support this explanation. Resource-rich California legislators believe that media tactics are no more effective than do their counterparts in Georgia and Iowa, but they use them more often. While it may be that the California media are especially interested in state politics, research on the media and politics suggests that news outlets around the country have similar news-gathering routines and vary little in the types of stories they cover (Gans 1979). Thus, the extra resources California state legislators have may simply allow them to use media tactics, something their counterparts in Georgia and Iowa would do if they had the resources.

#### WHO ARE LEGISLATORS TRYING TO REACH WITH THEIR MEDIA TACTICS?

Who are state legislators trying to reach with all these media efforts? To address this question, I asked my respondents: "Many members of the state legislature use strategies such as writing OP-ED articles and conducting interviews with reporters to publicize their ideas and policy positions. In your opinion, who are these members trying to reach through these efforts? Check

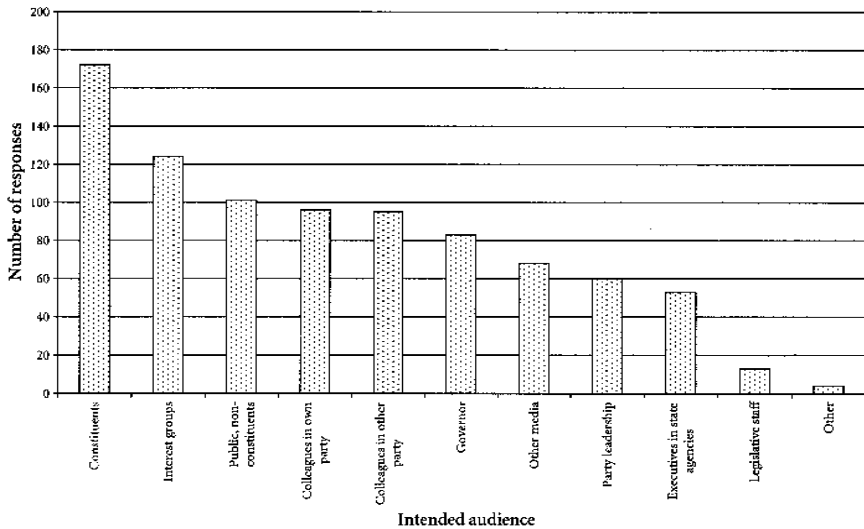
Table 4: Perceived Effectiveness of Traditional and Media Legislative Tactics in Achieving Legislative Goals

	All States	CA	GA	IA
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
<i>Traditional Tactics</i>				
Contacting other legislators directly	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.7
Proposing legislation	2.9	2.9	2.9	3.1
Contacting government agencies	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.3
Contacting the governor's office	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.5
Speaking on the floor	3.3	3.7	3.1	3.4
Meeting with lobbyists	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.1
Meeting with party caucus	3.0	3.1	3.3	2.9
Average for traditional tactics	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.1
<i>Media Tactics</i>				
Appearing on TV news	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.3
Writing OP-ED articles	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5
Issuing press releases	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.5
Appearing on public access TV	3.4	3.6	3.4	3.4
Average for media tactics	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.5
N	179	34	68	67

Note: 4 = very effective; 3 = effective; 2 = somewhat effective; 1 = not effective. The samples' sizes do not add up to 187 because eight legislators scratched out their ID numbers. It was impossible, therefore, to identify the state of origin for those eight respondents.

all that apply.” The responses to this question are summarized in Figure 1.

My respondents indicate that the bulk of state legislators' media efforts are aimed at their constituents. Certainly, this is not surprising. The scholarly literature is virtually unanimous in the opinion that legislators use the media to reach constituents (Cook 1989, 1998; Hess 1986; Kedrowski 1996; Lipinski 2001b). Of more interest, is the finding that over half of all respondents believe that legislators' media activities are at least partly aimed at their colleagues in both parties. The data also suggest that legislators' media activities target interest groups, the public outside the constituency, party leaders, and officials in the governor's office. In addition, over 36 percent of respondents indicate that one of their target audiences is other media. These audiences cannot all help directly with re-election, so this suggests that legislators see their media activities as more than just tools for keeping their jobs. State legislators use the media to reach a variety of audiences and to serve a variety of purposes—including law-making. These findings suggest a corrective to the re-election-centered understanding of the relationship between the media and state legislators. While certainly re-election is an important goal for legislators, my results suggest that they use media tactics to reach a variety of other audiences outside of their constituency. This “outside game” (Lipinski 2001b) has been virtually ignored in the state legislative literature.



Source: Author's survey of 187 Legislators in CA, IA, and GA  
 Figure 1. The Target Audiences of State Legislators' Media Tactics.

### WHICH LEGISLATORS USE MEDIA TACTICS?

Using ordinary least squares regression, I test my hypotheses about the factors that determine how effective a legislator believes media tactics are and how frequently he or she uses them. I ran models for all states together, as well as for each state individually. In modeling the frequency of media use, the dependent variable is an index combining answers to the question: "Legislators may engage in a variety of activities in order to achieve their policy goals. Please indicate how often you engage in each of the following activities."<sup>4</sup> The dependent variable for the effectiveness models is an index developed from the question: "In your opinion, what is the relative effectiveness of each of the following activities for furthering your policy goals?"<sup>5</sup> The results of these models are displayed in Table 5.

Generally, the results presented in Table 5 suggest that state legislators who have more resources use media tactics more often. For example, California legislators are more likely to engage in media tactics, even though they are no more likely than legislators in Georgia and Iowa to believe that these tactics are effective (all states model). California legislators have more staff, are in session longer, and have more money to spend on media activities. This confirms my findings in Tables 3 and 4, suggesting once again that it is the availability of resources, rather than differences in perceived effectiveness, that determines how frequently legislators use the media. This calls

Table 5: OLS Regression on Types of Media Activities

	All States			CA			GA			IA		
	Frequency	Effectiveness (SE)	slope estimate (SE)	Frequency	Effectiveness (SE)	slope estimate (SE)	Frequency	Effectiveness (SE)	slope estimate (SE)	Frequency	Effectiveness (SE)	slope estimate (SE)
Constant	10.4** (1.06)	11.8** (1.77)	11.53** (2.83)	11.65* (4.59)	9.95** (2.09)	12.29 (2.9)	11.76 (1.15)	12.01 (2.45)	11.76 (1.15)	12.01 (2.45)	12.01 (2.45)	12.01 (2.45)
Media market	.01 (.019)	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.07)	-.01 (.09)	.04 (.04)	-.05 (.09)	.04 (.04)	-.05 (.09)	-.05 (.09)	-.05 (.09)
% Vote	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.03)	.06 (.04)	-.02 (.02)	-.02 (.02)	-.01 (.01)	-.03 (.02)	-.01 (.01)	-.03 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.03 (.02)
Urban	.05 (.147)	-.21 (.25)	-.04 (.49)	-.16* (.79)	.14 (.28)	.33 (.39)	-.71 (.46)	-.15 (.98)	-.71 (.46)	-.15 (.98)	-.15 (.98)	-.15 (.98)
Age	.30 (.22)	.04 (.36)	.34 (.54)	-.32 (.90)	.94* (.41)	.67 (.57)	-.47 (.28)	-.55 (.58)	-.47 (.28)	-.55 (.58)	-.55 (.58)	-.55 (.58)
Leader	.32 (.36)	.28 (.60)	-.95 (1.17)	3.56 (1.9)	.98 (.62)	-.24 (.87)	-.20 (.45)	.23 (.96)	-.20 (.45)	.23 (.96)	.23 (.96)	.23 (.96)
Male	-.17 (.38)	-1.6** (.63)	-.27 (.92)	-.90 (1.49)	-.25 (.71)	-1.71 (.98)	-.03 (.49)	-1.77 (1.04)	-.03 (.49)	-1.77 (1.04)	-1.77 (1.04)	-1.77 (1.04)
Majority party	-.55 (.33)	-.57 (.55)	-.85 (.93)	-.81 (1.51)	-.55 (.63)	-1.6 (.89)	-.71 (.46)	-.55 (.58)	-.71 (.46)	-.55 (.58)	-.55 (.58)	-.55 (.58)
California	2.31** (.54)	1.3 (.89)										
Iowa	.14 (.37)	.01 (.62)										
N	179	179	34	34	68	68	67	67	67	67	67	67
R <sup>2</sup>	.25	.07	.17	.34	.19	.13	.10	.11	.10	.11	.11	.11

\*p < .05; \*\*p < 0.01

into question previous research suggesting that legislators use the media to compensate for a large gap between expectations and resources (Cook 1998).

Lending support to this finding is the fact that few other variables are statistically significant in any of the models in Table 5. For instance, the media market variable is not statistically significant in any of the models, failing to support the hypothesis that media market congruence facilitates media use (Hogan 1997). Leadership status is not significant in any of the models, which is surprising since this is traditionally associated with media entrepreneurship (Kedrowski 1996) and frequency of media coverage (Therault and Brady 2000) in Congress. Although there are a number of possible explanations for this, the most likely one is that since there are many more leadership positions in the state legislature than in Congress (Rosenthal 1998), individual state leaders are much less newsworthy and have fewer resources.

While gender is not a statistically significant predictor of how often a legislator uses media tactics, female state legislators are more likely to perceive media tactics as effective. But while this relationship is statistically significant in all-states model, it is not significant in any of the single-state models. Nonetheless, the direction of the relationship is consistent for all these models. Breaking up the analysis by type of media activity, I find that female legislators believe that issuing press releases, appearing on public access television, and appearing on network television are more effective than other types of media activities.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the media tactics women legislators find most effective are the ones they have the most control over.

Few patterns appear in the single-state models in Table 5. It appears that once one controls for resources, little else systematically influences how frequently state legislators use media tactics or how they feel about their effectiveness. By looking at these different state contexts and controlling for other potential influences, we see a pattern that suggests simply that as resources rise, legislators' use of media tactics also rises. Certainly, this hypothesis deserves to be revisited in future studies. In particular, scholars should test this hypothesis using more states. The importance of resources in supporting media tactics also suggests that as states continue to professionalize their legislatures (King 2000), legislators will increase their use of media tactics.

## CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on an understudied aspect of legislative behavior—how and why state legislators use media tactics in law-making. It has produced a

number of notable findings. First, the data suggest that state legislators use media tactics to aid both re-election and law-making. Still, the importance of the media in state legislative politics can be overstated. While state legislators do use media tactics, traditional means of legislating are still more common. Indeed, legislators in California, Georgia, and Iowa are more likely to contact other legislators, propose legislation, meet with lobbyists and engage in other traditional legislative tactics than they are to use media tactics. It appears that media tactics augment rather than replace legislators' legislative toolkit.

Next, I find that while legislators use the media to enhance their electoral prospects (Hogan 1997), this is not the sole purpose of media tactics. State legislators also use the media to advance their policy goals by reaching constituents, policy elites, and other media. Interest groups and the public outside of their constituency are also prime targets of legislative media tactics. This suggests that legislators use the media in law-making. This "outside game" (Lipinski 2001b) has been ignored in the state politics literature until now. While scholars should continue to examine the uses and effectiveness of the media for re-election, they should not stop there. The media are used to achieve a variety of goals, and future research should reflect this.

I also find that, controlling for other potential influences, legislators with more resources appear to use media tactics more often. Other factors traditionally associated with increased media activity had no effect on the surveyed legislators' use of media tactics. Indeed, the overarching finding of these analyses is that resource-rich California legislators use all types of media tactics more frequently than their colleagues in Georgia and Iowa whose offices are not so well endowed. However, California legislators are not more likely to perceive media efforts as effective. This provides further evidence that the availability of resources, rather than the perception of media tactics' effectiveness, spawns the increased media activity of California state legislators. Thus, it appears that "the urge to play to the media is practically irresistible" (Rosenthal 1998, 109) only if a legislator has the proper institutional support and as state legislatures continue to professionalize, their use of media tactics will likely increase. While this could increase constituent knowledge of their legislator, it could also have deleterious effects, such as more entrenched incumbents, fragmentation of state legislatures, and increased partisan conflict (Rosenthal 1998).

This study provides empirical evidence that, while their efforts might not always be successful, state legislators do attempt to use the media to advance their goals. Future studies should move from the results presented here and continue to examine the press-government relationship in the states. In particular, I have examined only one half of the negotiation of newsworthi-



ness. As I have pointed out throughout this study, just because a legislator perceives his or her media efforts as effective, we do not know that they are. Likewise, just because a legislator frequently tries to affect the news, it does not mean that he or she will. Future research should examine the other side of the negotiation of newsworthiness in the state legislature, paying special attention to the role of journalists in the coproduction of news.

#### ENDNOTES

This research was supported by the Yates Dissertation Fellowship at the University of Tennessee. The data are available on request. I would like to thank Robert Hogan for help in constructing the media market congruence variable, the *SPPQ* reviewers for a number of helpful suggestions, and Patricia Freeland, Lilliard Richardson, and, particularly, Anthony Nownes for help throughout this project.

1. Respondents were asked to self-identify whether they were a member of the party, or legislative leadership.

2. The websites are:

<<http://www.ss.ca.gov/elections/elections.htm>>

<[http://www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/election\\_results.html](http://www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/election_results.html)>

<<http://www.sos.state.ga.us/elections/results/default.htm>>

3. For each state, the response rates were: California—31.09 percent, Georgia—31.50 percent, and Iowa—50.67 percent.

4. For each legislator, I coded each response as: frequently = 4, occasionally = 3, rarely = 2, and never = 1 for each media tactic. Their responses for each media tactic (appearing on TV news, writing OP-ED articles, issuing press releases, and appearing on public access cable television) were then added together, creating a scale of frequency of media tactic use ranging from 4 to 16.

5. For each legislator, I coded how effective he or she rated each media activity as: very effective = 4, effective = 3, somewhat effective = 2, not effective = 1. Their responses for each media tactic (appearing on TV news, writing OP-ED articles, issuing press releases, and appearing on public access cable television) were then added together, creating a scale of perceived effectiveness of media tactics ranging from 4 to 16.

6. Space limitations preclude presenting these data in tabular format, but they are available from the author.

#### REFERENCES

- "15 Tips for Being an Effective Legislator." 1999. *State Legislatures* 25: 28–31.
- Beyle, Thad L. 1978. "The Governor and the Public." *State Government* 51: 180–6.
- Boulard, Garry. 2000. "More News, Less Coverage." *APSA Legislative Studies Section Newsletter* 23: 11–3.
- Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook*. 1999. New Providence, NJ: R.R. Bowker.
- Button, James, and David Hedge. 1996. "Legislative Life in the 1990's: A Comparison of Black and White State Legislators." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 21: 199–218.
- Campbell, James, John R. Alford, and Keith Henry. 1984. "Television Markets and Congressional Elections." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 9: 665–78.
- Carroll, Susan J., and Ronnee Schreiber. 1997. "Media Coverage of Women in the 103rd

- Congress." In *Women, Media and Politics*, ed. Pippa Norris. New York: Oxford.
- Cook, Timothy E. 1989. *Making Laws and Making News*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Cook, Timothy E. 1998. *Governing with the News*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Elazar, Daniel. 1966. *American Federalism: A View from the States*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.
- Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Wright, and John P. McIver. 1993. *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fico, Frederick. 1984. "How Lawmakers Use Reporters: Differences in Specialization and Goals." *Journalism Quarterly* 61: 793–800.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Vintage.
- Graber, Doris A. 1989. "Flashlight Coverage: State News on National Broadcasts." *American Politics Quarterly* 17: 277–90.
- Herrnson, Paul. 1998. *Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Hess, Stephen. 1984. *The Government/Press Connection*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Hess, Stephen. 1986. *The Ultimate Insiders*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Hess, Stephen. 1991. *Live from Capitol Hill: Studies of the Media and Congress*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Hogan, Robert E. 1997. "Voter Contact Techniques in State Legislative Campaigns: The Prevalence of Mass Media Advertising." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 22: 551–71.
- Jewell, Malcolm E. 1982. *Representation in State Legislatures*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.
- Kahn, Kim. 1994. "The Distorted Mirror: Press Coverage of Women Candidates for State-wide Office." *Journal of Politics* 56: 154–73.
- Kahn, Kim. 1996. *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kahn, Kim, and Edie N. Goldenberg. 1991. "Women Candidates in the News: An Examination of Gender Differences in U.S. Senate Coverage." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55: 180–99.
- Kaniss, Phyllis. 1991. *Making Local News*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kedrowski, Karen. 1996. *Media Entrepreneurs in the United States Congress*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Kernell, Samuel. 1986. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- King, James D. 2000. "Changes in Professionalism in U.S. State Legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25: 327–43.
- Lipinski, Daniel. 2001a. "The Effect of Messages Communicated by Members of Congress: The Impact of Publicizing Votes." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26: 81–100.
- Lipinski, Daniel. 2001b. "The Outside Game: Congressional Communication and Party Strategy." In *Communication in U.S. Elections: New Agendas*, eds. Roderick P. Hart and Daron R. Shaw. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Littlewood, Tom. 1972. "What's Wrong with Statehouse Coverage?" *Columbia Journalism*

- Review 10*: 39–45.
- Loomis, Burdett. 1988. *The New American Politician: Ambition, Entrepreneurship, and the Changing Face of Political Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lynch, G. Patrick. 1999. "The Media and State Politics: The View from the Political Elite." Presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Savannah, GA.
- Matthews, Donald R. 1960. *U.S. Senators and Their World*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Mayhew, David. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ranney, Austin. 1983. *Channels of Power: The Impact of Television on American Politics*. New York: Basic Books.
- Richardson, Lilliard E., Linda M. Daugherty, and Patricia K. Freeman. 2001. "E-Mail Contacts between Constituents and State Legislators." *State and Local Government Review* 33: 23–31.
- Rosenthal, Alan. 1998. *The Decline of Representative Democracy*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Sparrow, Bartholomew. 1999. *Uncertain Guardians*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Theriault, Sean, and David W. Brady. 2000. "The Impact of National Media Coverage and Ideological Extremity upon U.S. Senate Campaign Contributions." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.
- Witt, Linda, Karen M. Paget, and Glenna Matthews. 1994. *Running As a Woman: Gender and Power in American Politics*. New York: Free Press.