

# Legislative reform in Canada

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A question of capacity?

Paul Thomas  
PhD Candidate



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

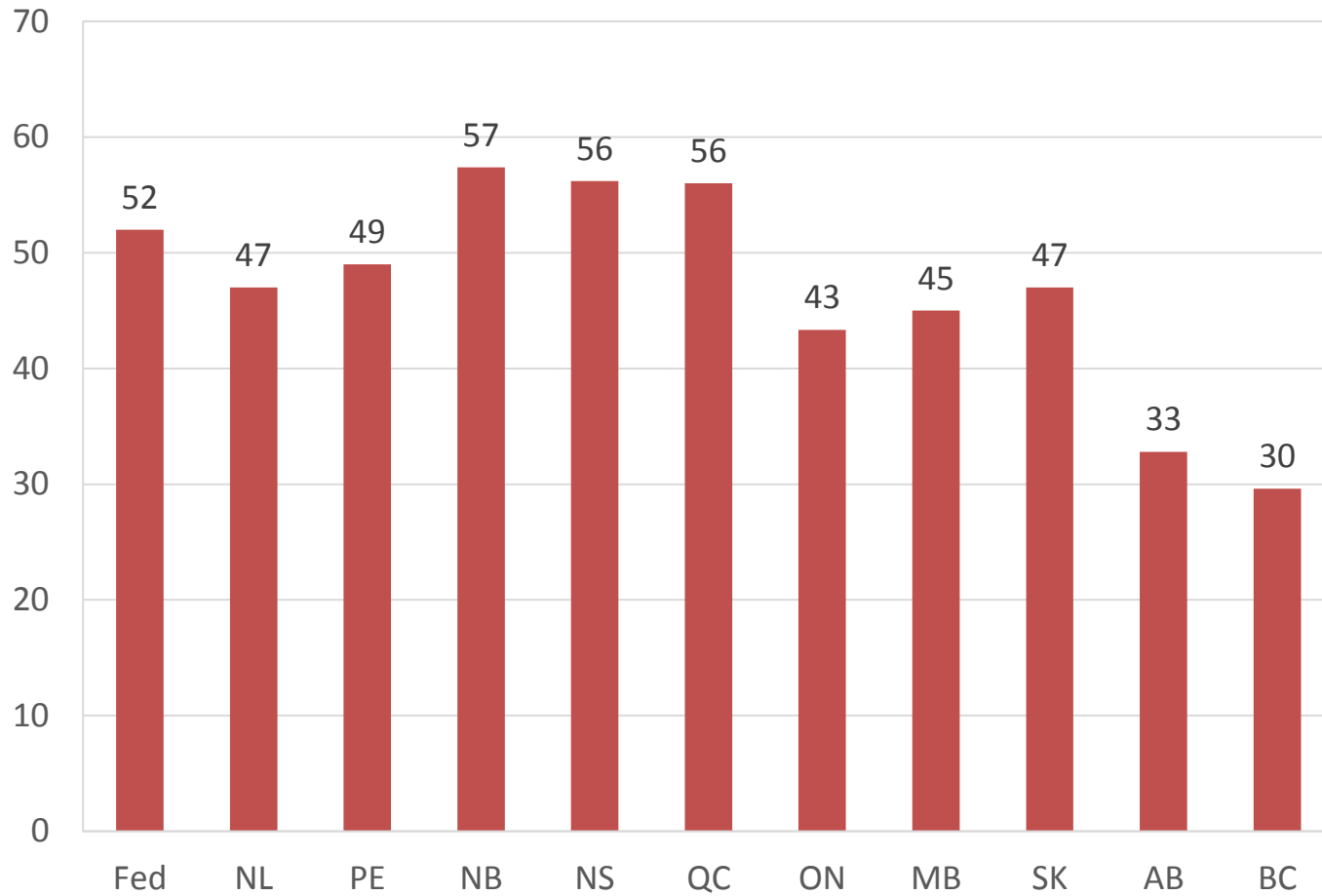
# Capacity of legislatures

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- All legislatures in Canada have same functions:
  - Representation (symbolic, service to constituents)
  - Legislation
  - Scrutiny

# Avg. government bills introduced per year

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# Capacity of legislatures

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- Not all legislatures have same capacity to accomplish these tasks
- Capacity is not efficiency
- Burden falls primarily on opposition

# Capacity of legislatures

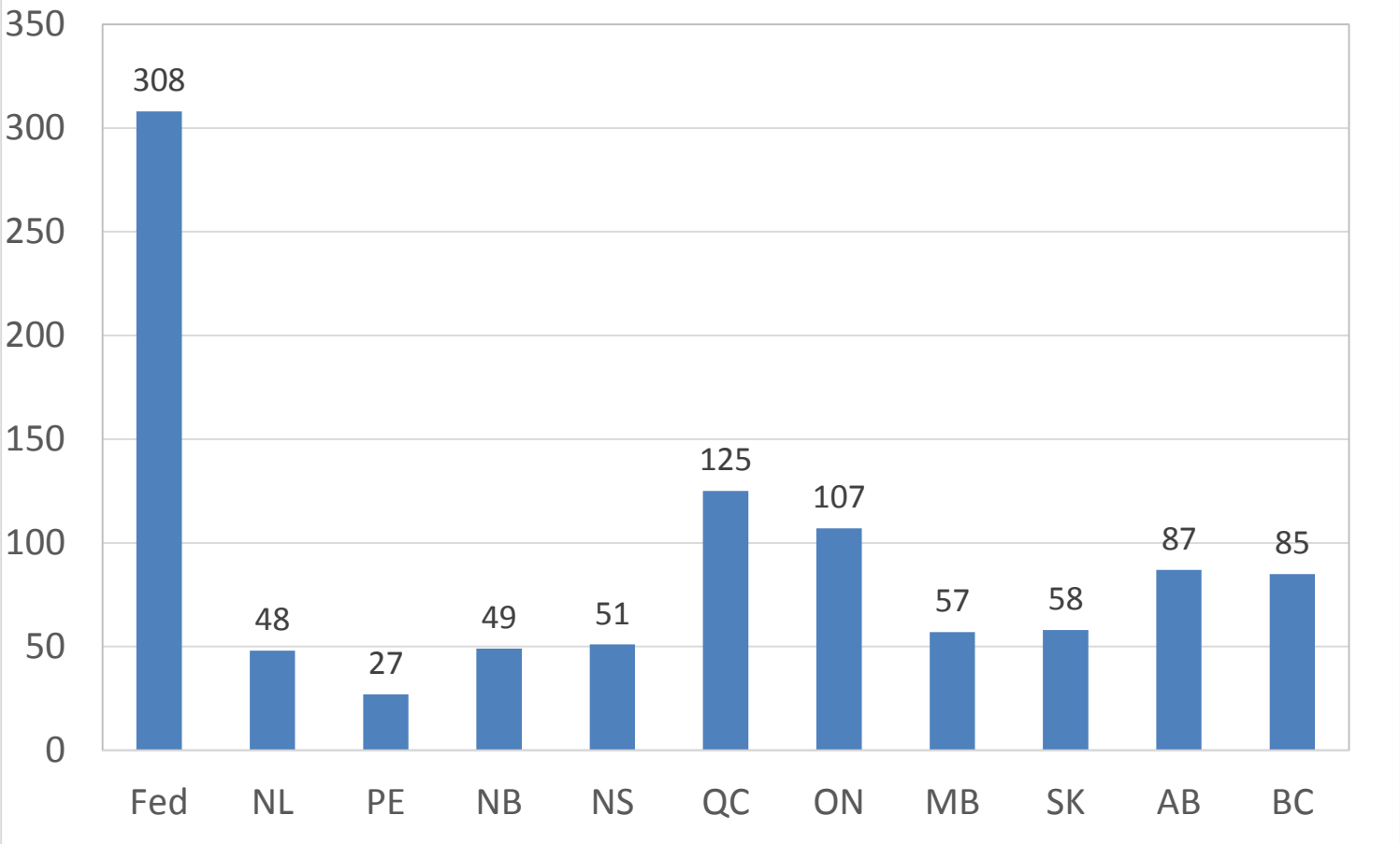
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Capacity = size x time x resources x backbench independence

- 1) **Size:** number of members
- 2) **Time:** sitting days, number of venues (e.g. committees)
- 3) **Resources:** officers of the legislature, research support, constituency staff, travel funding
- 4) **Backbench independence:** willingness of backbenchers to defy party line

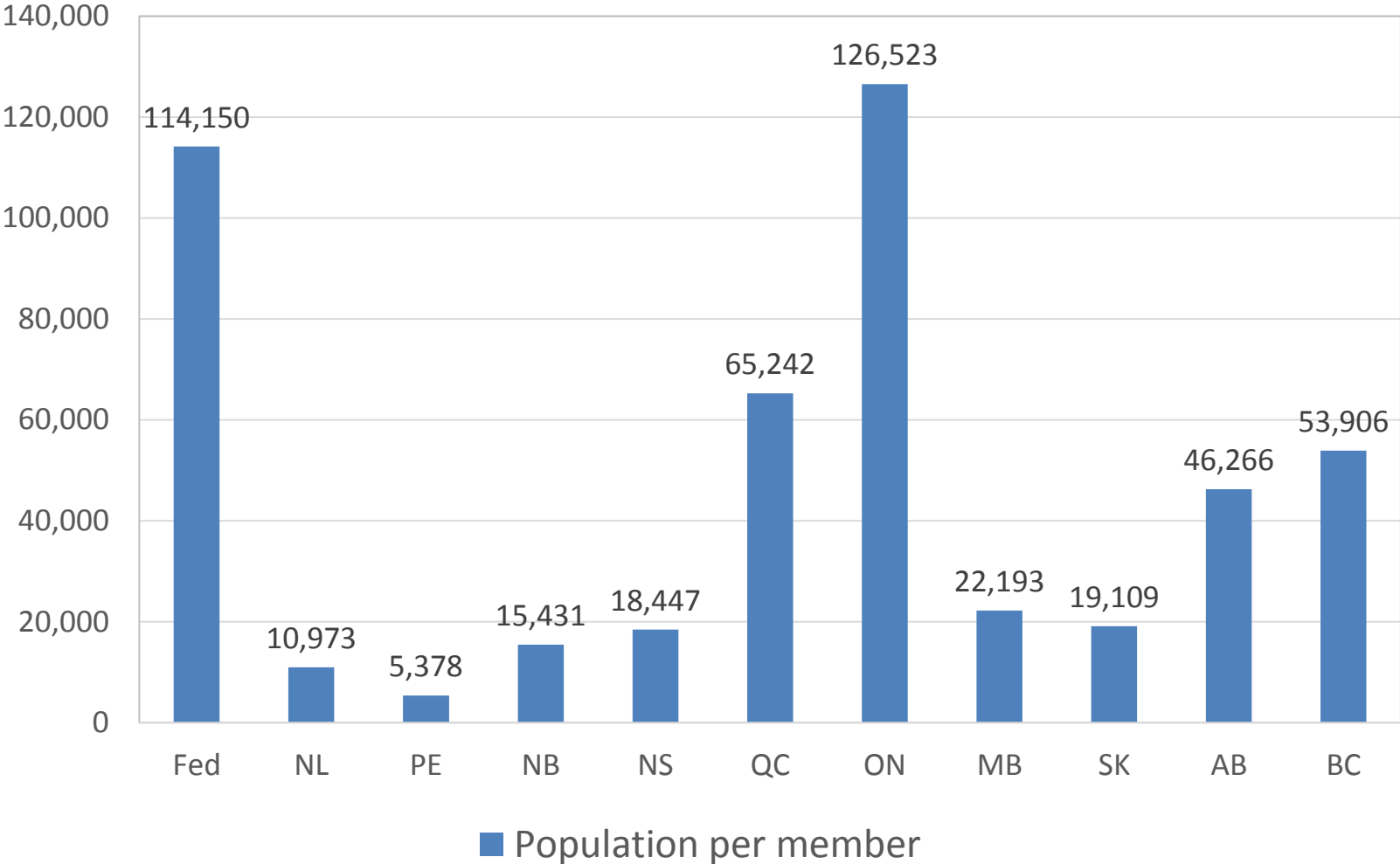
# Size: members per legislature

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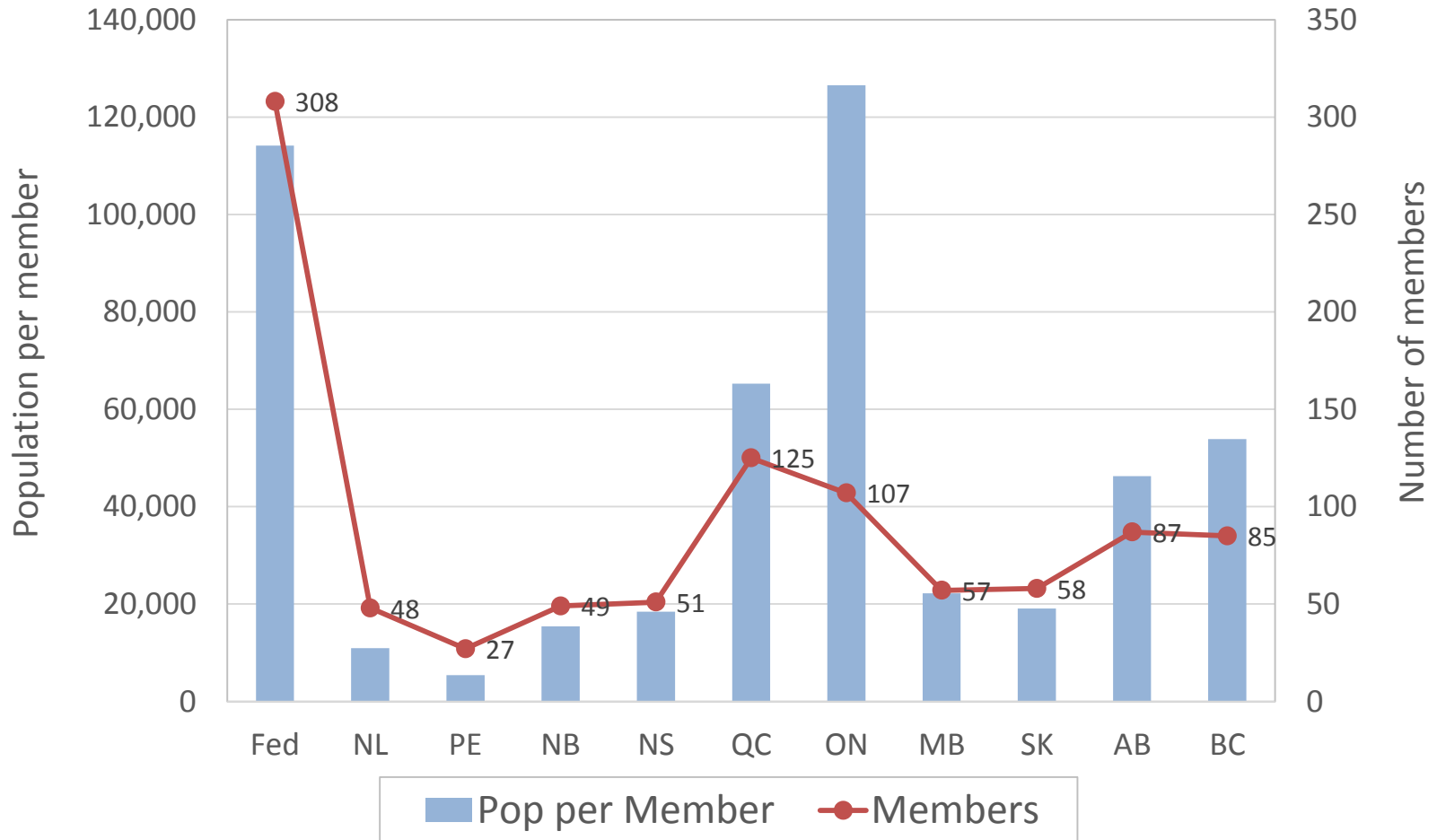


# Size: impact on representation

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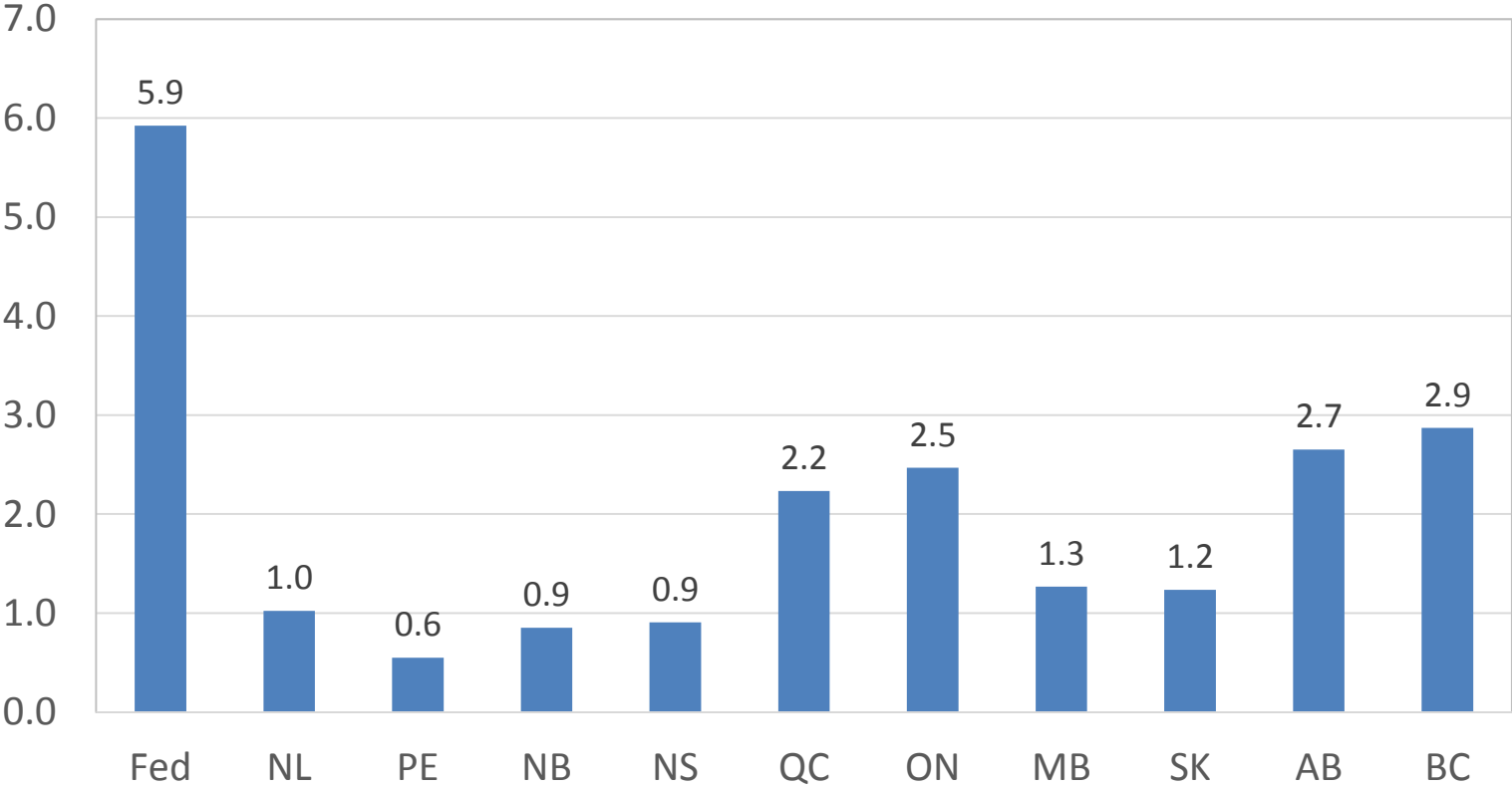
# Size: impact on representation





# Size: impact on legislation

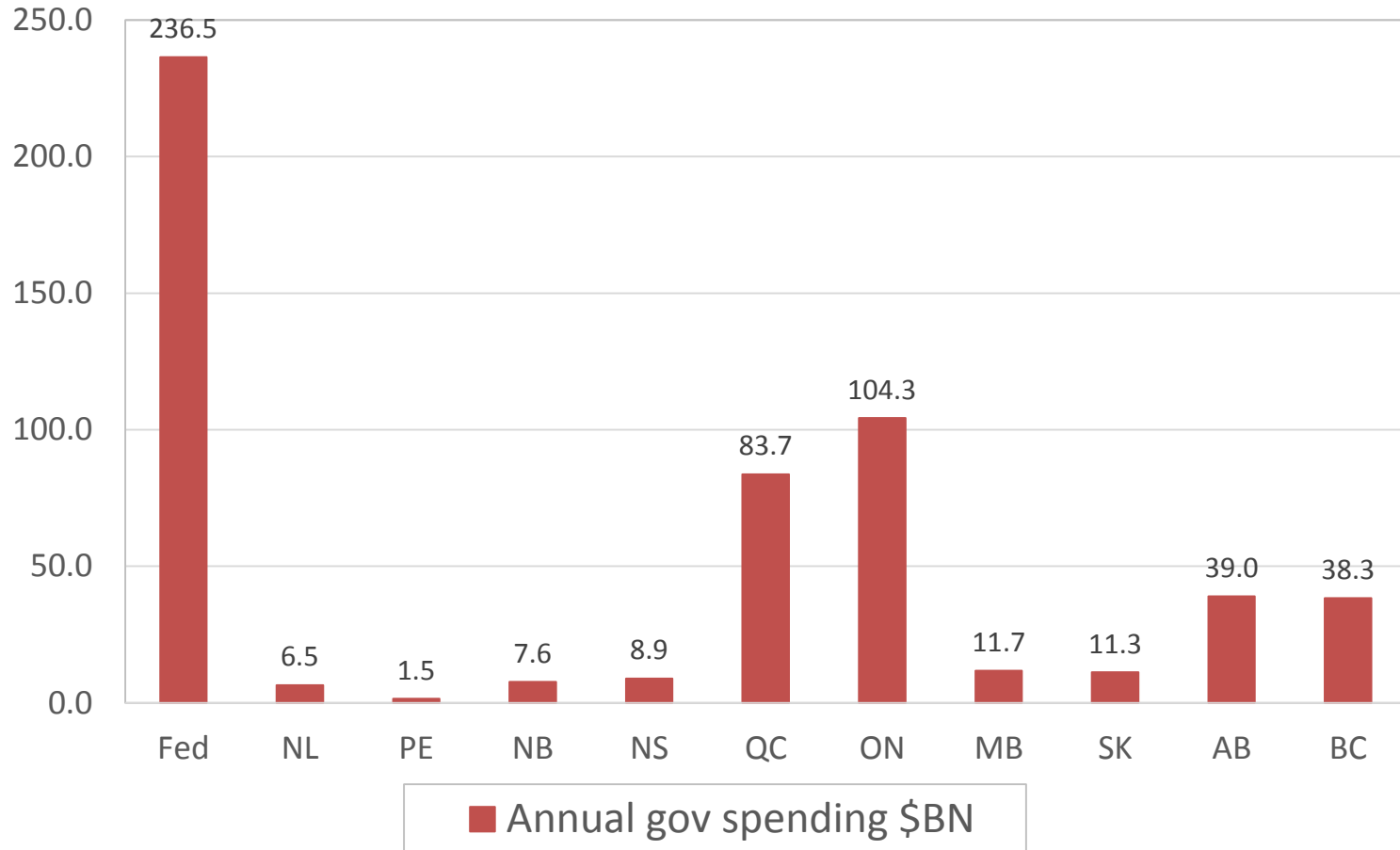
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■ Average government bills introduced per year, per legislator

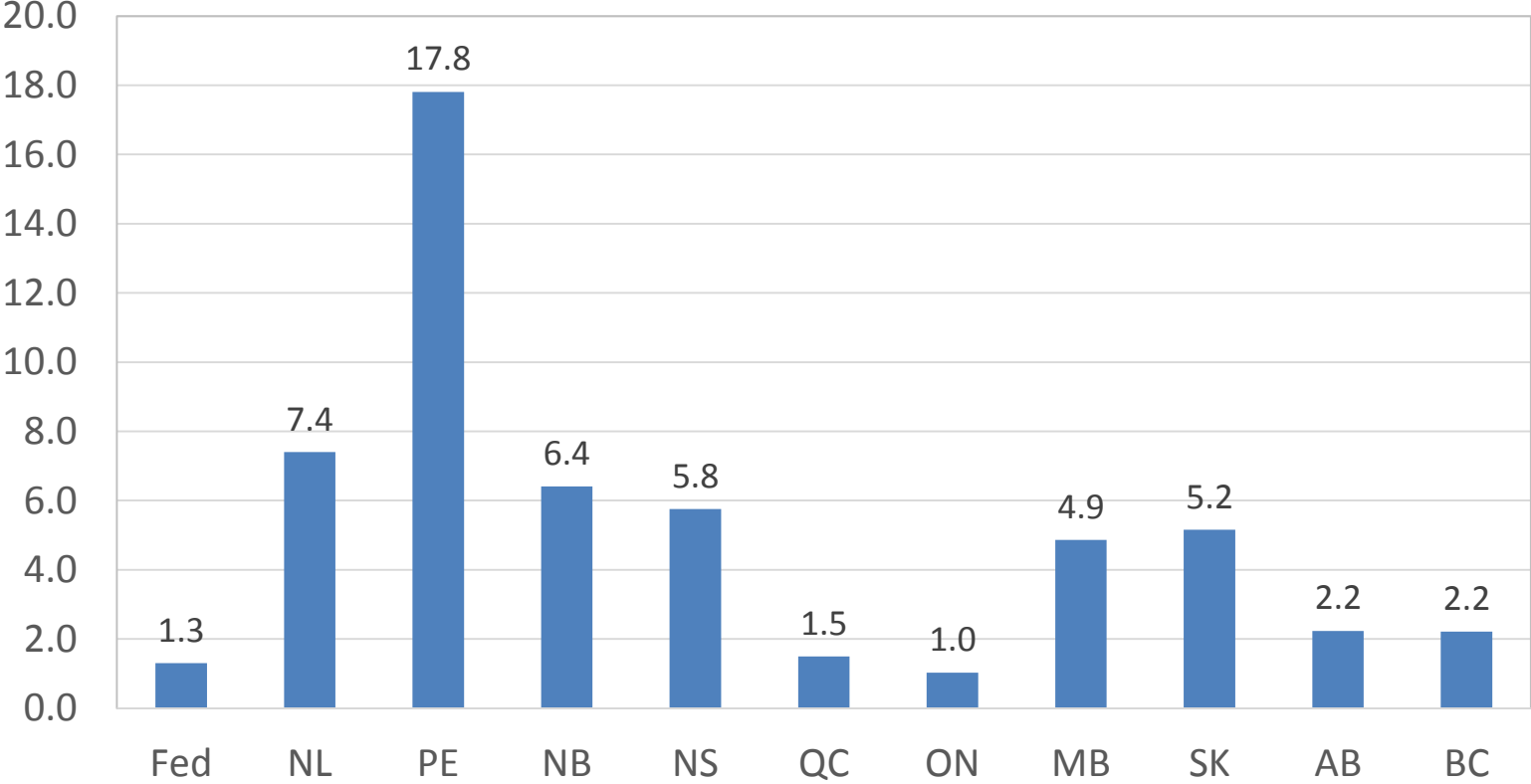
# Annual government spending (\$BN)

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# Size: impact on scrutiny

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■ Legislators per \$BN in government spending per year

# Capacity of legislatures

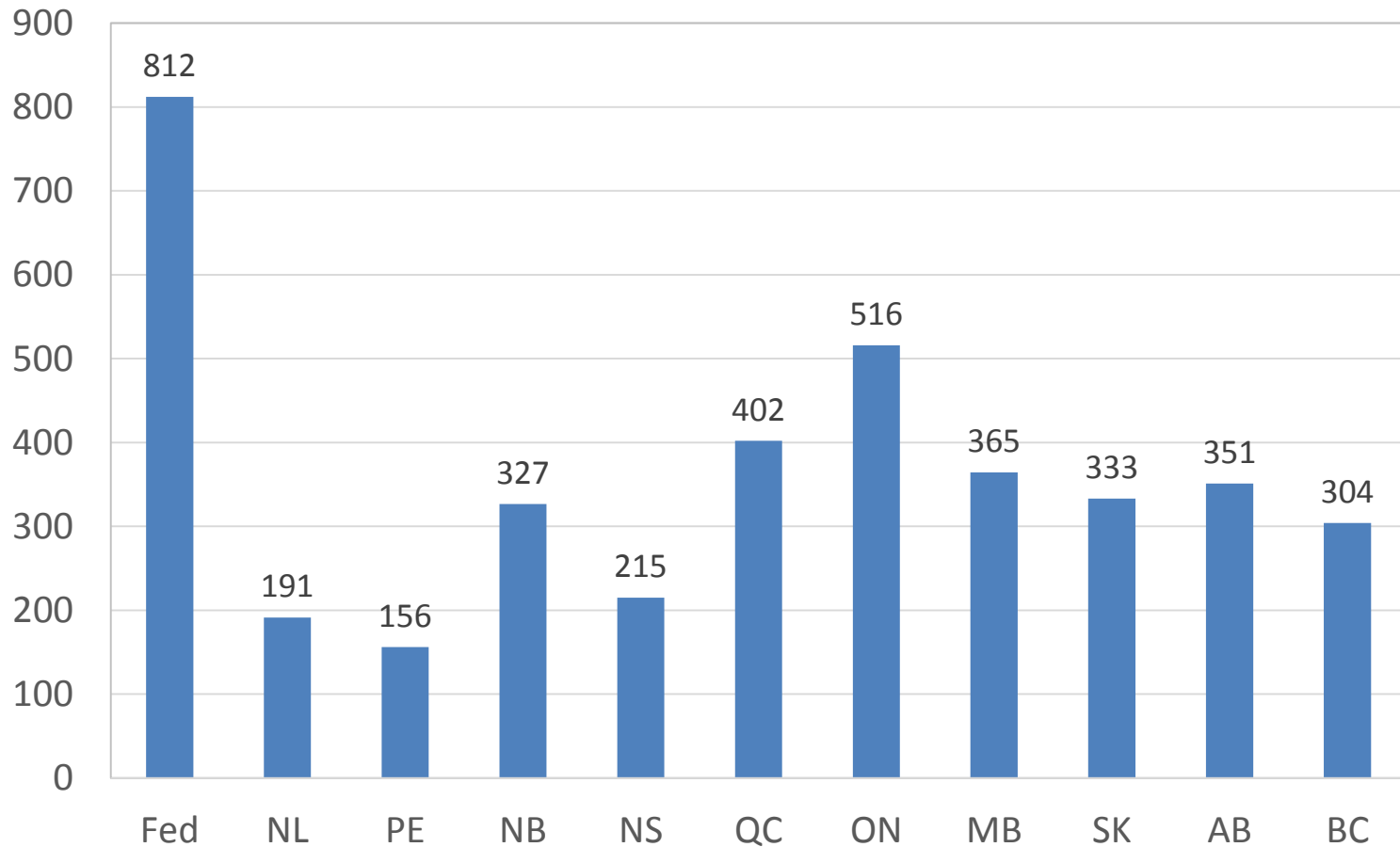
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Capacity = size x time x resources x backbench independence

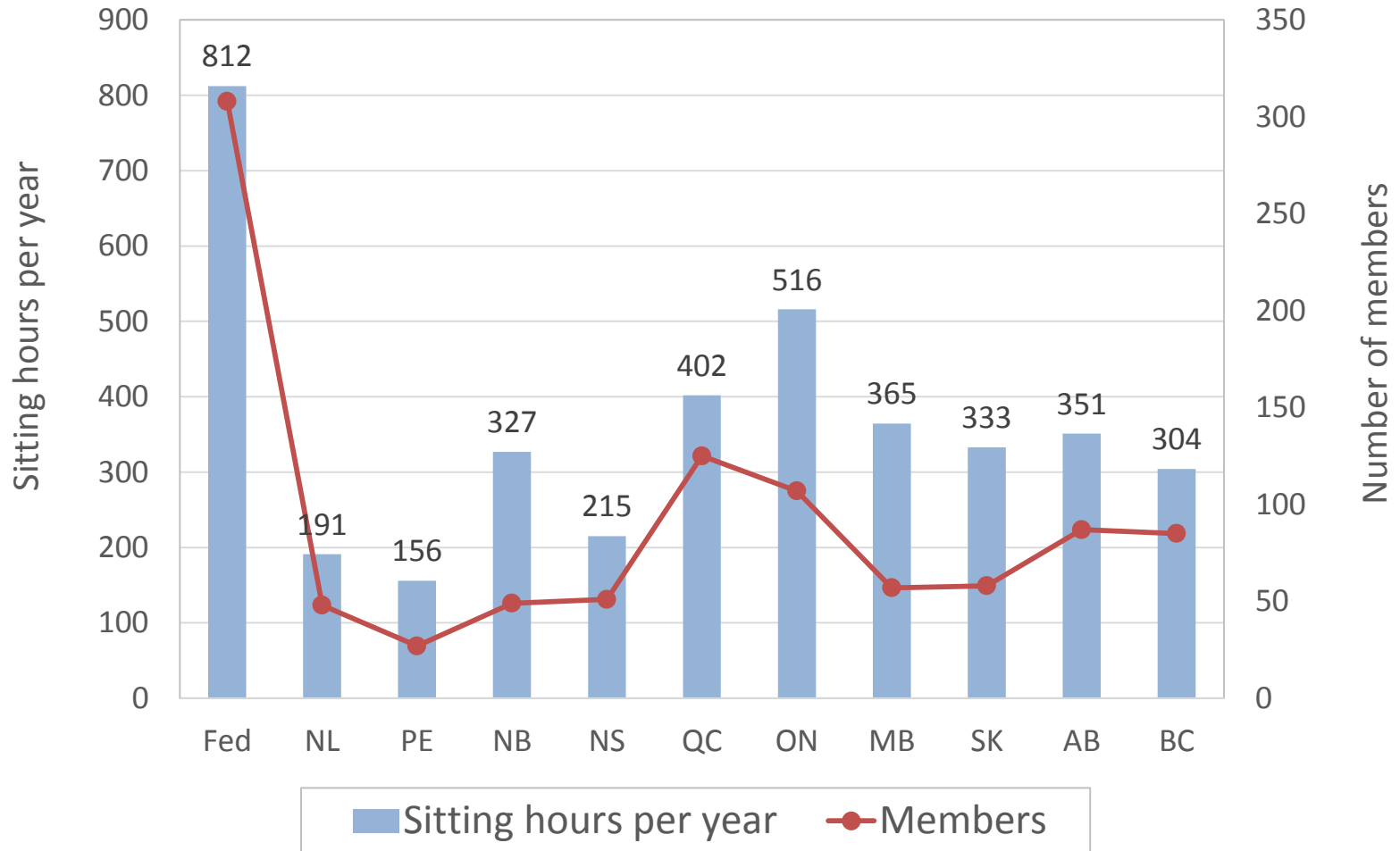
- 1) **Size**: negatively affects representation, legislation; little impact on scrutiny since small legislatures spend less

# Time: sitting hours per year

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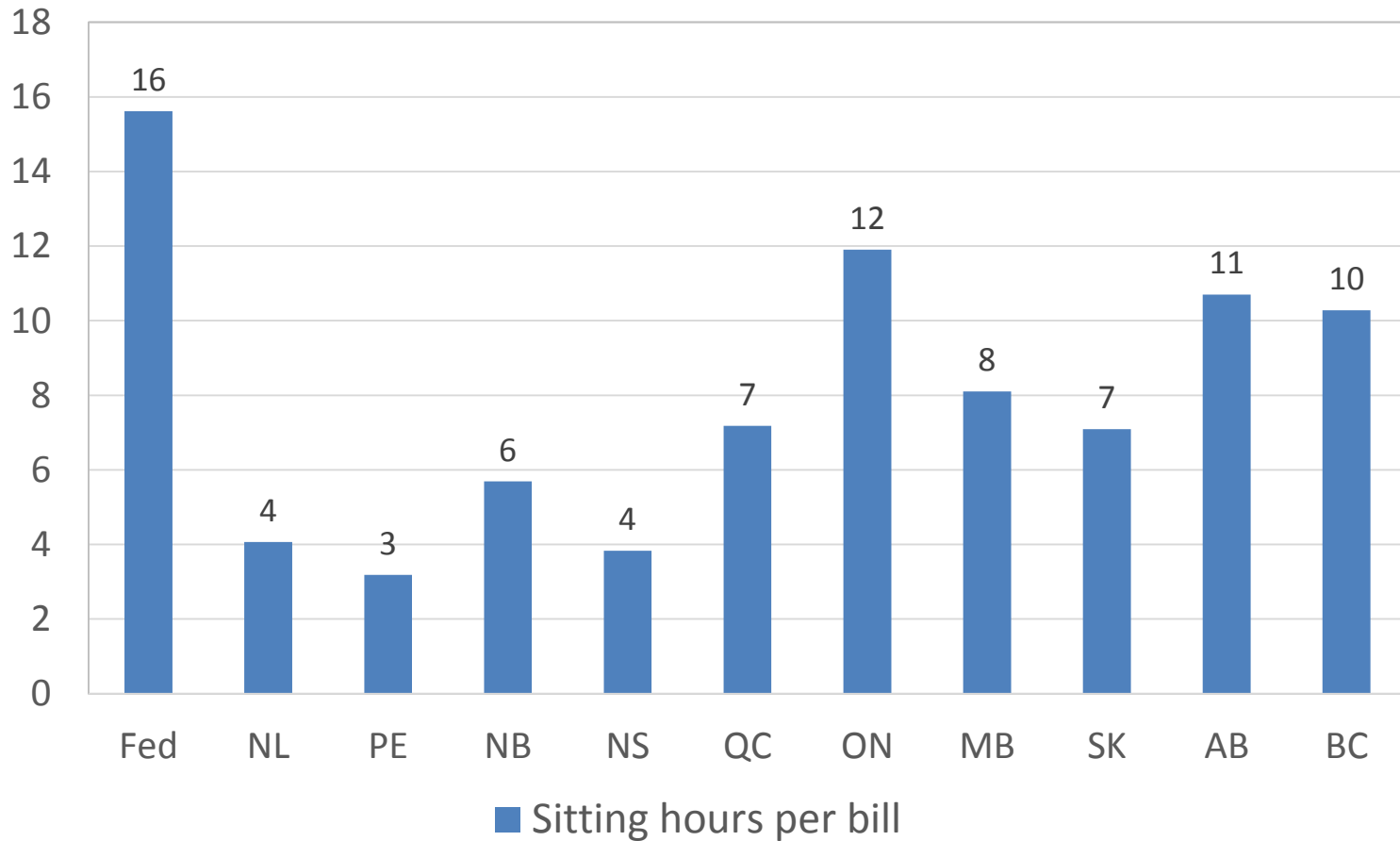


# Time: sitting hours per year vs. # members

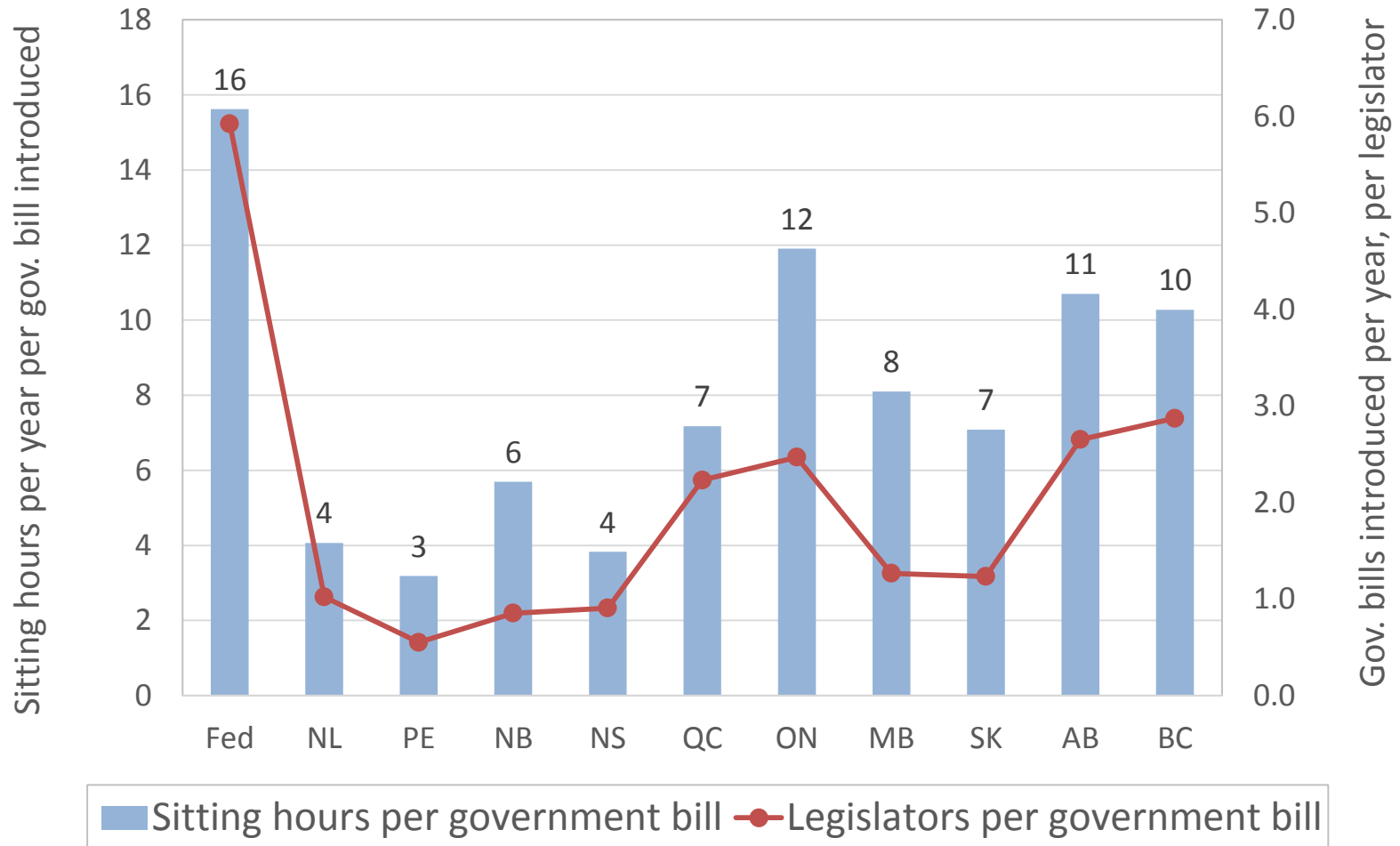


# Time: impact on legislation

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# Time: impact on legislation





# Cumulative impact: size x time

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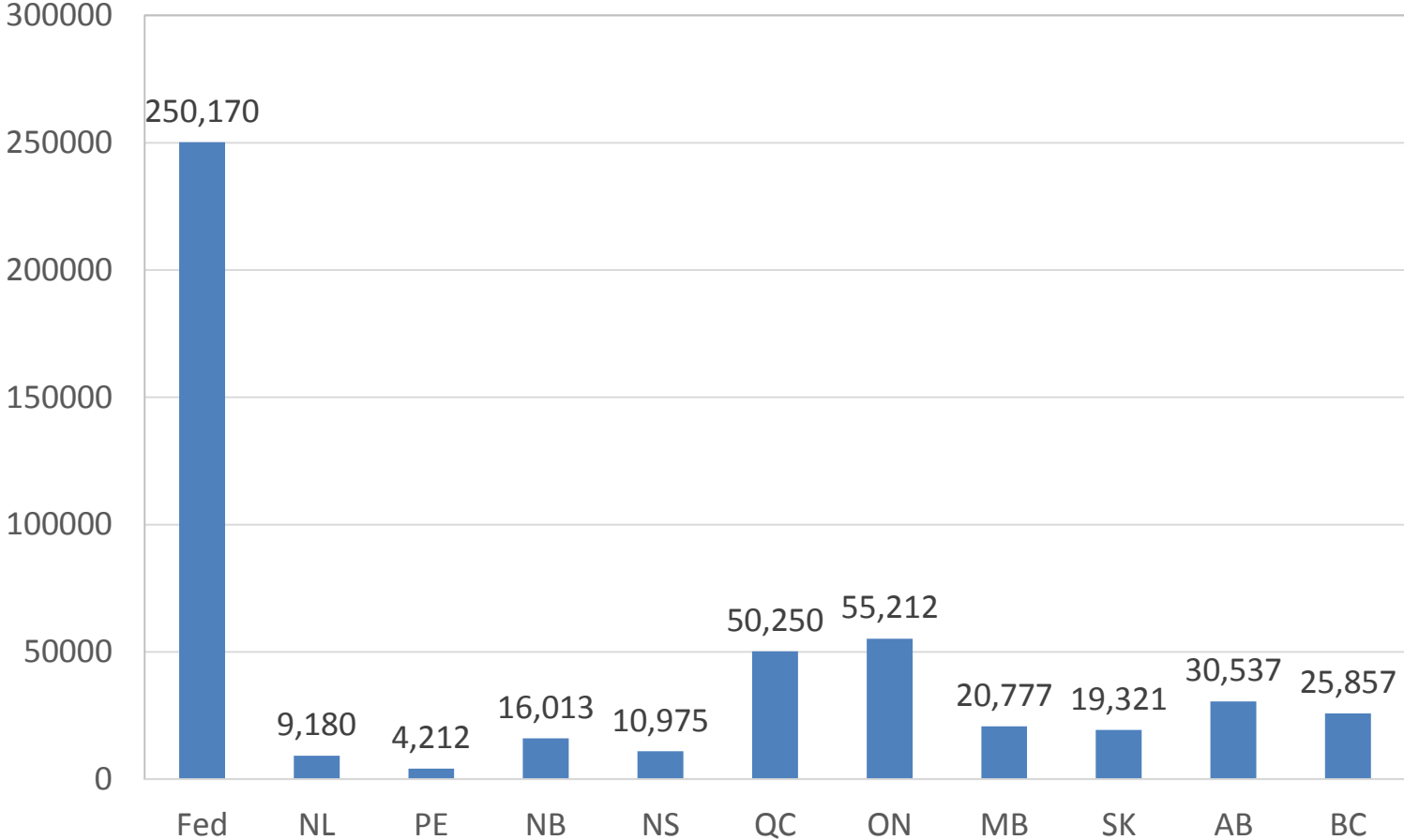
= 308 MPs x 812 hours per year



= 48 MHAs x 192 hours per year

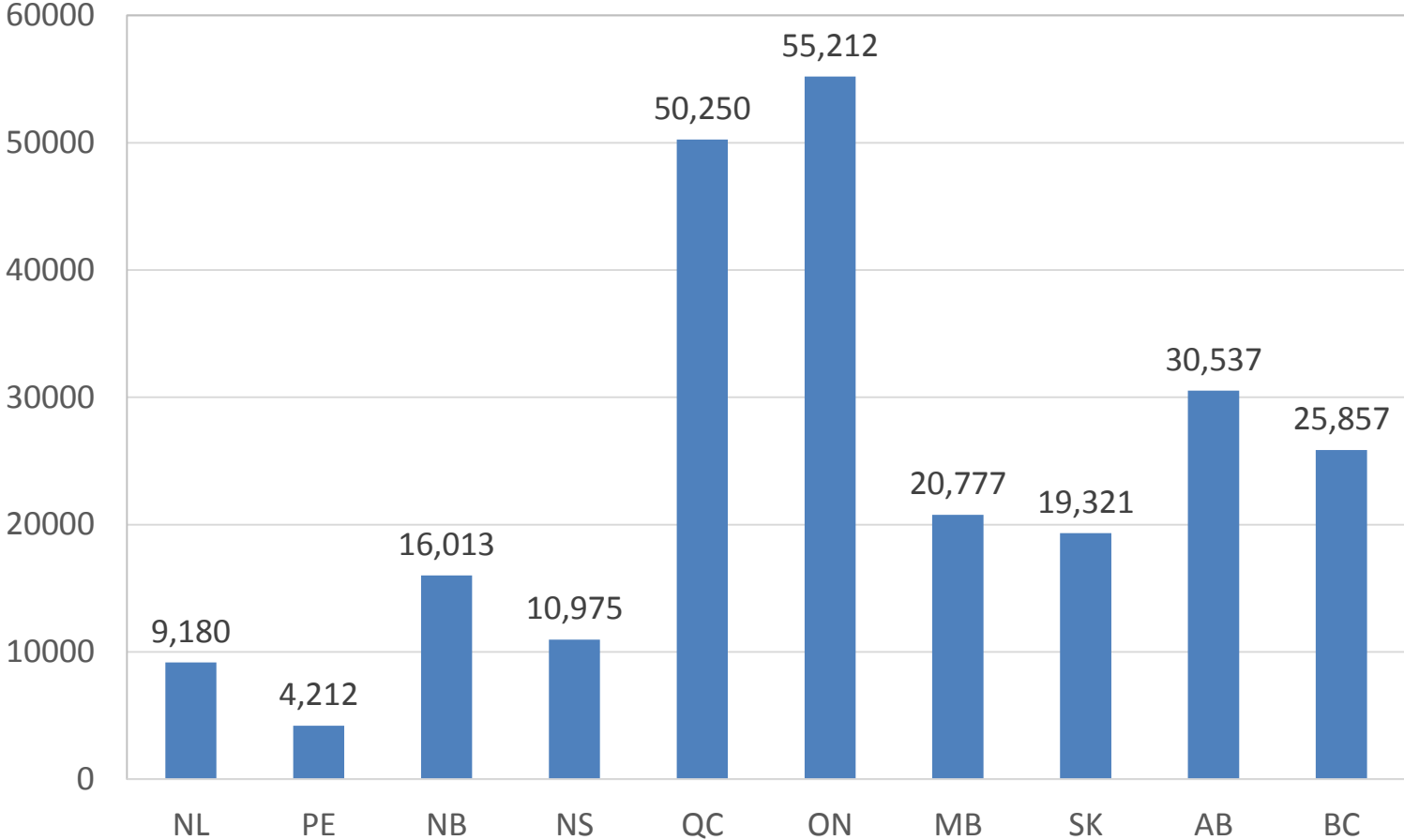
# Size x time: total legislator sitting hours/year

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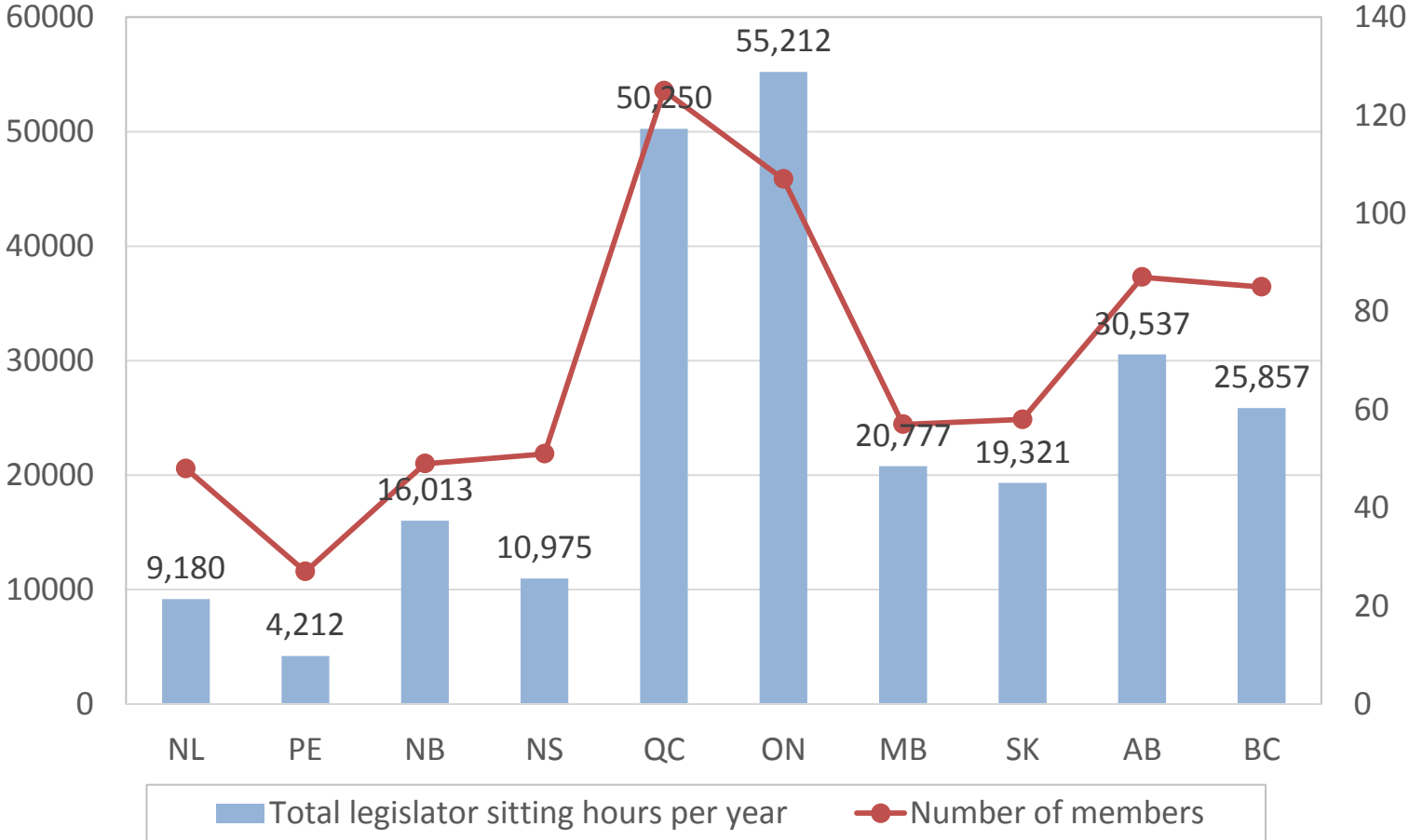


# Size x time: total legislator sitting hours/year

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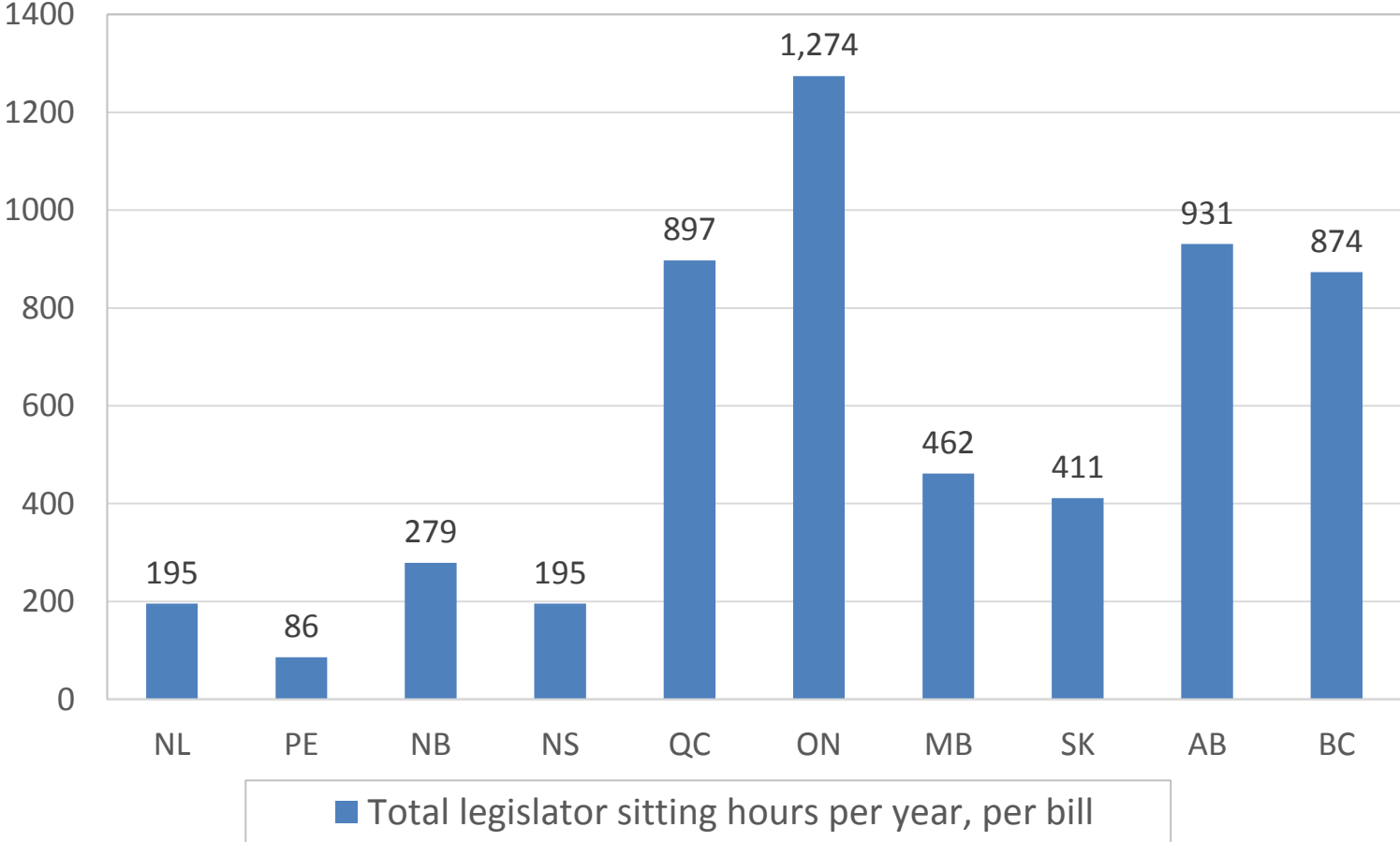


# Size x time: total legislator sitting hours/year



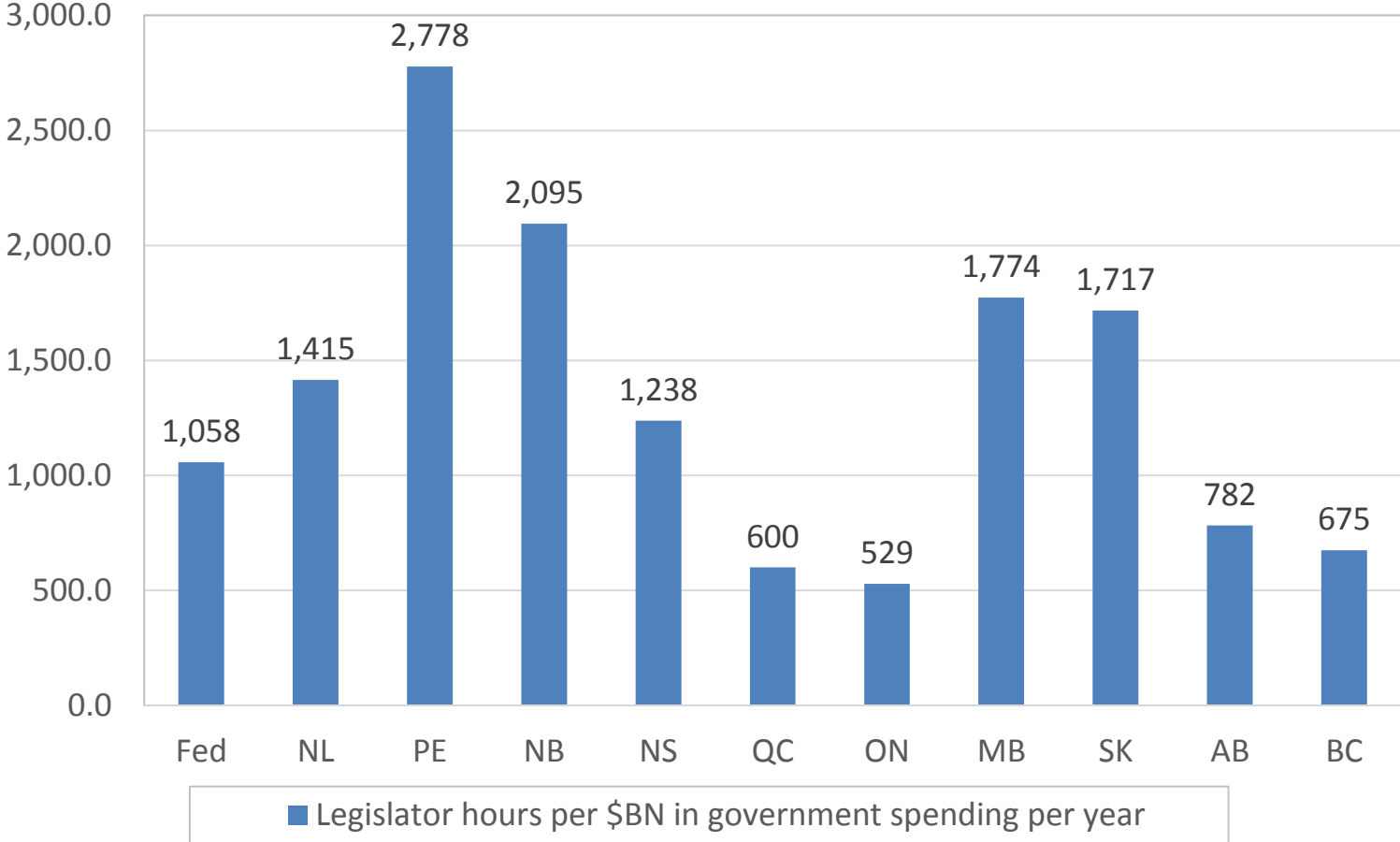
# Size x time: impact on legislation

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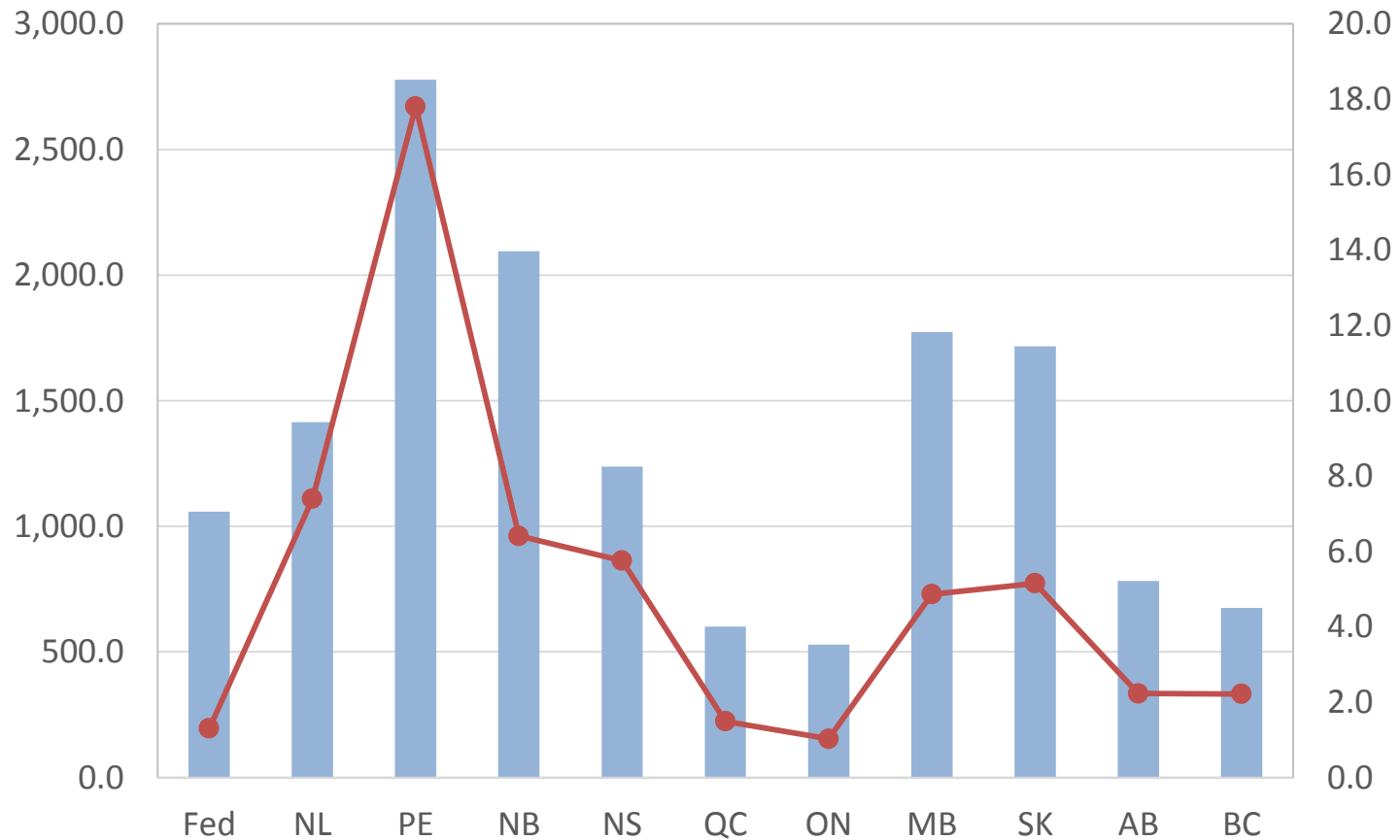


# Size x time: impact on scrutiny

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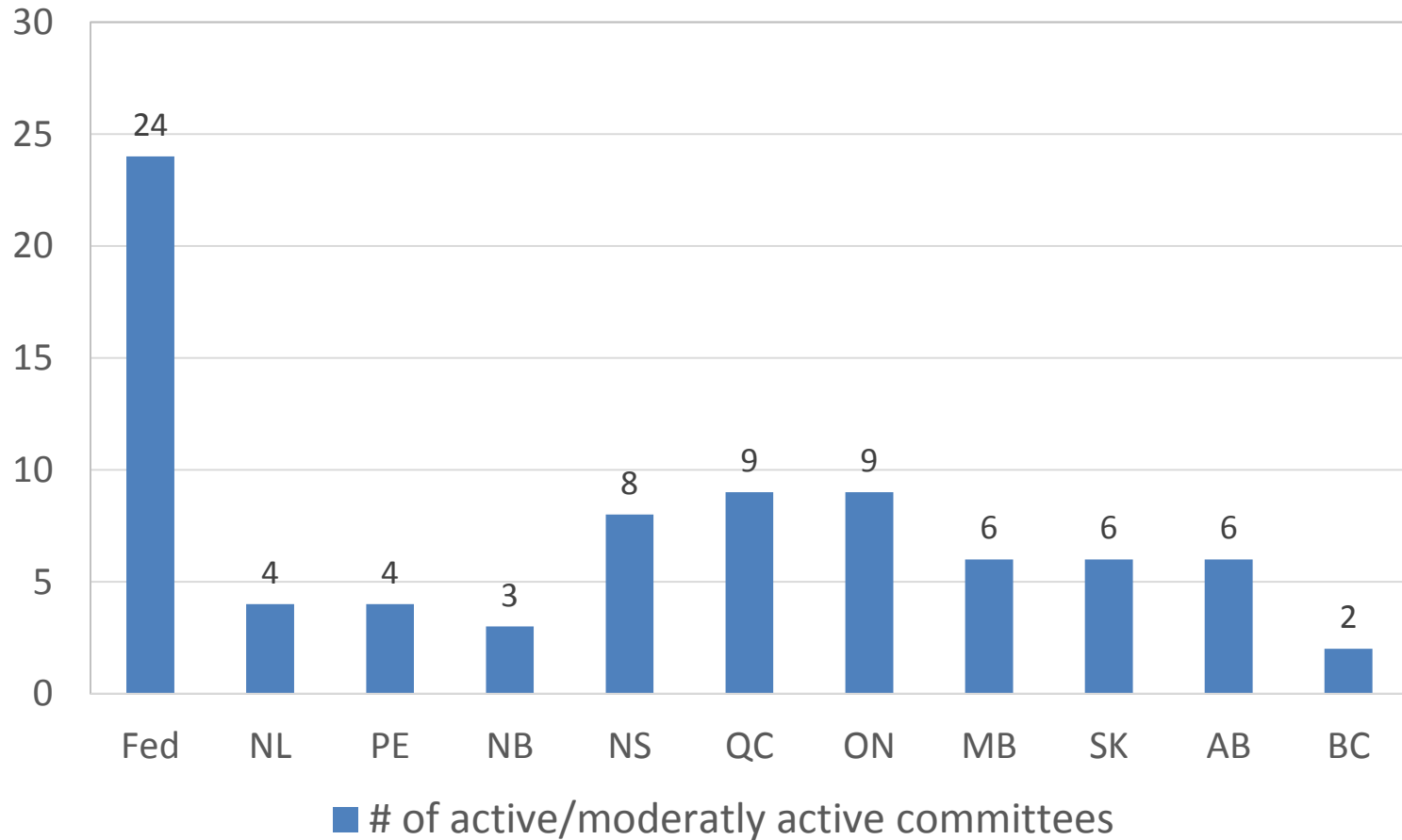
# Time: impact on scrutiny



■ Legislator sitting hours per \$BN in gov spending  
● Legislators per \$BN in gov spending

# Time: committee activity

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# Capacity of legislatures

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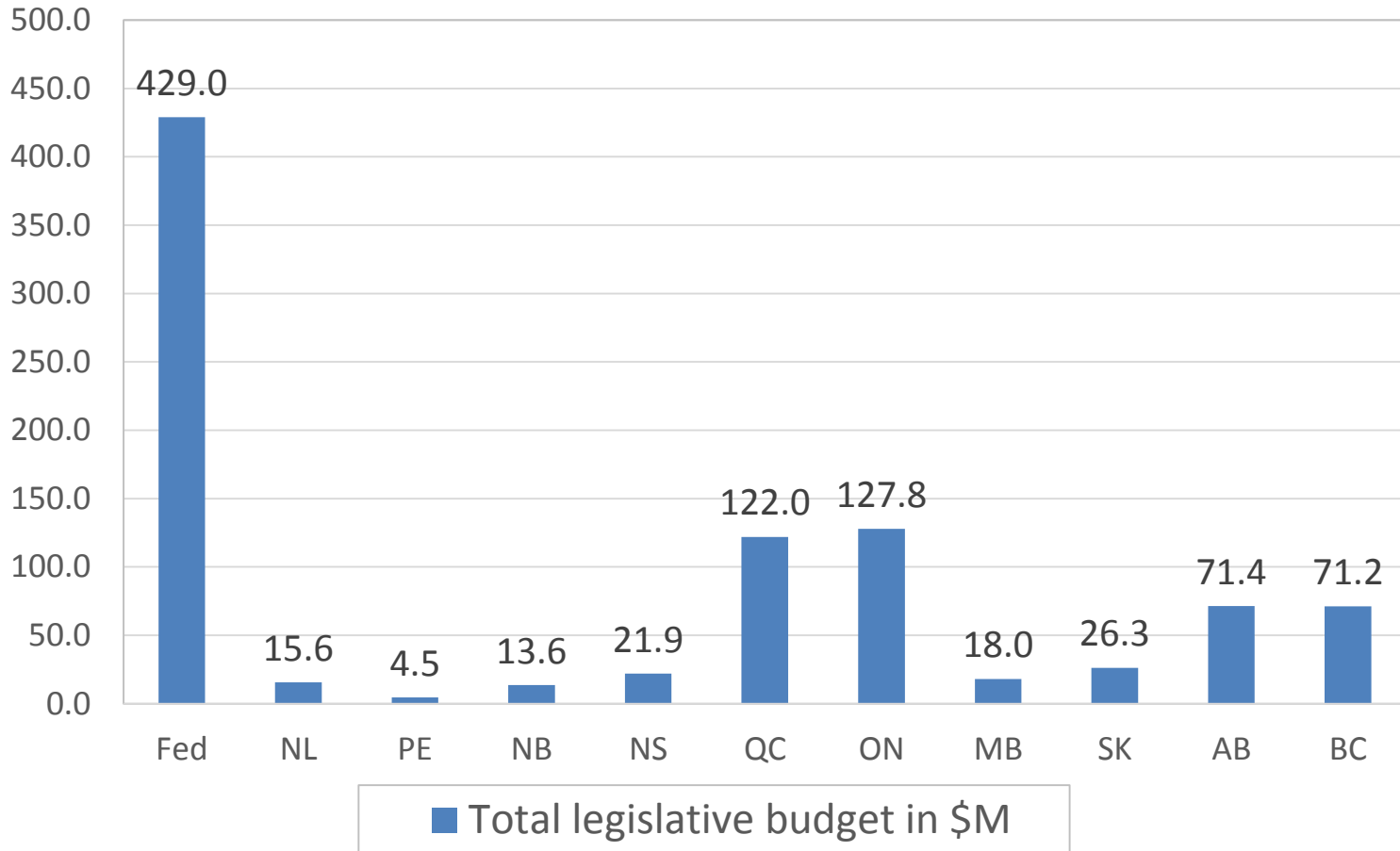
Capacity = size x time x resources x backbench independence

## 2) Time:

- Longer hours can help smaller legislatures compensate for their size, but shorter hours can aggravate size gaps
- Larger legislatures tend to have more committees, allowing more parallel activity.

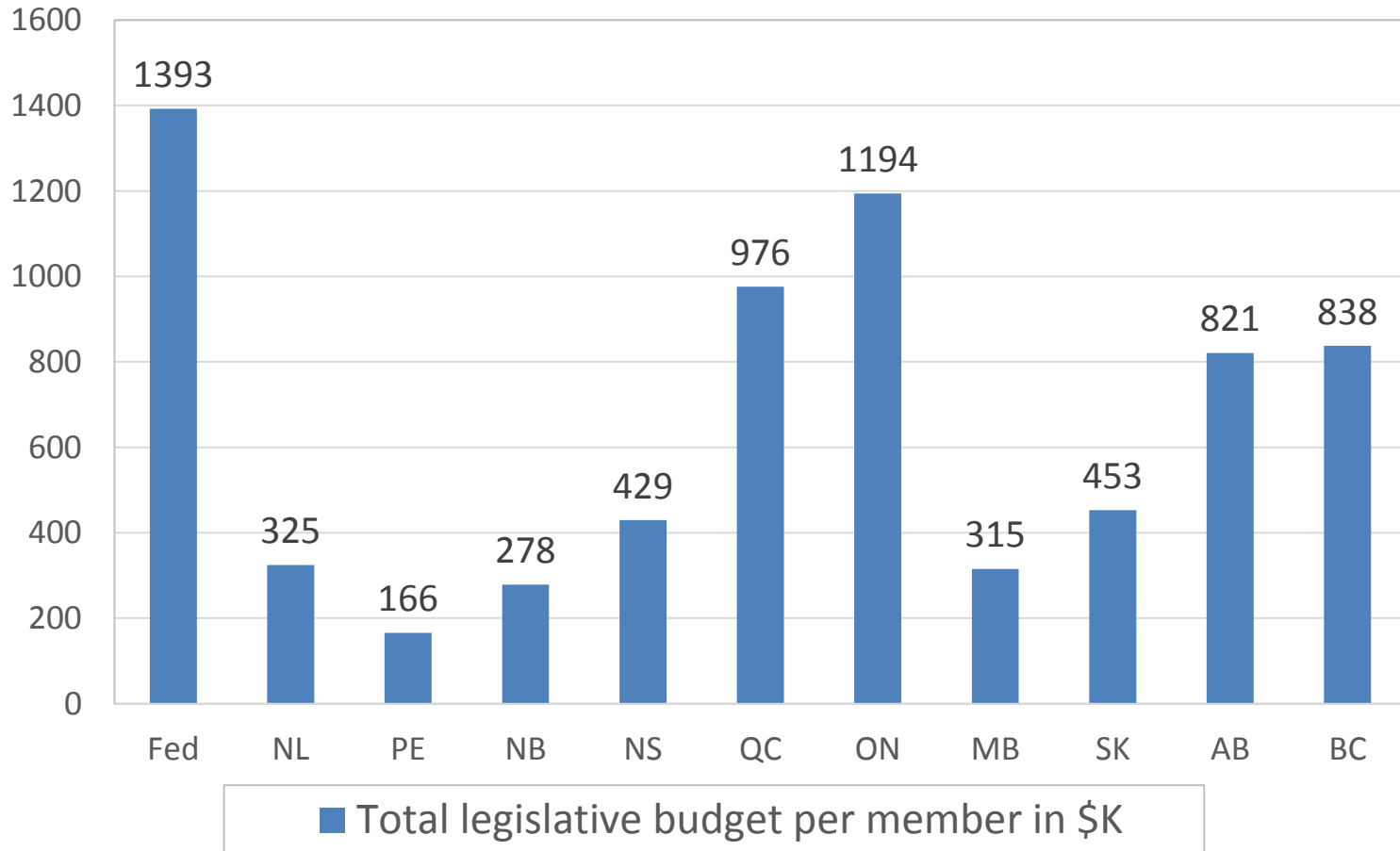
# Resources: total legislative budget

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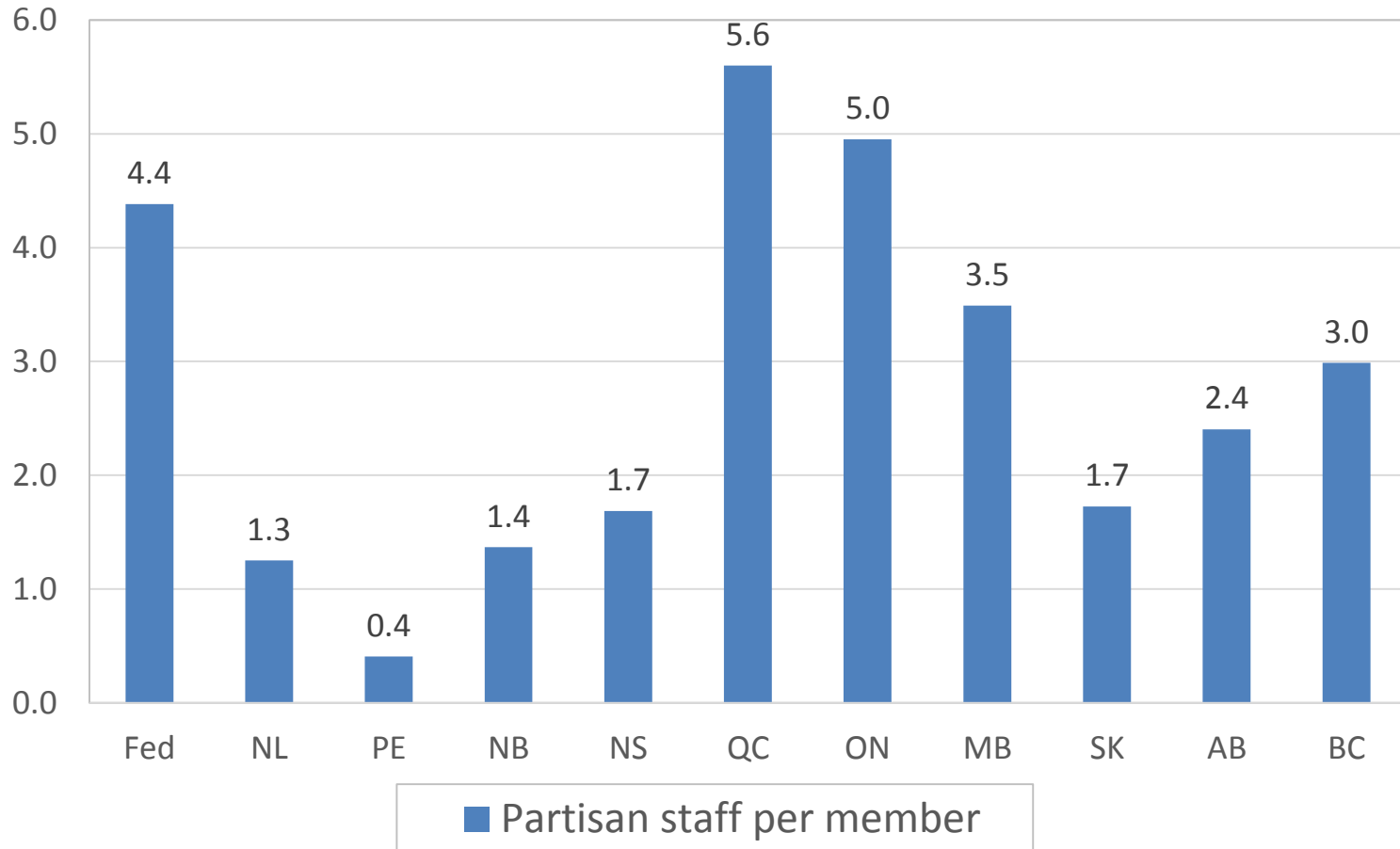
# Resources: budget per member

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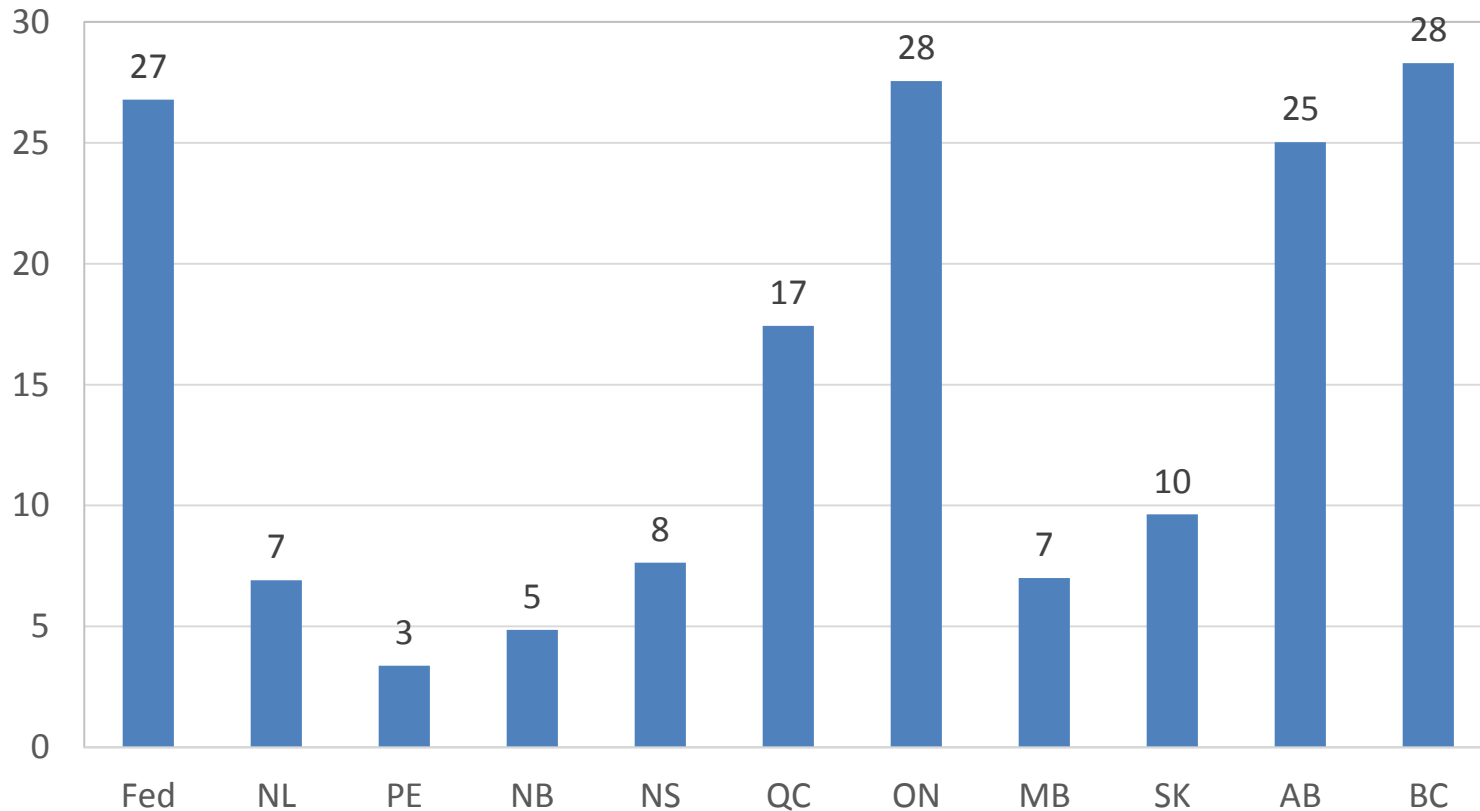
# Resources: impact on representation

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# Resources: impact on legislation

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■ Legislative budget in \$K per member per government bill introduced

# Capacity of legislatures

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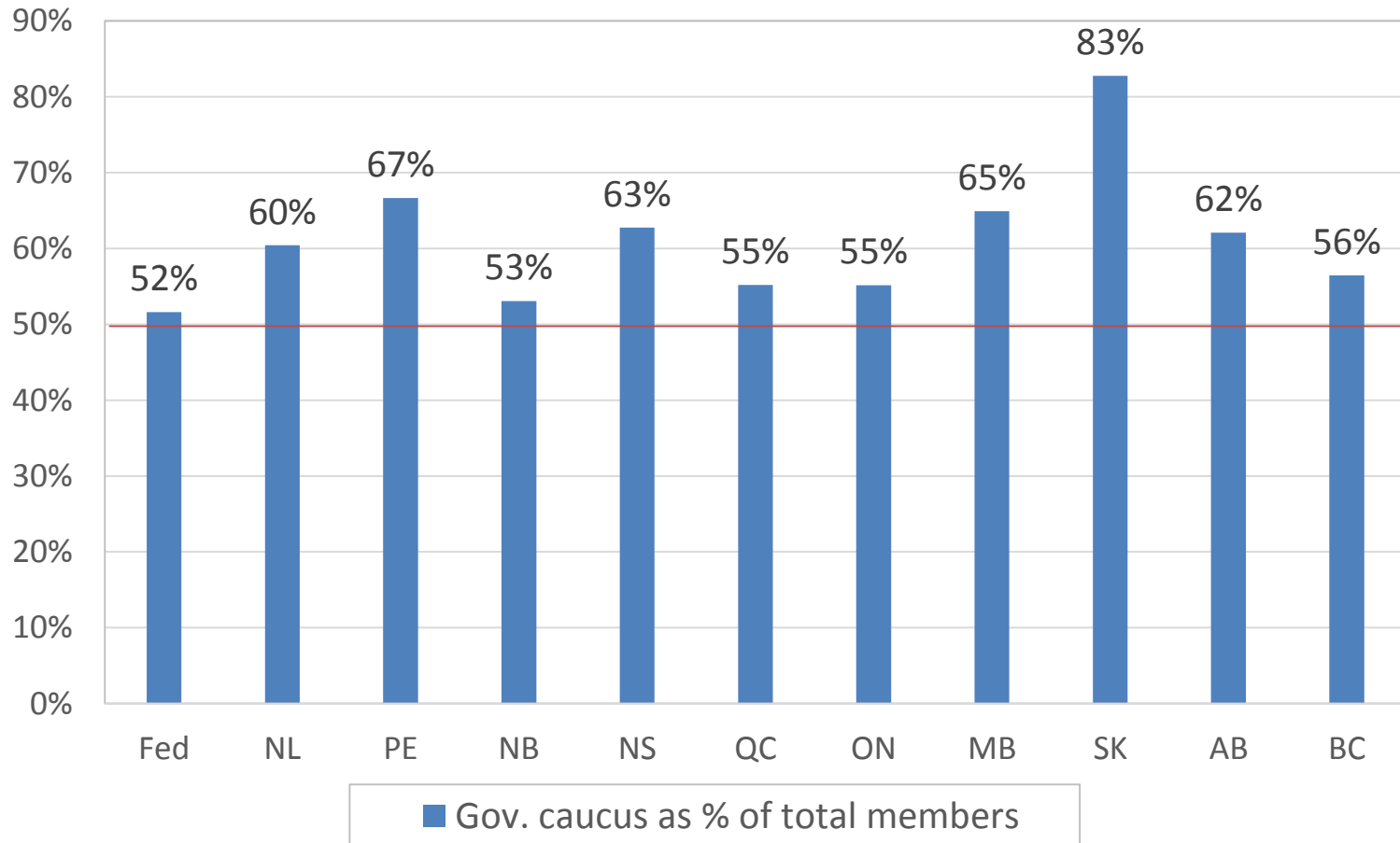
Capacity = size x time x resources x backbench independence

## 3) Resources:

- Larger legislatures also tend to have more resources, amplifying size gaps
- Ontario better resourced than Quebec despite having fewer members

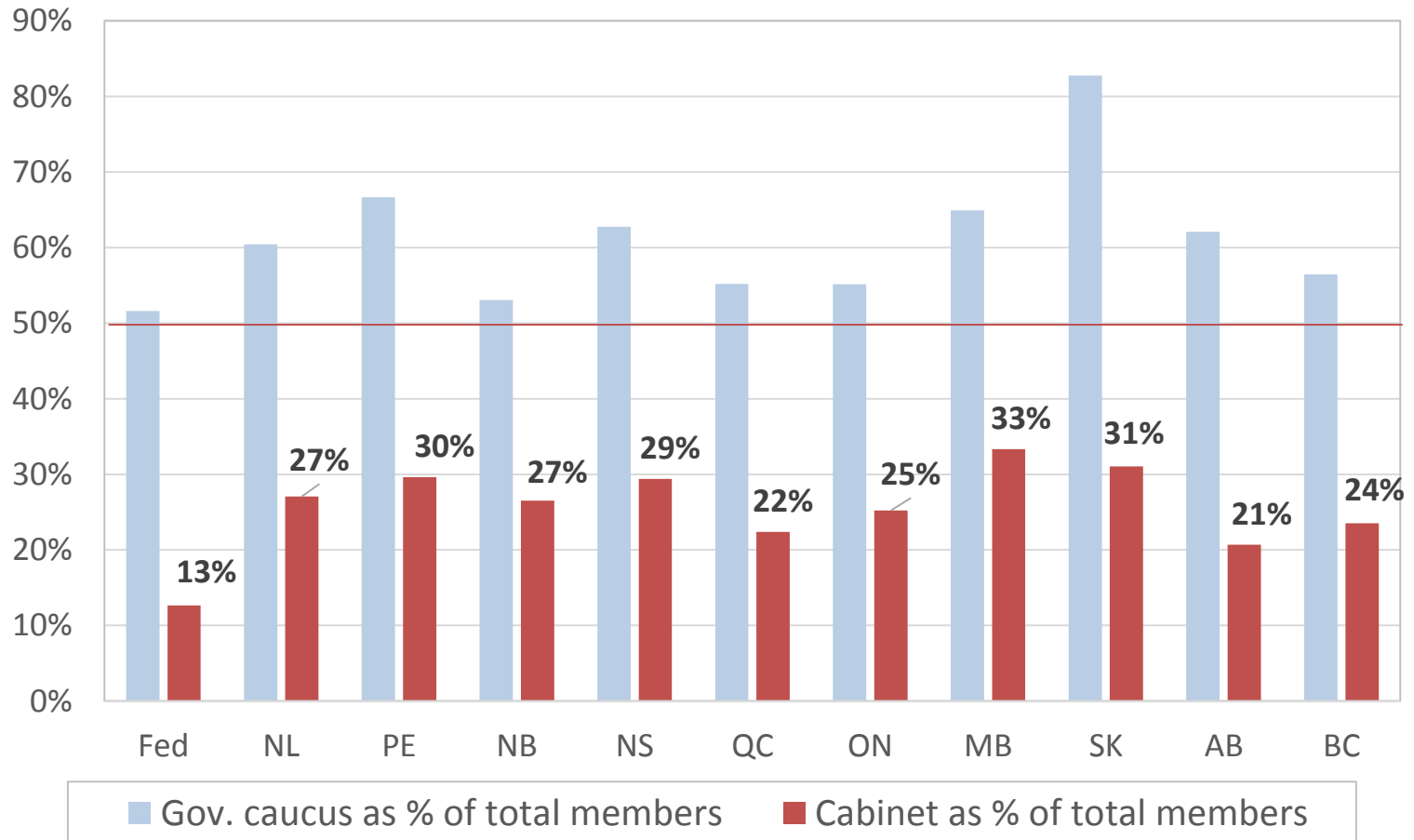
# Backbench independence: government caucus

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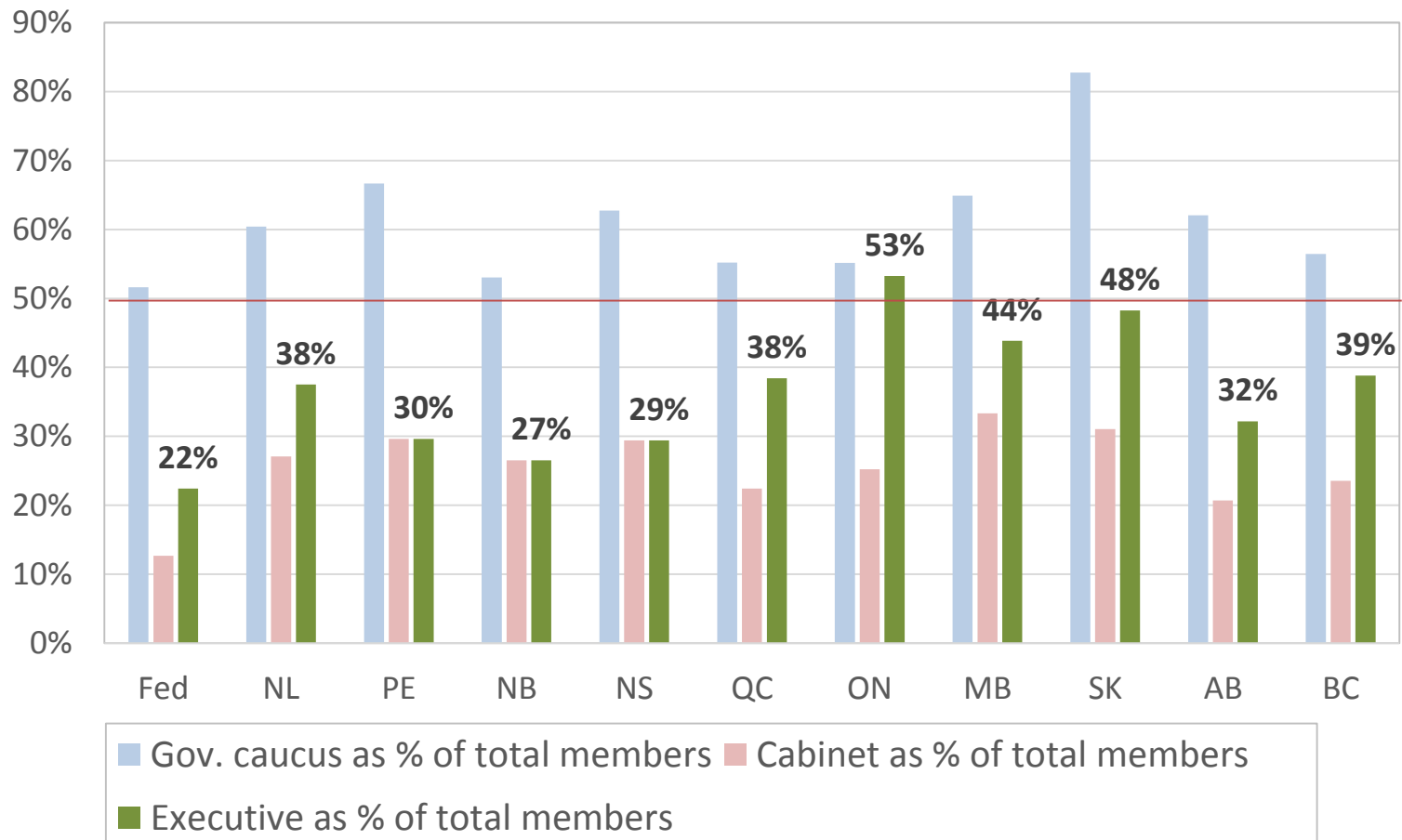
# Backbench independence: cabinet size

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# Backbench independence: executive size



# Capacity of legislatures

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Capacity = size x time x resources x backbench independence

- 4) Backbench independence: growing number of parliamentary secretaries, etc. can harm legislation, scrutiny functions

# Conclusion

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- All legislatures have the same functions, but their capacity differs
- Largest impact on performance is size:
  - Legislatures in more populous provinces are larger, but they have not kept pace with population or spending growth
  - However, larger legislatures are better able to handle legislation
- Time can lessen or aggravate size differences:
  - Small legislatures may increase capacity by sitting longer (NB, ON)
  - However, general trend is that larger legislatures sit longer, reducing difference in scrutiny capacity
  - Larger legislatures also tend to have more committees

# Conclusion

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- Resources aggravate size differences:
  - Larger legislatures have far more resources for scrutiny, etc.
- Capacity of some legislatures harmed by lack of backbench independence
  - Growth of parliamentary secretary and legislative assistant positions erodes number of true government backbenchers
- A gap at any point can undermine capacity for legislative effectiveness

# Thanks!

# Questions?

Email: [paul.thomas@utoronto.ca](mailto:paul.thomas@utoronto.ca)

