



Highlights from the 88th Texas Legislature Legislative Effectiveness Scores

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Executive Summary

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the recently completed 88th Texas Legislature (2023-2024). This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective lawmakers in the majority party in both chambers, the top-10 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the House of Representatives, and the top-5 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the Senate. Many legislators continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking from the previous legislative session.
- We identify those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category, as well as first-term lawmakers in this category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. However, while our data shows that majority-party bias is increasing, in the 88th Texas Legislature, there is a degree of balance in lawmaking between the majority and minority parties. Minority-party lawmakers in Texas perform above the national average in terms of lawmaking effectiveness. Democrats in the Texas House and Senate passed 147 and 170 laws, respectively. While Republican lawmakers passed significantly more legislation, 574 laws in the House and 284 laws in the Senate, there is some egalitarianism in the Texas Legislature that allows for participation of minority-party lawmakers in the legislative process.
- Serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. This phenomenon is highlighted during the 88th Texas Legislature legislative sessions, where many of the most effective lawmakers across the majority party in both chambers, and minority-party members in the House, held committee chair positions.
- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one legislative session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across sessions, as several legislators appear among the lists of most effective lawmakers in both the 2023-2024 and 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

Introduction and Methodology

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. While the scores capture how successful an individual member of the Texas House or Senate is at advancing her sponsored bills, compared to all members of her chamber (in a legislative term), it's important to be cognizant of the fact that the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores do not capture lawmaking activities that occur behind the scenes, such as legislators advocating for the passage of bills that they haven't sponsored. The scores also don't capture how effective individual members of the House or Senate are at blocking the advancement of other legislators' sponsored bills. To the extent that we are interested in identifying who is most successful at advancing their sponsored legislation through the different stages of the lawmaking process (and why), however, the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores provide us with an objective indicator of legislators' efforts. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found on our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator's majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 88th Texas House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.82 compared to 1.14 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 1.53. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.85 in the minority party, 1.14 in the majority party, and 1.17 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as "Above Expectations" for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, "Below Expectations" for those below 50% of their benchmark, and "Meeting Expectations" for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the lists of top performers highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire Texas Legislature together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 88th Texas House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives. Seven of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—House Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	Ryan Guillen (District 31)	5.39	Chair
2.	Jeff Leach (District 67)	2.63	Chair
3.	Craig Goldman (District 97)	2.56	Chair
4.	Thomas Oliverson (District 130)	2.52	Chair
5.	David Cook (District 96)	2.50	None
6.	William Metcalf (District 16)	2.29	Chair
7.	Cody Harris (District 8)	2.18	Chair
8.	Andrew Murr (District 53)	2.16	Chair
9.	Cody Vasut (District 25)	2.09	None
10.	Jacey Jetton (District 26)	2.02	None

At the top of the list is Representative Ryan Guillen from District 31 (Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Karnes, Kenedy, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Starr, Wilson, and Zapata counties) with a score of 5.39. In the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, he introduced 162 bills; 87 of which received action in committee, 73 received action beyond committee, 67 passed the House, and 26 became law.

Rep. Guillen assumed office in 2003, and at the time, was one of the youngest members ever elected to the Texas House of Representatives. He was originally elected as a Democrat, but switched affiliation to the Republican Party in 2021. He grew up working at his family’s feed store and as a ranch hand on his family’s farm. He later received a degree in agriculture from Texas A&M University and worked as a high school Agriculture teacher before joining the state legislature. For his leadership, Rep. Guillen has been named “Legislator of the Year” and “Best of the House” by many statewide organizations.

Five Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative sessions: Rep. Jeff Leach (District 67), Rep. Thomas Oliverson (District 130), Rep. William Metcalf (District 16), Rep. Cody Harris (District 8), and Rep. Andrew Murr (District 53).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 88th Texas House of Representatives

The following table identifies the top-10 highest scorers in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives among minority-party Democrats. Four of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	Terry Canales (District 40)	2.60	Chair
2.	Senfronia Thompson (District 141)	2.01	Chair
3.	Harold Dutton (District 142)	1.83	Chair
4.	Joseph Moody (District 78)	1.76	Chair
5.	John Bucy (District 136)	1.69	None
6.	Richard Raymond (District 42)	1.62	None
7.	Elizabeth Campos (District 119)	1.58	None
8.	Donna Howard (District 48)	1.53	None
9.	Annette Johnson (District 134)	1.48	None
10.	Julie Johnson (District 115)	1.34	None

Topping our list is Representative Terry Canales of District 40 (Hidalgo County), with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 2.60. He introduced 68 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, 44 of which received action in committee, 39 received action beyond committee, 31 passed the House, and 16 became law.

Rep. Canales joined the House in 2012. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science and government from the University of the Incarnate Word and a J.D. from St. Mary's University School of Law. He opened his own law practice, specializing in oil and gas, personal injury, criminal defense, and family law. Rep. Canales's family has an extensive history within the Texas State Legislature. His father, Terry A. Canales, sister Gabriella Canales, and great-uncle José Tomás Canales all served in the Texas State House. In the community, Rep. Canales is a member of the Coastal Conservation Association.

Six Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top 10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative sessions: Rep. Terry Canales (District 40), Rep. Senfronia Thompson (District 141), Rep. Harold Dutton (District 142), Rep. Joseph Moody (District 78), Rep. John Bucy (District 136), and Rep. Richard Raymond (District 42).

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 88th Texas State Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 State Senate. Seven of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—Senate Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	Bryan Hughes (District 1)	2.27	Chair
2.	Paul Bettencourt (District 7)	1.83	Chair
3.	Charles Perry (District 28)	1.55	Chair
4.	Charles Creighton (District 4)	1.52	Chair
5.	Tan Parker (District 12)	1.43	None
6.	Lois Kolkhorst (District 18)	1.40	Chair
7.	Joan Huffman (District 17)	1.35	Chair
8.	Charles Schwertner (District 5)	1.26	Chair
9.	Drew Springer (District 30)	1.12	None
10.	Mayes Middleton (District 11)	0.99	None

Among Republicans in the Senate, Senator Bryan Hughes of District 1 (Bowie, Camp, Cass, Delta, Fannin, Franklin, Gregg, Harrison, Hopkins, Lamar, Marion, Morris, Panola, Red River, Rusk, Smith, Titus, Upshur, Wood counties) ranked first with a SLES score of 2.27. In the 2023-2024 sessions, he introduced 163 bills; 78 of which received action in committee, 68 received action beyond committee, 61 passed the Senate, and 31 became law.

Sen. Hughes joined the Senate in 2017. Before serving in the Senate, Sen. Hughes represented District 5 in the Texas House of Representatives from 2003-2017. Sen. Hughes attended Tyler Junior College, holds an undergraduate degree in economics from the University of Texas at Tyler, and a J.D. from Baylor Law School. After law school, he clerked for U.S. District Judge William Steger in East Texas and then entered private practice. He has been recognized for his leadership in the Legislature through awards such as the Defender of the American Dream Award and the Taxpayer Champion Award.

Eight legislators on the list were among the top-10 highest scoring Republicans in the 2021-2022 legislative sessions: Sen. Bryan Hughes (District 1), Sen. Paul Bettencourt (District 7), Sen. Charles Perry (District 28), Sen. Charles Creighton (District 4), Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (District 18), Sen. Joan Huffman (District 17), Sen. Charles Schwertner (District 5), and Sen. Drew Springer (District 30).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 88th Texas State Senate

The following table identifies the five highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 State Senate.

Top Five List—Senate Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Judith Zaffirini (District 21)	2.75	19
2.	Royce West (District 23)	1.12	16
3.	Nathan Johnson (District 16)	1.06	3
4.	Cesar Blanco (District 29)	0.94	2
5.	Juan Hinojosa (District 20)	0.89	11

Senator Judith Zaffirini of District 21 (Bexar, Caldwell, Dimmit, Duval, Guadalupe, Hays, Jim Hogg, Karnes, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Starr, Travis, Webb, Wilson, and Zapata counties) had the highest SLES for Senate Democrats in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions with a score of 2.75. During the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, she introduced 223 bills; 77 of which received action in committee, 71 received action beyond committee, 67 passed the Senate, and 58 became law.

Sen. Zaffirini assumed office in 1987, and was the first Mexican American woman elected to the Texas Senate. In 2023, she became the first woman to serve as the Dean of the Senate. She holds a B.S., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin, and has worked as an educator and communications specialist. She currently owns Zaffirini Communications, she is the president of Mr. South Texas Foundation, and she is also the president of D&J Alexander Entities. Since serving in the Senate, she has cast 76,843 consecutive votes and has passed 1,524 bills, making her the highest bill-passer in the history of the State of Texas. Sen. Zaffirini has received 1,300 awards and honors for her legislative leadership and has been the namesake of multiple buildings and scholarships.

Three legislators on the list were among the top five highest-scoring Democrats in the 2021-2022 legislative sessions: Sen. Judith Zaffirini (District 21), Sen. Royce West (District 23), and Sen. Juan Hinojosa (District 20).

Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of “Above Expectations”

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority-party member and/or committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives and Senators with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative sessions.

**State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Ryan Guillen (R-31)	10 Legislative Sessions	5.39	11 Legislative Sessions
2.	Thomas Oliverson (R-130)	4 Legislative Sessions	2.52	4 Legislative Sessions

Representative Ryan Guillen (R) of District 31 (Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Karnes, Kenedy, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Starr, Wilson, and Zapata counties) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations," with 10 legislative sessions, and an SLES score of 5.39 in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions. Rep. Guillen (as noted above) was also the highest-scoring House Republican in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions. In addition, before switching parties in 2021, Rep. Guillen consistently ranked among the top 5 highest-scoring Democratic lawmakers in the House from 2007-2021.

**State Senator with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Judith Zaffirini (D-21)	5 Legislative Sessions	2.75	19 Legislative Sessions

Senator Judith Zaffirini (D) of District 21 (Bexar, Caldwell, Dimmit, Duval, Guadalupe, Hays, Jim Hogg, Karnes, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Starr, Travis, Webb, Wilson, and Zapata counties) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations," with 5 legislative sessions, and an SLES score of 2.75 in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions. Sen. Zaffirini (as noted above) was the top-scoring Senate Democrat in the 2023-2024 legislative sessions. She was also the highest-scoring Senator during the 2023-2024 legislative sessions and has been the most effective lawmaker in the Texas Senate (despite being a member of a minority party) since 2015.

High-Performing Freshmen

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen Representatives and Senators who earned an “Above Expectations” rating in their first term. For freshman legislators, their initial scores are compared to benchmarks for newcomers—so when a freshman outperforms their cohort, it can reveal strong political acumen, the ability to navigate legislative procedures quickly, and skill in coalition-building or policy entrepreneurship. These traits often correlate with future

leadership roles. Our research on the U.S. Congress suggests that legislators who perform well early on are more likely to be selected for committee chairs or leadership positions and to influence major legislation in subsequent terms. Hence, identifying high-performing freshmen can offer early signals of who might rise through the ranks.

Freshmen Representative “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	Stan Kitzman (R-85)	1.71

Rep. Stan Kitzman of District 85 (Austin, Colorado, Fayette, Fort Bend, Waller, and Wharton counties) was the State Representative with the top SLES score, who was also "Above Expectations" in lawmaking effectiveness during his freshman term, with a score of 1.71. During the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, Rep. Kitzman introduced 35 bills, 26 of which received action in committee, 21 received action beyond committee, 18 passed the House, and 14 became law.

Before joining the state legislature, Rep. Kitzman was a member of the Waller County Commission. Rep. Kitzman served for 21 years in the Texas Army National Guard, serving three terms of active duty during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He holds a B.S. in Agricultural Systems Management from Texas A&M University and is a former public school teacher. In the community, Rep. Kitzman is a past board member of the National Guard Association of Texas, past Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars – Post 4007, and past President of the West 1-10 Chamber of Commerce. Currently, he owns his own business, he is a board member of the Texas Water Conservation Association, and a member of the Lions Club.

Freshmen Senator “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Sessions)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	Tan Parker (R-12)	1.43

Sen. Tan Parker (Dallas, Denton, Tarrant, and Wise counties) was the State Senator with the top SLES score, who was also "Above Expectations" in lawmaking effectiveness during his freshman term, with a score of 1.43. During the 2023-2024 legislative sessions, Sen. Parker introduced 111 bills, 56 of which received action in committee, 45 received action beyond committee, 40 passed the Senate, and 21 became law.

Before joining the Senate, Sen. Parker represented the 63rd District in the Texas House from 2007-2023 and served as the Texas House Republican Caucus Chair. He is currently the Vice Chairman of the Senate Republican Caucus. Sen. Parker is a graduate of the University of Dallas, and he earned a master's degree from the London School of Economics. He recently published his own book, titled "Making Government Work." Sen. Parker has experience working in software development, financial services, biotechnology, and private equity. In the community, he serves on the University of Dallas Board of Trustees and has worked with various nonprofits, including Communities in Schools of North Texas, the Children's Advocacy Center for Denton County, and Special Olympics Texas.

Other Findings

In terms of broader patterns, despite media coverage of partisan bickering, our data show that the Texas State Legislature achieves a much greater balance in lawmaking effectiveness across parties than is found in most states across the country. While the SLES of minority-party lawmakers across the country on the whole averages about 0.6, the average scores in 2023-24 for minority-party Democrats in the Texas House of Representatives are notably higher at 0.82 and in the Senate at an average value of 0.85.

Such egalitarianism translates reasonably well into the number of laws produced by the parties, especially in the Senate. Although 284 laws resulted from the bills sponsored by majority-party Republican Senators in 2023-24, bills sponsored by Democratic Senators resulted in 170 laws across the term. A bit more of an imbalance occurred in the House, with 147 laws from the bills of Democrats compared to 574 from majority-party Republicans. However, the overall pattern is indicative that both parties were active and effective in the lawmaking process despite unified Republican governance in the state.

All that said, a majority-party bias is increasing in Texas, as the average SLES of minority-party lawmakers across all of our data stretching back to 1989 has been 0.93, placing them nearly on par with majority-party lawmakers. This balance has started to fade, especially in the House, in recent years.

Conclusion

The 88th Texas Legislature demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold a distinct advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in Texas.