

Rick Farmer, Christopher C. Mooney, Richard J. Powell, and John C. Green, eds., *Legislating Without Experience: Case Studies in State Legislative Term Limits*. (Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 258. \$39.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-1144-4

The editors of this book present case studies of six of the fifteen states that had enacted term limits for state legislators as of May 2007 and present in a case study format a collection of papers from the joint Project on Term Limits (JPTL) which began at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University in 2000. Term limits have been around in American politics since the founding. Term limits have their advocates and detractors, and the project was a collaborative effort between the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of State Governments, and the State Legislative Leaders Foundation involving 17 contributors. Given the breadth and scope of this study, this is an exceptional book about the operations of state legislatures faced with term limits. For the reader interested in state legislatures and the effects of term limits, this book merits serious consideration.

These studies are organized by levels of legislative professionalism. In each category of professionalism a comparable control state is used that is not restricted by term limits. These control state chapters allow analysis for each section offering the ability to provide single state narratives and analytical chapters in the same volume.

Measures of legislative professionalism have existed since the early 1970s including the Citizens Conference on State Legislatures. In measuring legislative policy making capacity, the scholarship of Peverill Squire is to compare state legislatures with the U. S. Congress in terms of members' pay, average days in session, average staff per member, and general time demands of service. Squire's study of the literature

suggests that membership turnover declines as professionalism increases. The quality of assistance offered to legislators increases as the professionalism of staffing increases, based on credentials and work experience of the staff. Squire's study of the literature suggests that membership turnover declines as professionalism increases. With more professional staffing and heightened work experiences for these staff members, legislators benefit by having more contact with their constituents and become more attentive to citizens and their concerns. Professionalism also relates to the percentage of bills passed and enacted per legislative day, and the interest to reform personnel practices increases with legislative professionalism.

Squire asserts the more days each year that a legislature meets, the better legislators understand the legislative process, including rules and procedures and actually conducting the legislative business of the state. The level of staffing in a legislature improves information made available to legislators, increased job satisfaction, and greater impact on policy making. Higher salaries allow more attention to legislative duties at hand (no second jobs) and may lead to better qualified legislation in terms of academic credentials and occupational status.

Legislating Without Experience examines the effects of state legislative term limits at the state level by using case studies from six of the states that currently impose term limits on their legislative members. The states are grouped by levels of legislative professionalism (professionalized, semi-professionalized, citizen legislatures) based on Squire's articles. The editors use Squire's categorizations to group states by levels according to their degree of professionalism (professionalized, semi-professionalized, and citizen legislatures). In each of the categories of professionalism the states are compared to a case study of a non-term limited state legislature as a control state. These comparisons allowed for separating the effects of term limits from other trends in state legislative politics.

California and Ohio were designated as professional states with Illinois acting as the controlled state. Arizona and Colorado were chosen as semi-professional, with Indiana acting as the control state. Arkansas and Maine were selected as citizen legislatures, with Kansas acting as a control state. Squire's definitions of a professionalized legislature center on credentialed staff members meeting many months each year and which pays their members a full time salary. A semi-professional

legislature is not fully staffed and not fully paid and does not meet full time. The characteristics of the citizen legislature are short sessions, low pay, minimal staff, and dual careers of the legislative members who represent smaller districts. Thus, the eleven chapters contained in this volume offer much insight into the question of term limits, and yet it is an experimental study whose findings are general in nature. The data provide nuts-to-nuts comparisons.

Nevertheless, the full results of studies of legislative term limits will not be known for another decade or more. Only then will trend lines be more clearly defined. For now among the general public term limits remain popular. To eliminate term limits entirely seems unlikely to happen. More than ever legislative bodies are under fire from the public, the media, and interest groups who are relentless in their demands. Levels of cynicism and distrust remain high. Term limits are an expression of the public's distrust of power and the public's hope that term-limited legislators will work harder and be more resistant to the temptations of long incumbency.

Some conclusions with regard to the effects of term limits can be seen in the following categories: composition of legislatures, behavior of legislators, organizational matters, and legislative performance. Looking at these areas, the following observations emerge with term limits: high turnover of legislative bodies, less experienced members, a decline of specialization among members, issue-to-issue thinking members, and an increase in *ad hominem* attacks among legislative members with continued rancor among house and senate members of the legislature, weakening of leadership, and standing committees' jobs more difficult for legislative staff to perform, weaker standing committees making legislative staffs' jobs more difficult to perform. Executive departments and overall weaker legislatures vis a vis governors, state agencies, and executive departments. In short, term limits has functioned to diminish the institutional commitments of leaders and members resulting in more show horses and fewer workhorses.

The public tends to believe that governors and state executives have come out ahead in terms of political power in states of term limits. Legislatures may be weaker institutions because of term limits. The effects of term limits appear to be more severe in the more professionalized states due to a lack of voluntary turnover. Broad changes in society's beliefs about the role of women, minorities, and some

occupational groups in elected office coupled with a myriad of societal forces may be more likely to instigate additional changes in the composition of state legislatures which will further increase the scrutiny of term limits on the legislative process.

Nine of the fifty states were used in this study on the effects of term limits. Future research possibilities would include other states in the categories of professional, semi-professional, and citizen legislatures and compare the states in this study with newly studied states. Oklahoma the first state to enact term limits would certainly be of interest to future scholars to study the effects of term limits on Oklahoma's legislative procedures and results. The inclusion of Oklahoma, the first state to enact term limits, would likely be of interest to scholars interested in the effects of term limits on Oklahoma's legislative membership and effectiveness.

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References

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