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Legislator characteristics and legislative outcomes in India

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Abstract

We empirically test the prediction that the personal attributes of the legislators critically determine the legislative performance of a legislature in an Indian context. Analyzing the data on the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in the state of Tamil Nadu in the 2006-11 Assembly batch, we examine how the various personal characteristics of the legislators affect two indicators of legislative outcomes – their attendance in the Assembly session-days and the number of the questions asked by them on public policy. We find that the legislators who are more affluent attend significantly fewer Assembly sessions than their less rich colleagues. The legislators who are more affluent and more educated and those who belong to the opposition party ask significantly less questions in the Assembly sessions. Though the session attendance and the asked questions can be part of a larger set of legislative performance indicators; in presence of data constraints, we argue these two can substantially signal the lawmakers' performance. [Keywords: Legislator quality, legislative outcomes, India.] [JEL classification: D72, H11.]

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1. Introduction

Legislator attributes veritably determine the legislative performance of a legislature. In this paper, we empirically test this prediction for the first time in an Indian context. Analyzing data on the Members of the Legislative Assembly (henceforth, MLAs) in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu in its 2006-11 Assembly batch, we examine how the legislators' personal characteristics affect two indicators of legislative outcomes – their attendance in the Assembly session-days and the number of questions asked by them on public policy. We find that the legislators who are more affluent attend significantly fewer Assembly sessions than their less rich colleagues. The legislators who are more affluent and more educated and those who belong to the opposition party ask significantly less questions in the Assembly sessions. Though session attendance and the asked questions can be part of a larger set of legislative performance indicators; in presence of data constraints, we argue these two can substantially signal the lawmakers' performance. While the attendance shows the legislators' intent to discuss and deliberate on the government's policy issues, the number of questions asked can actually point towards the legislative checks and balances and ensuring the accountability of the state's political executive while revealing the lawmakers' attendance in the first place.

Authorised by the Constitution, a legislator is mandated to legislate, i.e. devise new public laws and enact newer policies, in tune with the needs of the electorate which has elected her/him through the democratic elections. While this is the critical part of their position, legislators vary in their willingness to introduce policy satisfying the citizen preferences and in their ability to see those proposals through the legislative process. This variability stems from the characteristics and activities of the lawmakers themselves and the institutional context and advantages that accrue to certain legislators (Jenkins 2010). The quality of policy-making depends on the honesty and competence of the political class (Besley 2006). Recent empirical evidence suggests that political leaders significantly affect economic outcomes. Jones and Olken (2005) exploited the deaths of leaders while in office as a source of exogenous variation in leadership, and found robust evidence of the effects of political leaders on economic growth. They found that the effects of individual leaders are strongest in autocratic regimes with fewer constraints on a leader's power. Besley, Persson and Sturm (2010) find that lack of political competition in a state is associated with low income growth and anti-growth policies like higher taxes and lower capital spending.

While the candidate's characteristics are critical to her/his winning[1] in elections, the legislators' personal attributes and their historical background also greatly affect their legislative efficiency and performance. A huge deal of literature has spawned on the legislative performance and effectiveness (Olson and Nonidez 1972; Bratton and Haynie

[1] Gupta and Panagariya (2011) analyzed the 2009 Lok Sabha (Lower House in Parliament) elections in India and found that on average, more educated and wealthier candidates have a better chance of victory. These advantages turned out to be far more important in the states exhibiting low economic growth and indeed have a tendency to become statistically insignificant in states exhibiting high growth rates. Dutta and Gupta (2012) find that voters penalised candidates with criminal charges in the 2009 parliamentary elections; however, this negative effect is reduced if there are other candidates in the constituency with criminal charges.

1999; Jeydel and Taylor 2003; Clinton and Lapinski 2006; Adler, Ensley and Wilkerson (undated), Grant and Kelly 2008; Cox and Terry 2008; Jenkins 2010). Legislative effectiveness can be displayed through the frequency of floor speaking, number of questions asked, session attendance, number of bills introduced, number of bills passed, number of amendments offered etc. (Olson and Nonidez 1972). Jenkins (2010) argues that the factors that lead to legislative activity and effectiveness tend to be grouped into three main categories: institutional, environmental (also often termed political context), and individual activities and characteristics. The key determinants of legislative effectiveness in the institutional category are majority party status and leadership status. Legislators are constrained in their ability to succeed in shepherding bills through the legislature by institutional factors like majority party status, seniority and their position within the leadership hierarchy, with rank and file minority party members at a severe disadvantage. Papers like Cox and Terry (2008) and Miquel and Snyder (2008) find that because of their seniority, experience, legislative specialization and position in the party's political hierarchy, senior leaders tend to (and should be) more effective in the lawmaking process. Krutz (2005) finds that seniority is one of the important cues surrounding a bill that determine which bills gain further consideration. Additionally, Miquel and Snyder (2008) find no evidence that legislative effectiveness eventually declines with tenure and argue that this increase in effectiveness is the result of learning-by-doing as is seen in the human capital based economic growth theories. They note that this means that term limits may impose substantial costs in terms of loss of legislative effectiveness.

Legislator quality in India has recently attracted nascent research. Banerjee and Pande (2007) examined how increased voter ethnicization, defined as greater voter preference for the party representing her ethnic group (caste, for example), affects legislator quality. In situations where parties and politicians cannot commit to policies prior to the election, ethnicization reduces average winner quality for the pro-majority party, with the opposite true for the minority party leading to the decline in the average winner-loser quality gap. They find these effects increase with greater numerical dominance of the majority and are absent in jurisdictions with equal-sized voter groups. Aidt, Golden and Tiwari (2010) find that Indian political parties are more likely to select allegedly criminal candidates when facing greater electoral uncertainty and in parliamentary constituencies whose populations exhibit lower levels of literacy. The well-known incumbency disadvantage characterizing Indian legislative elections, as they find, stems from the superior electoral performance of the allegedly criminal candidates, who drive the incumbents from office.

Similarly, the political economics literature on the Indian legislators' legislative performance is very thin. In an interesting paper, Datta (2007) exploited an exogenous variation in the television coverage of the Parliamentary Question Hour and found that the televised sessions increased the voice of nationally prominent, senior politicians and represented the elite, urban electorate. The ordinary Members of Parliament (MPs) who did not hold any important position within the government or in their political parties had reduced voice. As this also happened within the ruling party, whose leaders were the Ministers supposedly being held to account, Datta argued that the Question Hour's effectiveness as a legislative institution of accountability was hampered by television coverage.

To the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first-ever study to analyze the effect of the legislator qualities or characteristics on the legislative performance in the Indian context. In

the process, it contributes to the growing political economics literature on the subject. Some self-explanatory graphic analysis in the form of Fig. 1 and 2 (presented after the References section) would tell us why we are sufficiently motivated to study this issue in the paper – i.e. in order to understand how the legislators' history affect their legislative outcomes. The paper has a simple organization which is as follows: in the first section, we review the extant literature, in the second section; we have a retrospective brief on the 2006-11 Assembly of Tamil Nadu. The third section explains the data sources, econometric methodology, estimation results and some exploratory analysis. Finally, we conclude with a summary.

2. Looking back at the Tamil Nadu Assembly, 2006-11

It is pertinent to have a retrospect on the studied Assembly batch.[2] As for the party-wise breakup of the total number of MLAs, the respective figures for the ruling party DMK and the main opposition party AIADMK were 96 and 61. Among the rest, the respective figures for the parties were INC: 34, PMK: 18, CPI(M): 9, MDMK: 6, CPI: 6, VCK: 2, DMDK: 1, Independents: 1. There are 23 female MLAs comprising 9.82 per cent of the total number of MLAs (Election Commission of India, 2006). The poll candidates' affidavits were analyzed by the National Election Watch, a front of Association of Democratic Reforms (http://www.adrindia.org). The Assembly batch had this brief profile as below:[3]

Out of total 234 MLAs, 77 (32.91%) had pending criminal cases against them. Out of these 77 MLAs that had a total of 176 (inclusive of 52 heinous IPC crimes like murder, extortion etc.) pending criminal cases, there are pending serious criminal cases against 25 MLAs. Out of 77 MLAs with pending criminal cases in Tamil Nadu 2006 Assembly Elections, 39 were of DMK, 15 were of PMK, 9 were of INC, 8 were of AIADMK, 2 were of MDMK and CPI each, 1 of CPI and 1 Independent. Among major parties, the average assets per MLA for INC was Rs. 2 crore (a crore is ten million), for DMK and VCK; it was Rs.1 crore each, for AIADMK, it was Rs 93 lakhs. For MDMK the average assets per MLA was Rs. 91 lakhs; and

[2] The chief minister of this Assembly batch was Mr. Muthuvel Karunanidhi of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham (DMK), aged 82 years, at the time of the 2006 election. DMK is a regional political party, mainly based in Tamil Nadu. The main opposition party AIADMK, headed by Ms. J. Jayalalitha, stands for the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham. The AIADMK came back to power with Ms. Jayalalitha as the chief minister in the 2011 Assembly poll.

[3] We have got these vital snippets from the ADR report titled "Analysis of Criminal and Financial details of MLAs from Tamil Nadu, Based on 2006 Assembly Elections" which is available at http://www.adrindia.org/sites/default/files/tamil%20nadu%20v8_0.pdf last accessed on 18 December, 2012.

for PMK, it was Rs.64 lakhs. Average assets for an MLA from Tamil Nadu stood at Rs.1.3 crore. Out of 234 MLAs analyzed, 114 had not declared their PAN details.[4]

3. Empirical Analysis

3.1 Description of the data sources and the variables

The legislators' background data have been taken from the database collated from their affidavits submitted along with their nomination papers at the Election Commission during the Assembly Elections in 2006 by a well-known non-profit pressure group Association of Democratic Reforms (http://www.adrindia.org) which advocates electoral reforms in the country and files various Right to Information applications. These data were publicized to inform voters to facilitate conscious participation in the voting process. Their flagship website http://www.myneta.info is the source for our background data as well as the Assembly sessions attendance and questions-asked data.[5] The latter two pieces of data were obtained from the Assembly secretariat as a consequence of a Right to Information Act application (see http://www.rti.gov.in for details on this public transparency measure) filed by ADR in early December, 2010. This organization's huge electoral dataset concerning the candidate characteristics, poll-time affidavits and findings of the Right to Information applications has recently attained wider acceptability among economics and political science researchers (Gupta and Panagariya 2011; Fisman, Schulz and Vig 2012; Bhavnani 2012; Dutta and Gupta 2012).

In the dataset, 26 MLAs did not furnish their education record and 7 MLAs had vaguely written "others" as their education qualification in their poll affidavit. We assumed these "not given" and "others" types as zero years of schooling in our dataset for estimations, for we argue that it is in each candidate's personal interest to reveal his education if he/she is truly educated. There are cases of MLAs who have clearly cited illiterate, 5^{th} pass, 8^{th} pass as their educational qualifications in their poll affidavits, so the "not given" and "others" types are presumed illiterate. Those MLAs who happen to be one of the groups of Ministers, Chief Minister, Speaker and Leader of Opposition, are exempted from day to day attendance signature in the Assembly, there are 32 such cases from the data of 234 poll-winning MLAs, which are officially marked zero. So we did not consider 32 of such cases while doing the regressions for session attendance and questions asked as the outcomes.

[4] It stands for the personal account number and the card is used for tax return filings in India. It is a very disengaging fact that in India, most poll candidates hesitate to furnish their PAN details as well as in some cases, their educational qualifications, as is shown here in this study.

[5] For the data we used, the relevant weblink is at http://adrindia.org/resources/most-popular/performance-mlas-and-assemblies-states-going-poll which was last accessed on 18 December, 2012.

Table- 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Legislator's age	201	47.53	8.59	25	71
Reserved seat dummy	202	0.203	0.403	0	1
Gender dummy	202	0.901	0.299	0	1
Total attendance	202	186.56	34.66	10	214
Log attendance	202	5.186	0.386	2.303	5.366
Ruling party dummy	202	0.327	0.470	0	1
Criminal dummy	202	0.292	0.456	0	1
Total assets	202	11500000	35500000	0	362000000
Questions asked	188	870.65	2782.27	0	22750
Log questions*	188	4.179	2.935	0	10.032
Total liabilities	201	1365589	9718232	0	134000000
Years of schooling	202	10.847	5.385	1	21
Log schooling*	202	2.094	0.971	0	3.045
Net wealth	201	10100000	29400000	0	247000000
Log net wealth	196	14.635	1.784	9.796	19.323

Note: * marks indicate the placing of one in cases where observations were found to be zero, which is why the minimum turned out to be zero (log of one is zero).

Now we describe the variables we have used in the econometric analysis. Log attendance is defined as the natural log of the MLA's total attendance in the Assembly Session-days in the 5-year stint (which had stipulated total session days = 214 during 2006-11). Log questions is the natural log of the number of questions asked by a legislator in all 214 Session-days of the five-year Assembly term. The criminal antecedents dummy equals one if the MLA has at least one criminal case pending against her or him, and equals zero otherwise. Reserved caste constituency dummy equals one if the MLA's constituency is reserved for either the Scheduled Castes (Dalits) or Scheduled Tribes (the Adivasis) candidates in the politically mandated affirmative action program, and equals zero otherwise (i.e. general, open-contest). The ruling party dummy equals one if the MLA belongs to the chief minister's political party, and equals zero otherwise. Log schooling is the natural log of the MLA's total years of schooling (we have assumed responses like "not given" and "others" as zero). Log net wealth is the natural log of the net wealth i.e. total assets minus liabilities in Rupees value declared in the official affidavit at the time of election before the Election Commission of India. The lawmaker's age is her/his age in years as noted by her/him in the election affidavit filed during the 2006 Assembly poll. Age squared is a quadratic in age. Gender dummy equals one if the MLA is male and equals zero if female.

3.2 Econometric methodology

At the outset, we estimate an Ordinary Least Squares regression model of the total session attendance of an MLA as the outcome. The model is of the form

$$\begin{aligned}\log attendance_i = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 CRIMINAL\_dummy_i + \beta_2 RESERVED\_dummy_i + \\ & \beta_3 \log yrsschooling_i + \beta_4 \log netwealth_i + \beta_5 rulingpartydummy_i + \\ & \beta_6 age_i + \beta_7 agesquared_i + \beta_8 genderdummy_i + \varepsilon_i\end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where $attendance_i$ is the dependent variable i.e. log of total attendance of a legislator. The explanatory variables (that we have defined in the Section 3.1) include the legislator specific characteristics like her/his gender, age, age squared, a dummy for a history of criminal cases, education represented by log of years of schooling, a dummy for ruling party affiliation, a dummy for caste-reserved constituency and log net wealth. β_1 through β_8 are the parameters to be estimated. ε_i is the normally and independently distributed error term.

Then we estimate a Tobit model of the legislative questions asked by an MLA. The number of questions asked by a legislator, which is the dependent variable, has the value of zero for a large number of legislators. It is, thus, censored at zero. The Ordinary Least Squares method, which assumes that the dependent variable is normally distributed, is inappropriate in this case. Consistent parameter estimates are obtained by the maximum likelihood estimation of the Tobit regression model, which is specified as follows.

$$\begin{aligned}\log questions_i^* = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 CRIMINAL\_dummy_i + \beta_2 RESERVED\_dummy_i + \beta_3 \log yrsschooling_i + \\ & \beta_4 \log netwealth_i + \beta_5 rulingpartydummy_i + \beta_6 age_i + \beta_7 agesquared_i + \\ & \beta_8 genderdummy_i + \varepsilon_i\end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}&\log questions_i = 0 \quad \text{if} \quad \log questions_i^* = 0 \\ &\log questions_i = \log questions_i^* \quad \text{if} \quad \log questions_i^* > 0\end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where $\log questions_i^*$ is the latent variable for the log of number of questions asked by the lawmaker i in the Assembly sessions and $\log questions_i$ is its observed counterpart. β_1 through β_8 are the parameters to be estimated. ε_i is the normally and independently distributed error term.

Heteroscedasticity is a common estimation problem concerning an analysis of this kind. It may result from the larger variation in the total number of questions asked by the ruling party vis-à-vis the opposition party MLAs or the open caste constituency vis-à-vis the reserved caste constituency MLAs. The use of the logarithmic transformation often reduces heteroscedasticity. Therefore, we use the logarithmic transformation of the total number of questions asked as well as that of the total net wealth and the years of schooling. This formulation has the advantage of providing an estimate of the total education (or wealth) elasticity of questions asked. Taking logarithm of the two variables (number of questions asked and years of schooling) created a problem since a large number of data points were observed to be zero. In order to overcome this problem, we assigned a value of one in place of zero for questions raised and years of schooling and then constructed the variables – log questions and log years of schooling– for the Tobit regression model following Tansel and Bircan (2004, 2006).

3.3 Estimation Results and Discussion

(a) Outcome: Session Attendance

The OLS and Tobit regression results for the MLAs' session attendance and asked questions respectively are presented in Table- 2. In its first column, we find that the legislators who are more affluent attend significantly less Assembly sessions. While the richer legislators having less Assembly attendance is an issue of great concern for its added implications (like the MLA may potentially be busy in other profitable, and so unethical, avenues etc.), this fact may partially be accounted for by the variation in electoral competitiveness.[6] When we control for a full set of the covariates in the second column, the effect of the lawmakers' log net wealth on their log attendance in Assembly sessions is still significantly negative vindicating the first column finding. Legislators from more competitive districts tend to be less effective; this is due, at least in part, to the fact that such legislators must devote more time and consideration to electoral concerns as opposed to policy or legislative concerns (Ellickson 1992). Apart from the political safety concerns, another environmental factor which could be relevant here is the type of district. Those representing urban districts have been found to be more effective legislators (Ellickson 1992; Bratton and Haynie 1999). Dutta and Gupta (2012) find that the vote shares are positively related to candidate wealth, with the marginal effect being higher for the candidates with criminal charges. Moreover, the MLAs

[6] Electoral competitiveness has a lot to do with the anti-incumbency feature of Indian politics in the post-liberalization period. Using a non-parametric regression discontinuity design that compares candidates who barely win an election to those who barely lose since 1991, Linden (2003) estimates that incumbents in Indian parliamentary election are 14 percent less likely to be elected compared to similar non-incumbents regardless of experience and party affiliation. Analyzing the parliamentary election outcomes in 483 constituents in rural India from 1971 to 1991, Paul and Denzau (2006) found that voters did significantly care about educational, electricity and communication facilities and reelected the incumbents succeeding at those public goods provisioning whereas the incumbents faced defeat if they provided more medical or safe drinking water facilities.

being less likely to turn up in the Assembly sessions may hint at their wealth accumulation which has recently attracted empirical research (Fisman, Schulz and Vig 2012; Bhavnani 2012).[7]

Table- 2. The correlates of the legislators' sessions' attendance and questions asked

	log attendance	log attendance	log questions	log questions
	OLS	OLS	Tobit	Tobit
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log schooling	0.0261	0.0247	-0.693**	-0.797***
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.280)	(0.283)
Log net wealth	-0.0588**	-0.0556**	-0.368**	-0.236
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.186)	(0.201)
Gender dummy	0.241	0.249		-0.622
	(0.194)	(0.209)		(0.928)
Reserved dummy	0.0712	0.071		0.708
	(0.045)	(0.049)		(0.723)
Criminal dummy	-0.0267	-0.0253		0.0047
	(0.065)	(0.067)		(0.732)
Ruling party dummy		-0.0066	1.046*	0.9170
		(0.064)	(0.587)	(0.599)
Age		-0.0059		-0.1950
		(0.028)		(0.289)
Age squared		0.00004		0.00153
		(0.0003)		(0.0031)
Constant	5.766***	5.901***	9.975***	14.41**
	(0.281)	(0.645)	(2.757)	(6.249)
Observations	196	196	183	183
R-squared	0.1142	0.1158		
Log pseudolikelihood			-410.52	-408.39
Pseudo R-squared			0.0164	0.0215
Left-censored observations			55	55
Uncensored observations			128	128

Note: Statistical significance is shown by * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Huber-White robust standard errors clustered at the Legislative Assembly constituency level are in parentheses.

[7] Indirectly signaling at political corruption by the Indian provincial lawmakers in 24 states in India, Fisman, Schulz and Vig (2012) studied the wealth accumulation of 3622 re-contesting candidates (2303 winners and 1319 runners-up) during 2003-08 using poll-time public disclosures required of all candidates. They found that annual asset growth of the winners was on average 3 to 6 percentage points higher than the runners-up. The "winner's premium" comes from the MLAs holding ministerial positions, with asset returns 13 to 29 percentage points higher than the non-winners and the benefit of winning is also concentrated among the incumbents, because of low asset growth for the incumbent non-winners. Bhavnani (2012) also studied politicians' assets accumulation in India based on mandatory poll-time asset disclosures for 14 states.

Although statistically insignificant, some relationships are quite informative. The MLAs with criminal antecedents (i.e. at least one criminal case pending against them) compared to their "clean" colleagues, are less likely to attend the Assembly sessions. Needless to add, it makes a palpable case for promoting stringent decriminalization of politics. The MLAs' age is found to have a positive relation with session attendance – it means higher the age of the legislators, higher would be the attendance by him or her. This finding is consistent with that of Cox and Terry (2008) and Miquel and Snyder (2008) among a host of others who have postulated that those with seniority in age, experience and political capabilities are more active in the lawmaking process in the legislature. Compared to the opposition party members, the ruling party members are less likely to attend the House sessions. The impact of aggregate level legislative performance on individual electoral fortunes is therefore central to understanding the legislative behaviour and parliamentary organizations (Adler, Ensley and Wilkerson, undated). For example, if the (Assembly) legislature's collective performance only affects the reelection prospects of the ruling (majority) party members, then there is little reason to expect the opposition (minority) party members to cooperate in the development and enactment of legislation. On the other hand, there is a phenomenon called 'bipartisan cooperation' in the US Congressional lawmakers and fully three-quarters of all "important legislation" enacted by the US Congress over the past 50 years has passed with bipartisan support (Clinton and Lapinski 2006). Translated to the Indian context, both the Parliament and the state level legislatures have lately been witness to a trend of the laws being enacted and passed by the ruling party or the ruling coalition with the help of some smaller parties espousing parochial preferences. Similarly, the opposition (minority) party members who have no electoral stake in the legislation that the committees produce would appear to have little incentive to contribute to legislative proceedings other than to engage in obstruction, yet research does not appear to indicate that this is the case (Hall 1992).

(b) Outcome: Questions asked

The third and the fourth column of Table- 2 explain the determinants of the number of questions on public policy asked by the MLAs in the House. In the third column, we find through a restricted model that the relatively more affluent and more educated MLAs do ask significantly fewer questions compared to their less rich and less educated peers whereas the legislators belonging to the ruling party ask a significantly higher number of questions vis-à-vis the opposition lawmakers. However, when we control for a full set of covariates in the fourth column, the impacts of net wealth and ruling party affiliation[8] dissipate yet the effect of schooling is retained. The effect of education on questions asked is still significantly negative – the highly educated MLAs ask significantly less questions than the less educated ones. Although insignificant, the positive coefficient of the reserved constituency dummy (that equals one if the MLA is from a caste-reserved constituency and zero otherwise) postulates that the lawmakers belonging to either the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled

[8] Research has confirmed that legislators of the ruling (majority) party are more successful in securing the passage of a legislation they sponsor (Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier and Sinclair-Chapman 2003; Cox and Terry 2008). Krutz (2005) examined the bill winnowing process to confirm this as he finds that bills sponsored by majority party members are more likely to continue on in the legislative process.

Tribes are likely to ask more questions on public programs than their general (higher caste) counterparts.

Some exploratory graphs in Fig. 1 and 2 (presented after the References section) substantiate our econometric estimation results. The Fig. 1 shows that the average attendance by years of schooling is the highest for the group of 92 MLAs belonging to 11 to 15 years of schooling category while the lowest attendance is for the illiterate group of MLAs; the mean of asked questions by years of schooling is the highest for the group of 92 MLAs belonging to 11 to 15 years of schooling category while its lowest is recorded for the group of the highest educated i.e. those with above 15 years of education. This finding – that the group of the highest educated MLAs ask least number of questions – is consistent with what we have found in columns 3 and 4 of Table- 1, i.e. a significantly negative effect of schooling on number of questions. The Fig. 2 shows the mean attendance by age group is the highest for the group of 130 MLAs belonging to 41 to 55 years category while the lowest of it is registered for the eldest age group of MLAs i.e. those who are >= 66 years; the mean of asked questions by age group is the highest for the group of 130 MLAs belonging to 41 to 55 years category while the lowest of it is registered again for the eldest age group of MLAs i.e. those who are >= 66 years. This finding is consistent with what we have found in Table- 2, i.e. as MLAs' age increases, their legislative outcomes (number of questions and attendance) decline.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we empirically tested the hypothesis that legislator attributes critically influence the legislative performance of a legislature for the first time in an Indian context. Analyzing data on the Members of the Legislative Assembly in Tamil Nadu state (India) in the 2006-11 Assembly batch, we examined how legislators' personal characteristics affected two indicators of legislative outcomes – their attendance in the Assembly session-days and the number of the questions asked by them on public policy. We find that the legislators who are more affluent attend significantly fewer Assembly sessions than their less rich colleagues. The legislators who are more affluent and more educated and those who belong to the opposition party ask significantly less questions in the Assembly sessions. Though session attendance and asked questions can be part of a larger set of legislative performance indicators; in presence of data constraints, we argue these two can substantially signal the lawmakers' performance nevertheless.

There is a felt need for further research on the Indian national Parliament and state legislatures especially on their legislative effectiveness and performance with a view to enhancing electoral accountability and promoting the level of good governance.

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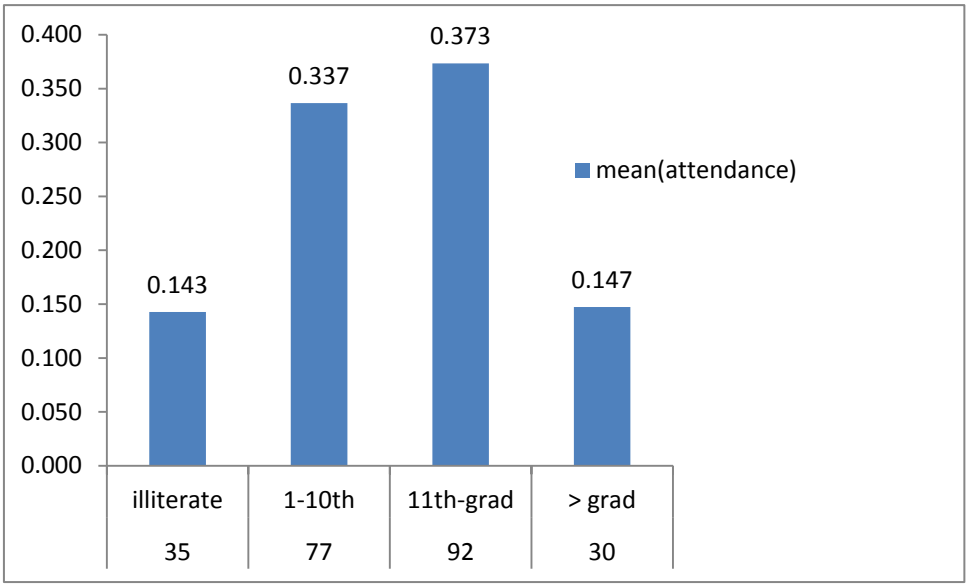
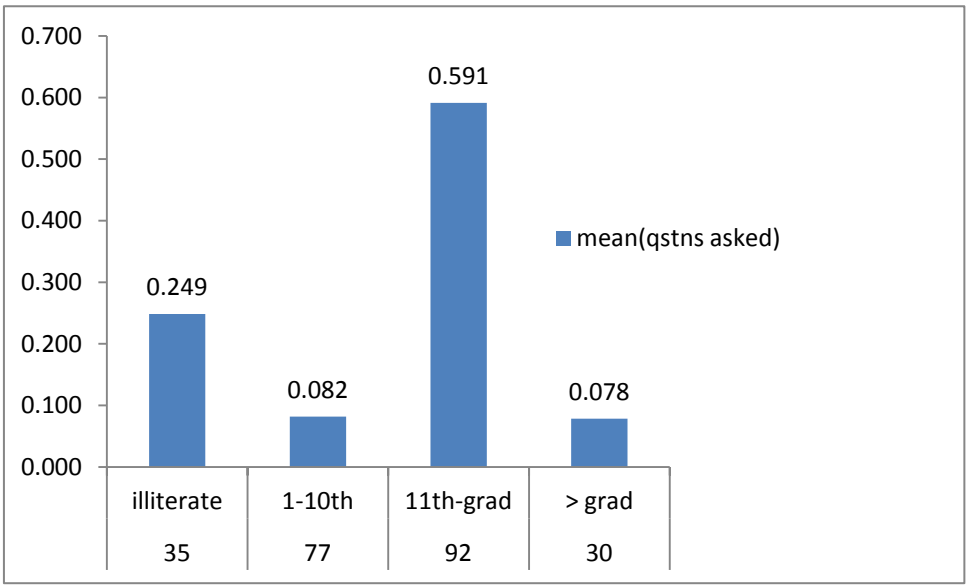
Fig. 1. Legislative performance by years of education

(a) Average attendance by years of schooling



Note: N= 234. This is the total number of elected MLAs in the 2006-11 Tamil Nadu state Assembly. 32 MLAs being some sort of executive were exempted from signing on the attendance register. 12 MLAs did attend all the 214 Sessions-days having a 100 per cent attendance. Grad means undergrad or (at least) 15 years of schooling in India.

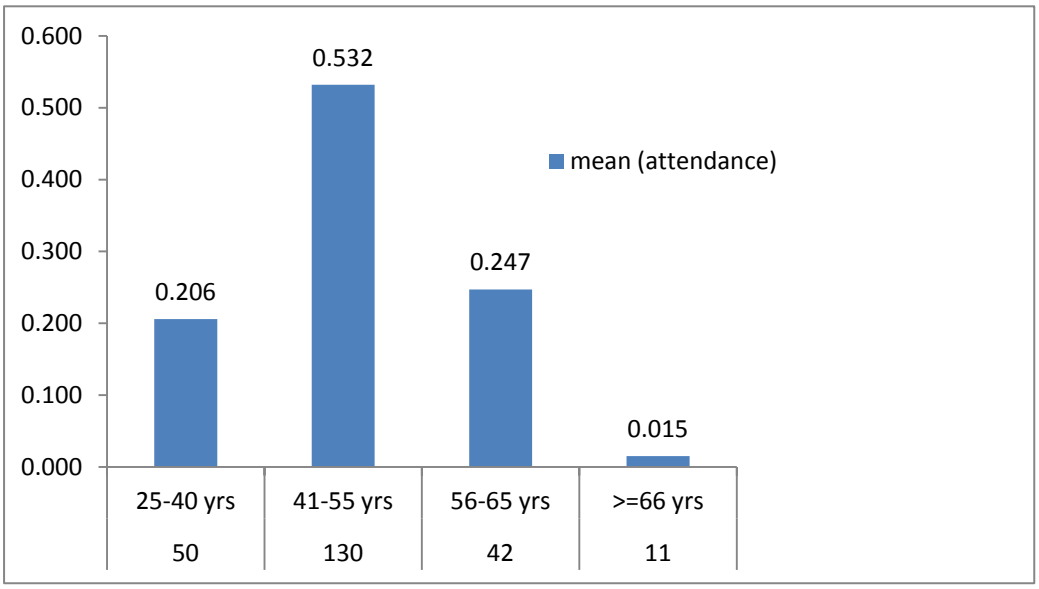
(b) Average number of questions asked by years of schooling



Note: N= 234. This is the total number of elected MLAs in the 2006-11 Tamil Nadu state Assembly. 82 MLAs did not ask a single question during all the Assembly sessions in the 5-year stint. Grad means undergrad or (at least) 15 years of schooling in India.

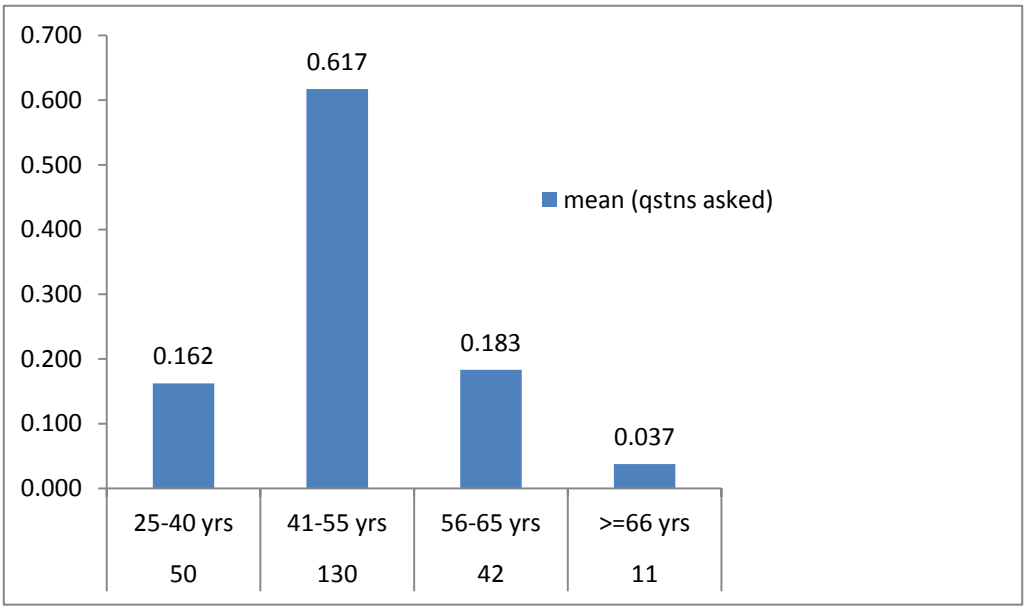
Fig. 2. Legislative performance by age group

(a) Average attendance by age group



Note: The sample is based on all 233 MLAs (the original N=234, for one legislator, the age data are absent) in the 2006-11 Tamil Nadu state Assembly. 32 MLAs being some sort of executive were exempted from signing on the attendance register. 12 MLAs did attend all the 214 Sessions-days having a 100 per cent attendance.

(b) Average number of questions asked by age group



Note: The sample is based on all 233 MLAs (the original N=234, for one legislator, the age data are absent) in the 2006-11 Tamil Nadu state Assembly. 82 MLAs did not ask a single question during all the Assembly sessions in the 5-year stint. The age group >= 71 years did not ask a single question during all the Assembly sessions in the 5-year stint.