

**Nebraska’s Asterisk: Vote Structuring in the “Non-existent”  
Legislature, 2002 Preliminary Study: Quote at Your Own Risk**

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Introduction

For decades the study of state legislatures has been a popular focus for research within the field of political science. Earlier studies performed in partisan legislatures have confronted issues such as professionalism, formation of caucuses and committee systems, and electoral studies. Recently, as the field has delved deeper into this area as a result of “devolution,” more studies have been performed on areas of legislative behavior: the impact of political parties, district constituencies, and interest groups on roll calls, to name just a few. Though much research has been conducted on state legislatures in general, there is one state house that never seems to be included in the data analysis. Due to its unicameral structure and/or the feature of non-partisanship, the Nebraska Unicameral is viewed as an outlier, and is seldom included in comparative arrays. As a result, Nebraska has been largely ignored, omitted, or overlooked in the realm of state legislative research. Welch and Carlson conducted the most recent study on the Nebraska Unicameral in 1973, on the lack of relationship between political parties and roll call voting in Nebraska.

This project attempts to shed some light on the unique, non-partisan system of the Unicameral, specifically by focusing on what or whom structure chamber voting, absent party. Through personal interviews with state Senators and by examining roll call votes from the 2001 regular and special legislative sessions, we investigated the influence of party on structuring legislative voting behavior and in creating unity or conflict among senators.

**Literature Review**

The Nebraska legislature changed from a partisan, bicameral system to a nonpartisan unicameral legislature in 1937 through an amendment passed in 1934. At the time of its conception, the Unicameral was considered both “revolutionary” and “dangerous” (Senning, 1935). Since the establishment of the Nebraska Unicameral, little research has been done on its unique structure or inner workings.

**The last published full-length academic piece focusing solely on the Unicameral is Welch and Carlson’s (1973) article examining the impact of party on voting behavior. The authors pointing to a lack of structure and predictability in voting within the Unicameral found that the scalability of roll calls was more unstructured than any other body and that this trend has been in place ever since the establishment of the nonpartisan system. Party was also reported to have, at best, a weak relation to voting, this confirmed the authors’ hypothesis that party leadership and organization are important components of party voting. Finally, the authors believed that urbanization and industrialization were the most significant aspects in explaining overall nonpartisan voting actions.**

Since Nebraska state senators are not organized by party, partisan divisions are much more difficult to recognize. One view of how the legislature divides in the absence of party is the urban/suburban/rural split. When the Unicameral was formed in 1936 the rural seats outnumbered urban ones. With apportionment in the 1960s, urban districts gained six new seats, thus weakening some of the influence once held by the rural senators. In the 1970s and 1980s, only minor shifts were made in reallocation, and it is likely that the split is still fairly even today. (Sittig, 1986, unpublished master’s thesis, pg. 12.)

This split may be especially important because of the effect district composition can have on voting. Fenno (1982) concludes that urban representatives will vote differently on certain bills than their rural counterparts, since a representative will often vote on legislation according to the views from his/her district. Glen Broach (1972) also reported that urban representatives and rural representatives would divide on issues that pertain solely to urban areas or to rural areas. However, she also found that urban and rural senators tend to vote together on issues that do not have a clearly identifiable rural/urban division.

Jewell’s (1982) book on representation in state legislatures points to district composition as a variable measure for voting. “In a district that is basically homogenous

in socioeconomic character-all rural or all urban working class, for example-the task of representation is relatively easy” (Jewell, 1982, pg. 115). Since not all districts are completely urban or rural, it makes the decision making process for representatives much more complicated. Because of the nature of the state of Nebraska, containing a mixture of all rural, all urban, and mixed districts, Jewell’s finding is well supported in the Unicameral.

Finally, Jewell’s (1955) work also examines the urban-rural factor in party voting. Jewell found that rural states tend to have a mixture of Democratic and Republican legislative strength spread throughout the state, except in large cities, which tend to be dominated by the Democratic Party. Hence, rural states will tend to experience less party voting because the urban-rural split is less dominating. The author also found a link between high levels of homogeneity within a party and voting cohesiveness.

However, the urban/suburban/rural division is not the only factor that can act as a voting cue for legislators. The concept of electoral accountability and legislative responsiveness is examined by Jones (1973). He references Miller and Stokes’s seminal articles (1963 and 1964) on the subject and in particular their findings that legislators from marginal districts will be more apt to follow their personal beliefs while legislators from safer districts will reflect the opinions of their constituency more frequently. Entman (1983) proposes ideology as a potential voting influence and tool while acknowledging that a level of skepticism exists to the degree legislators let their own beliefs and motivations control their actions. Though it is unlikely that most voters expect their representatives to follow their wishes unwaveringly, it is likely that some attention is paid to constituency wishes. If for no other reason, most representatives must take their constituents into account in order to increase their electoral chances (see also Mayhew, 1974; and Fiorina, 1974).

Wiggins, Hamm, and Bell (1992) suggest yet two other alternative cues, interest groups and the governor. These authors present the view that a strong party system can act as a check on the power of interest groups in policy making. Citing

Morehouse (1981) and Bernick (1978), they also mention the role a strong and influential governor can have on this same process. Bernick's work even goes so far as to suggest that party cohesion will increase, even in one-party legislatures, when the governor is a factor in the process.

Perhaps the best tool for examining the Nebraska Unicameral is its counterpart, the one-party or speaker system discussed by Hamm and Harmel (1993). This system "assumes nonpartisan behavior" (1149). It is noted for structuring behavior and organization along ideological instead of partisan lines, as with the Nebraska Unicameral, and for the speaker to be the distributor of committee positions, thus making assignments less a product of majority party influence and one more particularistic to the Speaker's preferences. Even in the nonpartisan legislature of Nebraska, where the Republicans control the vast majority of seats, there are Democrats in select committee chair positions. Thus, it is likely that useful conclusions could be drawn with the comparative study of one-party legislatures and the non-party Nebraska Unicameral.

Though much research has been done on state legislatures in general, there has been very little investigation into the structure and workings of the Nebraska Unicameral. For this reason, we have chosen to further the examination of the Nebraska Unicameral by looking into the voting patterns as well as personal opinions held by state legislators in regard to the structure of the house. Although, the urban/suburban/rural split is an important facet to explaining policy preferences among senators. Here we limit the scope of our consideration to party division and will be incorporated in the next iteration of our analysis. We do note that population and type of constituency within these divisions is not nearly as simple as one would assume (see table 8). Thus, we focus here mainly on other possible influences of vote structuring in the Nebraska unicameral, and we offer the following research question and hypotheses.

The research question is, what factors chamber voting in the 2001 regular and special sessions of the Nebraska Unicameral?

The hypotheses are that, in the Nebraska Unicameral:

H<sub>1</sub>: Party structures voting.

H<sub>1a</sub>: There is partisan unity in the chamber, across the board. Partisans will tend, on balance, to vote together.

H<sub>1b</sub>: The parties will divide across issues in much the same manner as they do in “partisan” chambers.

H<sub>1c</sub>: This partisan conflict will be patterned in much the same way as it is patterned in “partisan” chambers: the bill types in the unicameral that are partisan will be the same types of bills and issues that are partisan in other chambers. Specifically, we hypothesize that party voting will be strongest in elections and reapportionment bills, and major money issues.

In short, we expect to find evidence of political parties structuring representatives’ behaviors.

## Data & Methods

### *Operational Definitions*

**Partisan Cohesion:** We use roll call voting as the best surrogate variable for these items. The degree to which members adhered to their own “party position” was entered as a “party cohesion score.” For example, on a given issue, 20% of the Democrats and 60% of the Republicans voted “nay”, while 80% of Democrats and 40% of Republicans voted “yea”. In such a case, the party position of the Democrats was considered to be “yea,” while that of the Republicans was “nay.” The party unity score for Democrats in this case would be 80%, Republicans, 60%. The more important measure of party cohesion, which is used for the balance of the analysis, is the standard Rice Index of Cohesion.<sup>1</sup> This is a measure of the percentage distance between the majority of the party and the minority of the party on a given vote. Thus, where the majority of the party equals 80% and the minority of the party (on the opposite side of the issue) is 20%, the “distance” score is 60. For the means tables in the first part of the analysis, each party’s raw vote totals were converted into percentages and the higher of the two scores was considered the “party position” on that bill or rule.

**Non-conflict Votes** are votes in which the majority of the voters of *both parties* vote for the same side of an issue or rule. They are “non-conflict” in the sense that there is no conflict between the *party majorities*, not because there is no conflict or dissension on the vote.

**Party conflict votes** are those votes in which the major parties faced off against each other on a given issue, with the majority of one party voting “yea” and the majority of the other voting “nay.” Operationally, a dummy variable was used to divide the roll calls into two types, “conflict” and “non-

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<sup>1</sup> See Rice, 1928; also Jewell, 1955, p. 774.

conflict.” An index of difference was also generated, by subtracting one party from the other on the same side of a question. These manipulations have been regularized to return a positive number.<sup>2</sup> Also is an “index of difference” measure, constructed by subtracting the majority and minority party vote percentages on the same side of an issue. This index allows for the measurement of both conflict and relative party cohesion: both rise as the index rises.

**Coalition votes** are a subset of party conflict votes, considered in terms of outcome and the partisan mix, which results in the outcome. These may be considered in several ways, all under the notion that the two parties face off against each other. If the majority wins, and has enough strength to win with or without defecting minority voters, no real or “necessary” coalition takes place and the majority party could win the vote without the participation of the minority. If the majority party wins but must rely on the participation of minority members votes in order to win, then the coalition is a “necessary” one.

In order to assess these ideals within the Nebraska Unicameral, we conducted a cross-sectional study encompassing both an interview instrument and an examination of roll call votes from the 2001 Nebraska Legislative Regular and Special sessions of the Unicameral. We coded 205 votes, excluding votes by acclamation. Votes on several types of legislative action were coded in order to have a wider sampling range and to examine the actions of the legislators across a variety of dimensions. We took into account votes on final passage, bill advancement, motions to cease debate, motions to invoke cloture, motions to over-ride vetoes, motions to suspend rules, votes on amendments, motions to bracket, motions to indefinitely postpone, and motions to reconsider. We also felt it was important to gain both quantitative and qualitative insight into the legislature by looking at both the actual roll call voting and the legislators’ own understanding from interview responses.

In developing the interview instrument, we wanted to include questions that specifically addressed our hypotheses and expectations outlined above. We included nine open-ended, five scales, and one ranking question for a total of fifteen questions. We structured the survey so that the senators could freely provide their own opinions and we would still have measurable numerical values as responsive guides. The questions posed to the senators concerned such issues as urban/suburban/rural division, constituency interest and influence on voting behavior, partisan influence as a voting cue, the importance of the Governor’s agenda to the legislative process, and additional factors that influence a senator’s decision on a bill. (See Appendix A for the interview instrument.) .

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<sup>2</sup> That is. when the majority party is at 70% “yea” and the minority is at 40% “yea”, the minority is subtracted from the majority to return 30 as the index of difference. When the positions of the majority and minority are reversed, the majority is subtracted from the minority, and so on. This is simply to eliminate negative numbers, and has no effect on the values.

In arranging and organizing the interviews, we used several different methods. Initially, our goal was to have face-to-face interviews with all 49 members of the legislature. The process began with phone calls to the aides of each legislator to set up interview appointments for the following day. After the initial appointments were met, we divided into groups and visited the remaining offices to finish scheduling. Some appointments were scheduled, but as time passed it grew increasingly more difficult to meet with some senators in a sit-down office setting. Since certain legislation was being debated and voted upon at that time, some legislators requested we pull them off the chamber floor for interviews. After three days of meeting with state senators, we were able to get responses from 47 of the 49 members of the Unicameral; only one declined to participate and the other was absent for medical reasons. We felt the senators went out of their way to cooperate with our time constraints and were more than willing to aid in our research endeavor. Conducting these interviews was valuable not only for our research, but also for the purposes of documenting and preserving the institutional memory of the present body, as all members currently in the chamber will be replaced within the next eight years because of the implementation of term limits. To protect the anonymity of the legislators through each phase of our project, we assigned each senator code numbers by skip-intervals of three.

The survey was designed to be applicable across all districts, rural, urban and mixed throughout Nebraska. As a result, some senators felt certain questions applied to their interests, while others did not. Certain senators were more apprehensive than others when answering particular questions. Whether first-year legislators, or long-time members of the Unicameral, both groups provided much insight into the unique setting of a non-partisan legislative body.

While interviewing the senators, we learned that much debate stems from fiscal issues, and the dividing lines are often drawn between certain groups within the legislature. Thus, we felt it was imperative to include the 2001 special session data in our research, because the purpose of the special session was to resolve budgetary constraints. We used Hedlund and Hamm's (1994, 1996) categorization of bill types. This divides bills into five basic subject areas: 1) legislative control bills—those bills concerned directly with the running of the chamber, such as rules, parliamentary decisions and so on; 2) major money bills—these are generally large budget measures or appropriations packages; 3) elections and reapportionment bills; 4) minor money and legislative control measures—such as expenditures for house operations and assignments to greeting committees, and 5) substantive policy bills.

Examining procedural votes is particularly important because it provides more insight into the nature of debate and voting patterns on the floor. We included all roll calls that had at least one dissenting vote. This was based on commonly-held public perceptions, shared within the Senate itself, concerning the great influence of one particular senior legislator on the workings and procedures of the Unicameral.

## Analysis

### *Partisan Influence in Roll Call Voting in the Unicameral*

In order to examine the partisan aspects of the roll call voting, we used a variant of an index of cohesion originally suggested by Stuart Rice (1928) and popularized by Malcolm Jewell (1955). The original index is a simple 0-100 scale, where when all members of a party vote on the same side of a given issue (“issue” hereafter refers to any bill, amendment, or resolution) the scale returns a party scale of 100; when the party is evenly divided, the score is 0. Our scale is somewhat different, in that we used the simple 51-100 range suggested by the general split by party on any issue. Where the majority of the party has voted “yea” on a given issue, we have used that percentage of the party chamber vote to describe unity. Conversely, where the majority has voted “nay”, that percentage has been used. Thus, if the vote is 60% Democrats “yea” and 40% of Democrats “nay”, we have used “60%” as the party unity score for that vote.

We also examine the degree to which the parties in the chamber divide on party lines. As Jewell notes, “[the percentage of roll calls where the parties are on opposite sides of the question] will tend to vary with the degree of party influence” (Jewell, 1955:775). To do this, we used a measure similar to Jewell’s: a range, which divided the cases into 50.01-59.99%, 60-80%, 80.1-100%.

Evidence from other studies (Anderson, 2000, e.g.) suggests that partisan influence on issues in the chamber varies by bill type. Clearly, some bills are of more concern to political parties than others. We have divided the types of bills into the following categories:

- 1) legislative control bills -- those bills concerned directly with the running of the chamber, such as rules, chamber decisions, etc.
- 2) major money bills -- these are large budget measures or appropriations packages;
- 3) elections and reapportionment bills;
- 4) minor money and legislative control measures -- such as expenditures for chamber operations and assignments to greeting committees, and
- 5) substantive policy bills.

This division of bills by subject area match the jurisdictional division used by Hedlund and Hamm

(1994, 1996). After Anderson’s (1999) study, this taxonomy is slightly different than that found in Hedlund and Hamm (1994,1996) in that minor legislative control issues in this study have been folded into minor money issues, where in Hedlund and Hamm’s taxonomy the two were counted as separate categories (see Anderson, 2000).

We hypothesized, at the start, that “There is partisan unity in the chamber, across the board. Partisans will tend, on balance, to vote together.” Table 1 examines the simple divisions, in the aggregate, of party cohesion in the chamber.

*Tables 1-10*

Table 1: Raw Unity Scores by Party  
*Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Democratic Party Unity	197	53.30	100.00	80.7949	13.9633
Republican Party Unity	205	52.20	100.00	79.5546	15.0972
Valid N (listwise)	197				

Here, we can see that the parties are highly unified, with a mean of about 80% of partisans voting on the same side of the issue, all though there are instances at the low end for both parties. It is difficult to determine the frequency of party unity across the array of votes by using this method, however, and to make this possible; we split the array of unity values of each party as follows:

Where Republican (or Democratic) Party Unity Scores are greater than 50% (as all must be due to the computation which produced them) but less than 60%, we coded a dummy at “1”; where they are greater than 60% but less or equal to than 80%, we coded the dummy at “2”; for those greater than 80%, the dummy was coded at “3”. The results of these divisions are in Table 2 below:

**Table 2a:  
Republican Unity by Range**

Descriptive Statistics

Range of Republican Unity		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
50.01-59.99%	Republican Party Unity	26	52.20	59.30	56.1308	2.2154
	Valid N (listwise)	26				
60-80%	Republican Party Unity	78	60.00	80.00	69.8205	5.6151
	Valid N (listwise)	78				
80.01-100%	Republican Party Unity	101	80.80	100.00	93.1020	6.1264
	Valid N (listwise)	101				

**Table 2b:  
Democratic Unity by Range**

Descriptive Statistics

Range of Democratic Unity		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
50.01-59.99%	Democratic Party Unity	17	53.30	58.30	55.6529	1.9526
	Valid N (listwise)	17				
60-80%	Democratic Party Unity	84	60.00	80.00	71.9643	5.8209
	Valid N (listwise)	84				
80.1-100%	Democratic Party Unity	96	81.30	100.00	92.9740	6.3293
	Valid N (listwise)	96				

As we can see in Tables 2 a and b, in the vast majority of issues the parties are unified at the 80% level or higher. Those votes lying below the 80% range are not evenly distributed, however; Republican defections from the majority of the party are nearly twice as high as those of Democrats. This should not be too surprising since the chamber split between Republicans and Democrats is heavily in favor of the Republicans – Republicans should be expected to be more heterogeneous than the minority Democrats as a simple function of their greater numbers.

Party unity has little explanatory value if both parties align on the same side of the question in near-acclamation votes. The more important question is, on how many votes do the parties find themselves on opposite sides of the question? We hypothesized above that “the parties will divide across issues in much the same manner as they do in ‘partisan’ chambers.” The results in Table 3 tend to support confirmation of this hypothesis. These results were computed by tagging the votes where the majority of Democrats voted on one side and the majority of Republicans voted on the other. Table 3 reports the raw scores for this variable:

**Table 3: Where Parties Divide**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Where the Parties are on the Same Side of the Question	147	71.7	71.7	71.7
Where the Parties are on the Opposite Side of the Question	58	28.3	28.3	100.0
Total	205	100.0	100.0	

In this table, we can see that the parties divide across the issues, 28% of the time. The next question one must ask is the

depth of this effect: what are the unity scores at the mean when the parties are in majority opposition? If the majorities are large, we would have to assume that there is some partisan effect taking place. Table 4 reports these figures.

**Table 4: Party Unity, Where The Parties are on the Same Side of the Question, Followed by Instances where the Parties are on Opposite Sides of the Question**

Descriptive Statistics

Party Conflict		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Where the Parties are on the Same Side of the Question	Democratic Party Unity	139	53.30	100.00	83.9561	13.2532
	Republican Party Unity	147	52.20	100.00	82.6735	14.5798
	Valid N (listwise)	139				

Where the Parties are on the Opposite Side of the Question	Democratic Party Unity	58	53.30	100.00	73.2190	12.7440
	Republican Party Unity	58	52.20	100.00	71.6500	13.5125
	Valid N (listwise)	58				

Table 4 reports the disparate results for mean party unity first, when the party majorities are on the same side of the question, and secondly, when the parties divide on an issue. While there is approximately a 10 point difference between the two, party unity is still remarkably strong in both cases. In the first case, when parties are on the same side of a question, these are near-acclamation votes – with both parties siding on either “yea” or “nay” with over 80% of their members. This should not be surprising. It is in the second, where the parties have divided over a question, that the finding is so arresting: here, the defections, at the mean, from party unity, are only a little over one-fourth of the party. What, then, is the range across the defections? Table 5 utilizes the earlier computation of ranges and returns the following table:

Table 5: Range of Unity Where Parties Divide: Democrats

Descriptive Statistics

Party Conflict	Range of Democratic Unity		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Where the Parties are on the Same Side of the Question	50.01-59.99%	Democratic Party Unity	8	53.30	58.30	55.7750	2.1319
		Valid N (listwise)	8				
	60-80%	Democratic Party Unity	53	60.00	80.00	73.5679	5.5972
		Valid N (listwise)	53				
	80.1-100%	Democratic Party Unity	78	81.80	100.00	93.9051	6.0141
		Valid N (listwise)	78				
Where the Parties are on the Opposite Side of the Question	50.01-59.99%	Democratic Party Unity	9	53.30	58.30	55.5444	1.9027
		Valid N (listwise)	9				
	60-80%	Democratic Party Unity	31	61.50	80.00	69.2226	5.2083
		Valid N (listwise)	31				
	80.1-100%	Democratic Party Unity	18	81.30	100.00	88.9389	6.2306
		Valid N (listwise)	18				

Here, we can see that for the Democrats, the unity in those votes where the parties divide load highest in the 60-80% range, with 31 of the 58 votes in that column. Second are those votes in the 81-100% range, with 18 of the votes in which the parties divide. Clearly, when the parties divide, the Democrats are unified at high levels – there are few defections from the party on these types of votes.

For the Republicans, Table 6 reports the results:

Table 6: Range of Unity Where Parties Divide: Republicans

Descriptive Statistics

Party Conflict	Range of Republican Unity		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Where the Parties are on the Same Side of the Question	50.01-59.99%	Republican Party Unity	13	52.20	59.30	56.1692	2.0886
		Valid N (listwise)	13				
	60-80%	Republican Party Unity	48	60.00	80.00	70.5042	5.6940
		Valid N (listwise)	48				
	80.1-100%	Republican Party Unity	86	80.80	100.00	93.4721	6.1262
		Valid N (listwise)	86				
Where the Parties are on the Opposite Side of the Question	50.01-59.99%	Republican Party Unity	13	52.20	59.30	56.0923	2.4206
		Valid N (listwise)	13				
	60-80%	Republican Party Unity	30	61.90	80.00	68.7267	5.4000
		Valid N (listwise)	30				
	80.1-100%	Republican Party Unity	15	82.60	100.00	90.9800	5.8789
		Valid N (listwise)	15				

The report for the Republicans is remarkably similar. The Republicans also seem to be quite loyal in circumstances where the parties divide.

On what types of bills are the parties dividing? We hypothesized that “This partisan conflict will be patterned in much the same way as it is patterned in ‘partisan’ chambers: the bill types in the unicameral that are partisan will be the same types of bills and issues that are partisan in other chambers.” Specifically, we hypothesize that “party voting will be strongest in elections and reapportionment bills, and major money issues.” Further, we expected to see less of an effect of party in other matters, such as substantive policy measures, which may be more responsive to local and/or district concerns or to cleavages such as were among rural, mixed and urban constituent populations.

Table 7 reports the raw division across bill types in the array of bills where the parties are on opposite sides of the question:

Table 7: Where Parties Divide: Bill Types:  
Crosstabulation of Party Conflict and Type of Bill

		Major Money	Elections/Reapportionment	Minor Money Issues and Etc.	Substantive Policy	Total
Party Conflict	Where the Parties are on the Same Side of the Question	39 (26.5%)	2 (1.4%)	18 (12.2%)	87 (59.2%)	147
	Where the Parties are on the Opposite Side of the Question	10 (17.2%)	5 (8.6%)	5 (8.6%)	38 (65.5%)	58
Total		49 (23.9%)	7 (3.4%)	23 (11.2%)	125 (61%)	205

Of the issues across which the parties are divided, less than 1% are legislative control issues (not examined here), 17.2% are major money bills, 8.6% are elections or reapportionment issues, 8.6% are minor money issues or chamber issues, and 65.5% are substantive policy measures. Within these categories, the largest percentage of the full array that are disputed by the parties are elections and reapportionment measures (n= 5 or 55% of all elections and reapportionment issues); followed by substantive policy measures. If substantive policy measures are, as we suggested above, usually local or related to some population cleavage more than they are to party, it may be that we see two things here: party bills, in the reapportionment measures, which were of great concern in the session in which we took our sample, and local or cleavage bills related to an urban/rural/mixed population cleavage which is also associated with party. If the partisans hold these population cleavages in common, then this is the type of result we would expect to see.

The problem is that the population in the chamber does not easily divide across this constituent range. Table 8 provides a thumbnail sketch of the districts and the partisan identifications of these Senators.

**Table 8: Partisan Affiliations of Senators by District Type**

		URBAN			Total
		Urban	Mixed	Rural	Ttl.
Democrat	D	11		6	17
Independent	I	2	1		3
Republican	R	11	9	9	29
Total		24	10	15	49

Here, we can clearly see that the supposition that rural districts are, for the most part, represented by Republicans is not supported. Equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans are drawn from urban districts and fully 17 Democrats hail from rural districts. The only significant difference is in so-called “mixed” districts, we surmise that these are suburbs represented by Republicans. If there is a policy angle connected to urban-rural differences, it does not connect to partisan affiliation, although the examination of the aspects of the rural/urban/mixed split must be left to a future iteration of this research.

During our interviews, two senators stated that party lines are drawn when elections for committee chairs were taking place. This is an excellent example of a party unity occurrence, because it is a necessity, in the eyes of a political party, for a member to acquire that seat. One senator also noted that during regular elections party lines are drawn. Although members of the Nebraska Unicameral made statements like these, many still argue that the body is non-partisan. One senator commented; “It is unfortunate that Political Science instruction in Nebraska is so devoid of information about our non-partisan unicameral system. I have no partisan opponents that I am aware of. Nor do I oppose any member based upon their individual choice of political party. So, your questions have no relevancy to my decisions on the factors influencing my voting, except for constituency cues and cues from lobbyists/interest groups.”

Indeed, some of this may be apparent if we identify and describe the bills, which are most conflictual, by party. After reviewing the data, we found that numerous cases of elections and reapportionment bills were conflictual. As stated above, these bills tend to draw party lines. An example of this can be seen in LB 851 concerning Congressional redistricting in Nebraska. In this case, it seemed as though a compromise had to be reached between members of opposing parties. Thus, partisan conflict can be resolved in a partisan fashion.<sup>3</sup> Five of the forty-seven senators interviewed specifically mentioned that redistricting is one area where party affiliation serves as a voting cue. However, fourteen senators stated that ideology and philosophical beliefs played a larger role as a voting cue than party affiliation. One senator commented, “It’s more of a Conservative/Liberal divide rather than Republican/Democrat. Party affiliation doesn’t

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<sup>3</sup> We consulted the records of the 2001 Nebraska Legislative Journal in order to reconstruct the events that occurred surrounding LB 851. Because these records do not provide a detailed outline of events surrounding the bills, some assumptions were made.

play a big role.” Given the strong partisan attachments on the election and reapportionment bills, it should not be surprising that similar findings attach to budget and major money items.

We were also interested in what voting cues the senators used for decision making for bills. Seventeen senators stated that Information from the district office or from legislative aides were their primary voting cues. Nineteen senators stated that constituency cues were their top voting cue. Fifteen senators mentioned that party affiliation had no bearing on voting cues; sixteen said the same for national party and fifteen claimed similar for state party. Although these findings show that a significant number of the senators interviewed claim that party affiliation, national party and state party, have no affect on their voting behaviors, their voting actions show otherwise.

#### **Urban Rural Effects**

Table 8 revealed a problem with the notion that urban and rural representation may structure voting behavior: it cannot do so and account for all the bills that are accounted for as conflict bills under the party identifier. Only the “mixed” districts are clearly represented unitarily by one party (the Republicans control 9 of the 10 districts with the 10<sup>th</sup> represented by an independent). Urban districts are evenly split between the parties (11 are represented by Democrats, 11 by Republicans) and the rural districts are nearly so (6 are represented by Democrats and 9 by Republicans). This means that where the parties divide on an issue, defections that would unify districts on these lines are difficult – mathematically, only if almost all of the Democrats from the rural districts vote with their Republican counterparts and all of the Democrats from the urban districts vote together on the opposite side of the issue is this a likely outcome.

***Table 9: Cross-tab of Urban/Rural Conflict Votes and Partisan Conflict Votes***

**PARTYDIV \* URBANDIV Crosstabulation**

Count

		URBANDIV		Total
		.00	1.00	
PARTYDIV	.00	127	20	147
	1.00	24	34	58
Total		151	54	205

Table 9 reports a simple cross-tab of party votes (0=those where the party majorities vote on the same side of the issue, 1=party conflict votes) and urban/rural splits across the array (where 0=those votes where the majority of urban and rural senators vote on the same side of the issue; 1=those votes where they divide on geographical lines). Here, we can see that though 34 of the votes reflect a structure of voting which reflects both party and geographical voting, 24 of them are votes where the party structures the vote without aid from the urban/rural split across the issues. Only 20 votes reflect the geographical division alone. This suggests that though geographical division may play a role, its role is less than that of party, and that in some cases one reflects a division in the other.

The next logical question is, if urban rural divisions play a role in structuring the vote, which bills are typically those where the geographically different districts find themselves on opposite sides of the question? Table 10 reflects these divisions.

Table 10: Simple N Count of Urban/Rural Conflict Bills by Bill Type

Descriptive Statistics

URBANDIV	BILL TYPE	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
.00	2 URBANDIV	35	.00	.00	.0000	.0000
	Valid N (listwise)	35				
	3 URBANDIV	5	.00	.00	.0000	.0000
	Valid N (listwise)	5				
	4 URBANDIV	15	.00	.00	.0000	.0000
Valid N (listwise)	15					
1.00	5 URBANDIV	96	.00	.00	.0000	.0000
	Valid N (listwise)	96				
	2 URBANDIV	13	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.0000
	Valid N (listwise)	13				
	3 URBANDIV	3	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.0000
Valid N (listwise)	3					
.00	4 URBANDIV	9	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.0000
	Valid N (listwise)	9				
	5 URBANDIV	29	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.0000
	Valid N (listwise)	29				

Table 10 describes urban and rural district voting across different bill types and across conflict and non-conflict votes, where conflict votes are those where urban representatives vote on one side of the question and rural representatives vote on the

other. The simple number of bills across which representatives from the two district types conflict is a little over one-quarter of the total number of bills in the array. Of these, the vast majority of them are substantive policy bills (5) accounting for 29 of the 53 conflict bills. Major money bills (2) come in a distant second (at n=13).

Clearly, both party and the urban – rural divisions play a role in structuring the vote in the unicameral.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

In summary, we tested three main aspects of our overall hypothesis that party structures voting in the 2001 regular and special sessions of the Nebraska Unicameral:

We hypothesized, at the start, that “There is partisan unity in the chamber, across the board. Partisans will tend, on balance, to vote together.” We found that the parties are highly unified, with a mean of about 80% of partisans voting on the same side of the issue, though there are instances at the low end for both parties.

The second sub-hypothesis was that “the parties will divide across issues in much the same manner as they do in ‘partisan’ chambers.” The results tend to support confirmation of this hypothesis. Clearly, when the parties divide, the Democrats are unified at high levels; there are few defections from the party on these types of votes.

The report for the Republicans is remarkably similar, in that they also seem to be quite loyal in circumstances where the parties divide.

Third, we asked the question, On what types of bills are the parties dividing? We hypothesized that “this partisan conflict will be patterned in much the same way as it is patterned in ‘partisan’ chambers: the bill types in the unicameral that are partisan will be the same types of bills and issues that are partisan in other chambers.” Specifically, we hypothesized that “party voting will be strongest in elections and reapportionment bills, and major money issues.” Further, we expected to see a smaller effect of party in other matters, such as substantive policy measures, which may be more responsive to local and/or district concerns or to cleavages such as rural, mixed and urban constituent populations. We found that the largest percentage of the full array of issues that are

disputed by the parties are in fact elections and reapportionment measures, followed by substantive policy measures.

Elections and reapportionment bills cannot be anything other than party bills in the clearest sense of the concept. It is difficult to see them any other way, since these types of bills tend to lend advantage to one party over another. Although there may be some possibility that the split in marginal rural districts to include more urban voters might affect the strengths of individual candidates, the probability of Senators organizing so effectively along urban/rural lines to draw lines to advantage these candidates is very small indeed. Clearly, party has a role in structuring these bills: party matters in the Unicameral.

In this paper, we have attempted a preliminary exploration of vote structuring in the non-partisan Nebraska Unicameral by looking into the voting patterns as well as the personal opinions held by state legislators in regards to the structure of the house. We examined the role of party affiliation and how it does or does not influence voting. Although our findings show that a significant number of the senators interviewed claim that party affiliation has no affect on their voting behaviors—their voting actions show otherwise. It is evident that to uncover the voting structure of the Unicameral fully, other possible influences beyond party affiliation need to be investigated. We suggest that future research on this topic include data concerning the effects of the urban/suburban/rural split. Although the urban/suburban/rural split is an important element in explaining policy preferences among senators, we could not undertake that examination here, and have limited the scope of our paper to the party division.

The phase of the analysis I did accomplish in this arena does invite some interesting speculation however. I do not want to speak far beyond the data here, but earlier accounts of roll call voting in state legislatures point to specific types of bills as “party bills”. This analysis is somewhat hamstrung by containing data which does not include legislative organizational bills – those most likely (after elections bills) to be “party bills”. However, this analysis reinforces that earlier work, with one critical exception: substantive policy bills have never been identified as party bills, and yet here in the Unicameral roll call data, they account for a great number of the party conflict votes. I speculate that the reason this is so is that this is the one area where party and geographical district representation cross paths: these are not specifically party bills per se, but rather bills where the Republicans in the hinterland and their urban partisan counterparts, have formed a coalition with Democrats there (of which there are 6) that places these Democrats in defection against the majority of their party, (of which there are 11) who hail from urban districts. This results in an 11-6 split among Democrats, so that the majority of Democrats lie on one side of the issue, while a majority, if not all, Republicans join with the defectors on the other side of the issue. This would leave us with a mathematical calculation that reports a “party conflict bill” under our definition, but is, in fact, a cross-party coalition based on the needs of rural Republicans.

The study of state legislatures has been and continues to be a popular focus for research within the field of political science. Amidst all this research, however, the Nebraska Unicameral never seems to be included in the data analysis due to its one-house structure and feature of non-partisanship. We have shown through this study that an examination of Nebraska's unique state house is a worthwhile endeavor. It not only contributes to our understanding of state legislatures as a whole, but also poses intriguing research questions for future undertakings.

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