

Rick Farmer, John David Rausch, Jr., and John C. Green, eds. *The Test of Time: Coping with Legislative Term Limits*. (Lexington Books, 2003) pp. 298. \$75.00 ISBN: 0-7391-0444-6 (hb); \$26.95 ISBN: 0-7391-0445-4 (pb).

The time has come to quit telling the non-political scientist world that we cannot say for sure whether terms limits will make a difference because “we don’t have any data yet.” By now we do have data. Some state legislators were first prohibited from further service in 1996. In 1998, term limits had completely taken effect in Maine and California. By 2002 a dozen states had been affected. In Oklahoma, in 2004, we finally see the results from the first citizen initiative on legislative term limits. The accumulation of data is not great, but it certainly enough to merit serious attention to this important topic.

The fine collection of articles in the *Test of Time* begins the serious process of systematically sorting through the hypotheses that have accumulated around term limits to determine which have merit, which are wrong, and which need more careful scrutiny. The editors of this book provide a valuable service by trying to organize expectations and, therefore, the essays into a manageable approach.

The first set of papers in this volume is a series of case studies of the states which have experienced the earliest impact of term limits. Generally, these parallel case studies look at how the legislatures operate under term limits, the electoral consequences of term limits, and whether the demographics of the legislatures have changed. The second section focuses on select topics: leadership, career paths, representation, and legislative performance or success. In the final section, the editors pull together essays that address the linkages between term limited legislatures and other political actors such as the media, interest groups, and citizens.

It is impossible to summarize the findings of this important book in a brief review, but reading it should dispel any notion that because nothing tragic has happened in these states (excepting, perhaps, California), that term limits have not done much. These essays routinely talk about increased volatility and commotion, challenges to make the legislature work, shifting loci of power, and surprising little change in demographics.

Reading these essays reminds one how adaptable legislative institutions are. That they survived term limits should not be a surprise; they are, after all, nearly ubiquitous because they are so adaptable. But, the powers they have and the functions they serve are quite different in different settings. The mere survival of legislatures that are term limited tells us little. When the editors conclude that term limits “are neither the panacea that proponents hoped for nor the Pandora’s box that opponents feared” caution is in order. These essays demonstrate great changes taking place in these state legislatures; changes that do seriously affect who wins and who loses. And, that is exactly what proponents wanted and opponents feared.

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NOTE

Oklahoma has been at the center of both the term limits movement and the analysis of it. Continuing that tradition, this book has strong Oklahoma ties. Two of the three editors, Farmer and Rausch, received their Ph.D.’s from the University of Oklahoma as did another contributor, Matthew Moen.