

**ELECTING EDUCATORS: HOW TERM LIMITS  
CAN INCREASE REPRESENTATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

In 2018, teacher walkouts occurred in several states as a result of disaffection with low teacher pay and benefits. The walkouts garnered national attention, but the state governments did not respond to the demands of the participants. In this study, we examine two of the states most involved with the walkouts: Oklahoma and West Virginia. We seek to answer how the same social movements in two similar states resulted in different electoral changes. We argue that the institutional permeability caused by legislative term limits in Oklahoma provided an avenue for electoral change. By shedding light on how public movements affect electoral outcomes, this study demonstrates that the interaction between walkouts and term limits leads to electoral changes and, thus, contributes to current understandings of when and how term limits have positive influence on democratic representation.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2018, teachers from multiple states left their classrooms and headed for their state capitols. Teachers from West Virginia and Oklahoma garnered national attention as they fought against cuts to education. Educators aimed their efforts at the state legislature hoping for increased funds, better pay, and greater financial support. The walkout in Oklahoma ended after 9 days without many of the changes that they had been fighting for. In light of the disappointing results, many protesters vowed their walkout would make a difference in the upcoming November election.

We use the cases of Oklahoma and West Virginia to examine how citizen movements and institutional structures interact to lead to substantive electoral change. We center our exploration on the varying effects of social movements on elections, as well as legislative term limits. Teachers in the two states had been persistently frustrated by low pay and benefits, but as the issue garnered public attention, *educational problems* became a concern for more than just teachers. Nevertheless, state governments made only small changes that were much less than the teachers had hoped for. The teacher walkouts in Oklahoma and West Virginia ultimately drove teachers to run for office as a move toward creating the change they did not see from the state legislature.

We argue that Oklahoma's state legislative term limits created low-cost opportunities for citizens to run for office. With time, the Oklahoma legislature has become more permeable as term limits have become the institutional norm. While term limits can reduce the responsiveness of lawmakers by prohibiting their reelection (Carey, Niemi and Powell 2000; Powell, Niemi and Smith 2007), at the same time, term limits can increase representation by having

new members elected more frequently (Carroll and Jenkins 2001; Casellas 2011). Without term limits, it would have been more difficult for the new members to gain their seats in legislature. The lack of change in West Virginia was a result of the lack of ability for new members to penetrate the legislature, there was simply not the opportunity for change as there was no form of mandatory turnover.

In this study, we examine whether or not teachers had greater electoral success in the 2018 election as a result of a combination of teacher walkouts and term limits. We use the 2018 State Legislative Election Results from Carl Klarner, supplemented by original data to uncover if teachers were more successful in the Oklahoma elections. This analysis sheds light on the ways that term limits have allowed for more citizen involvement, evidenced by wide-sweeping electoral change. Furthermore, this study also suggests a political condition that enhances the positive effects of term limits on democratic representation by examining how political activities such as walkouts and protests strengthen the role of term limits.

## THEORY

The walkouts, which were incited by issues of teacher salaries and educational funding, occurred within months of each other in West Virginia and Oklahoma.<sup>1</sup> Yet, only in Oklahoma were teachers able to drive change by becoming new members of the state legislature. We examine why the walkouts, with the same root cause, resulted in vastly different outcomes. To provide appropriate answers to the question, we first examine how the protests influenced the electorate and then discuss how the walkouts reinforced the theory that legislative term limits increase democratic representation.

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1 A number of other states followed, including Kentucky and Arizona.

## IMPACT OF WALKOUTS ON THE ELECTORATE

Political activities such as walkouts, protests, and demonstrations can affect citizens' understanding of issues and, accordingly, shape their political perception and vote choice in elections. According to Lee (2002), protest activities play an important role in mobilizing public opinion by providing voters with opportunities to learn about issues. In particular, because voters interact with their peers, they are likely to not only share relevant information but also have similar attitudes (McKelvey and Ordeshook 1986; Page and Shapiro 1992). Political activity, such as a protest, is a form of social communication that offers informative cues to the electorate. Put another way, because the activities tend to emphasize certain issues (Soule and King 2006), citizens can understand the issues and evaluate candidates in accordance with their salience (Gillion 2013; Fassiotto and Soule 2017). Indeed, it is well known that protest activities educate citizens on particular details of an issue (Gillion and Soule 2018).

Similarly, participants in walkouts and protests are regarded as signifying agents who guide the electorate (Benford 2000, Snow 2004). In other words, they place an emphasis on the social movements in order for citizens to follow a set interpretation of the event.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, studies have shown that the degree to which a framing gains public sympathy matters for the success of social movements (Snow 1986, Kane 1997, Ferree 2003). Moreover, repression can amplify the impact of social movements (Lichbach 1987, Rasler 1996). Every protest experiences counter-movements, and their impact varies depending on the movement cycle. For example, whereas repression directly weakens the protest as a short-term effect, it indirectly strengthens the protest as a

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2 Referred to as the politics of signification (Hall 1982)

long-term effect (Opp 1990). Thus, repetitive repression and subsequent protests can increase its influence on the public as a result.

Regarding the impact of walkouts and protests, it also should be noted that these forms of political activities are just one of many options for those involved in the movements in addition to electoral participation (Harris and Gillion 2010). Because individuals are usually dissatisfied with the status quo policies and incumbents (Gurr 1970; Lazarus 1991; Norris, Walgrave and Van Aelst 2005), they are eager to not only share information but also encourage non-participants to understand issues and, ultimately, make vote choices in elections in accordance with their discontent (Lohmann 1994; Claassen 2007; Heaney and Rojas 2011). Citizens may support the political activities by providing financial contributions and political support during an election (Rucht 1990). At the same time, it is also known that they tend to vote for a party or candidate who has consistent opinions in accordance with protests (Gillion and Soule 2018). In sum, the teacher walkouts increased the salience of *educational problems* among voters so that they consider these issues when deciding how to vote.

### **IMPACT OF TERM LIMITS ON ELECTIONS**

In addition to the independent role of the walkouts, we argue that the interaction between the walkouts and term limits are likely to lead to significant electoral changes. In other words, term limits can strengthen the positive impact of teacher walkouts on electoral outcomes in terms of democratic representation.

As discussed above, the teacher walkouts expressed educational discontent in both Oklahoma and West Virginia. Teachers tried to share relevant information among citizens

to persuade citizens to support their positions. However, the two states reached different electoral outcomes. Oklahoma experienced changes of members in the legislature, while West Virginia failed to make significant changes in the legislature. Thus, the two states present an interesting puzzle because they experienced differing consequences of the walkouts despite similar political environments including the size of legislatures, partisanship, and legislative resources. We argue that the primary reason for the different outcomes stems from the presence of legislative term limits. That is, although the educational problems and public upset in both states led to the teacher walkouts, the term limits uniquely positioned the Oklahoma legislature to be susceptible to greater change.

The literature on term limits provides ambiguous evidence. On the one hand, some studies show that term limits decrease the representation and responsiveness (Powell, Niemi and Smith 2007; Carey, Niemi and Powell 2000; Cohen and Spitzer 1996; Boeckelman 1993). This is because senior members are more interested in securing reelection than solving problems and, at the same time, those who are about to term out of office are less likely to vote with their constituents (Powell, Niemi and Smith 2007; Coyne and Fund 1992). As a result, term limits might weaken the electoral connection (Mayhew 1974; Glazer and Wattenberg 1996; Powell, Niemi and Smith 2007). As single-minded seekers of reelection (Mayhew 1974), members easily become less responsive to their constituents when their reelection is prohibited by law. Thus, problems which their constituents have might not be solved by the legislative process.

However, other studies argue that term limits increase representation diversity and legislative responsiveness (Carroll and Jenkins 2001; Casellas 2011). According to the theory of democratic representation (Pitkin 1967;

Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Hazel 1968), legislatures should resemble the citizens who elect the legislators. Furthermore, the principle of majority rule suggests that the legislature should reflect the interests and demands of the majority. Term limits are meant to limit the number of terms a member can serve, paving the way for new members. The long-standing theory was that term limits would allow new members who are demographically more representative of their constituents (Carey, Niemi and Powell 2000). In other words, term limits are meant to increase democratic representation, which is also expected to raise responsiveness.

In spite of contrasting evidence on the impact of term limits, we argue that teacher walkouts as political activities can strengthen the positive - rather than negative - impact of term limits on representation. As discussed earlier, political protests can shine a light on incumbents' inability to deal with constituents' concerns (Gillion and Soule 2018). As a result, qualified candidates can enter upcoming races to challenge incumbent politicians. The impact of protests on elections comes primarily from the fact that not only citizens, but also potential challengers, can understand current political and social conditions via the protests.

Though it is generally assumed that incumbents have strategic advantages against potential challengers through media channels and mailings (Mann and Wolfinger 1980; Cover and Brumberg 1982), walkouts and protests can weaken the incumbents' advantages by providing citizens with information about incumbents' failures and public upset. Moreover, because politicians are forward-looking (Arnold 1990), they always consider latent and potential preferences among the electorate (Sulkin 2005). Therefore, teacher walkouts are expected to inform citizens of educational concerns in the states, which also allows potential politicians to recognize that education is the notable

issue in the upcoming election. In sum, term limits, on the one hand, preclude the reelection of incumbents who failed to address educational concerns, while teacher walkouts, on the other hand, make the concerns prevalent in elections so that qualified candidates who can make education better are able to enter into the state legislatures.

Table 1 outlines the framework we utilize to guide our examination. First, both states had similar experiences with teacher walkouts. Educators were frustrated with educational problems and lack of benefits and welfare. Their dissatisfaction was also shared with the general public, which in turn led the public to understand the issues and support their protests. Though their efforts to improve the educational environment in the states have been constantly repressed by the state, educators were eager for dramatic changes in both states. However, term limits, as the key institutional difference, bifurcated the influence of the walkouts on the election outcomes in the two states. While the presence of term limits in Oklahoma allows the state legislature to experience electoral changes driven by the walkouts, the West Virginia legislature was not designed for similar changes and thus the walkouts were largely unsuccessful in the state.



Table 1

	Theory	Explanation	Oklahoma	West Virginia
Impact of walkouts	Disaffection	Frustration with state education and personal benefits led to walkouts	Yes	Yes
	Informing and framing	Positive public support encouraged walkouts	Yes	Yes
	Repression and resistance	State governments resisted change and teachers desired change	Yes	Yes
Impact of term limits		Term limits positioned the legislature for change	Yes	No

### TEACHER WALKOUTS IN OKLAHOMA AND WEST VIRGINIA

The upset in Oklahoma and West Virginia was initiated by disaffection with teacher pay and resources. Starting in January 2018, West Virginia led the nation-wide teacher walkouts (Slocum, Hathaway and Bernstein 2018). When the protest began, West Virginia ranked among the worst states in regards to teacher pay, salaries were lower than they had been in the 1990s (Kuhn 2018). To put an end to the walkouts the legislature approved a bill raising teacher pay (Park 2018). The changes were not what teachers had hoped for. The lack of change furthered teachers’ disaffection, which subsequently led to repeat walkouts in early 2019 (Greene 2019).

Several months later on April 2, 2018, Oklahoma teachers left their classrooms and headed to the hallways of the state capitol in order to increase their salary and improve the educational environment in the state (Dakin et al. 2018; Reilly 2018). Though the problems in Oklahoma’s educational system were not new rather, issues had frequently been brought to the legislature; no changes were made. Instead, the state continued to cut state expenditures for educational purposes (Krutka, Asino and Haselwood 2018).<sup>3</sup> There were some successful measures by the governor to increase spending on teachers and education by over 400 million dollars (Dakin et al. 2018). However, the pay raises offered to teachers fell short of what teachers had been hoping for by roughly four thousand dollars per teacher (Dakin et al. 2018).

Prior to 2018, teachers informed the public of the educational problems and tried to rally support for change (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2004). As a reaction to budget cuts in 2008, teachers in the state expressed their dissatisfaction and some even attempted to run for the state legislature in 2016. However, these early attempts failed to garner public support and the push for change was ultimately unsuccessful (Krutka, Asino and Haselwood 2018). Following these failed attempts, more work was dedicated to gaining public support. Teachers took photos of outdated textbooks and broken furniture in their classrooms and uploaded them to social media platforms (Reilly 2018). The efforts brought public attention to their protests against the state government by framing them as a “fight for public education” (Sanders 2020).

In 2018, teachers in Oklahoma and West Virginia gained positive and supportive national attention as their walkouts filled the halls of each state capitol. Local news headlines read, “Oklahoma educators and students united with hope

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3 The cuts to educational funding had been consistent since 2008.

for positive change” (Tow 2019), de- scribed the walkouts as “historic strikes” (Strauss 2019). Additionally, there were positive and supportive comments on the walkouts from the public and commentators. The framing of these walkouts to the public furthered their strong public support. Namely, the protests were framed as a struggle for better public education and a better future for both teachers and their students, rather than simply expressing discontent for their own benefit.

As the legislatures continued declining teachers’ demands, the impact of walkouts strengthened those pushing for change. In Oklahoma, the state budget for education had been declining since 2008, which in turn led to the decrease of teachers’ salaries and the number of teachers (Krutka, Asino and Haselwood 2018). Though the state legislature raised salaries, the increase was insufficient to compensate for the stagnant wages over the course of several years. Similarly, teachers in West Virginia, whose compensation ranked 48th in the U.S. at the time, required a pay increase and a more reliable financing plan for state health insurance. Yet, West Virginia Governor, Jim Justice offered the teachers only a 1 or 2 percent pay increase, which was unable to keep up with the inflation rate. Thus, the continued resistance escalated the walkouts in Oklahoma and West Virginia.

## **ANALYTICAL BACKGROUND AND STRATEGY**

The walkouts in Oklahoma and West Virginia present an opportunity to explore how different legislative rules can allow for greater change. Put another way, the similar events which occurred in both Oklahoma and West Virginia allow us to compare how the permeability of term limits created a greater shift in membership in Oklahoma. In both states, there was a growing disconnect between the citizens and the legislature, which is evidenced by the teacher walkout. Subsequently, the lack of response on the part of the

legislature drove many members of the walkout to pursue office. Comparing election results from 2016 and 2018, we assess how these protests were able to stimulate electoral change. We argue the public push for change in Oklahoma was successful because the legislature had the most room to change, whereas the election in West Virginia was just like the preceding elections. This change is with the caveat that the walkouts in combination with the presence of term limits creates the unique opportunity to increase representation in the legislature.

The walkouts and public upset resulted in highly contested seats. Term limits have been found to decrease competition and strengthen the incumbency advantage (Luttbeg 1992; Sarbaugh-Thompson et al. 2004). In fact, many incumbents in term-limited states run unopposed (Sarbaugh-Thompson et al. 2004). The decrease in competition is due, in part, to the lack of credible challengers (Gerber and Lupia 1996). The build-up of public distrust and the teacher walkouts led to an increased number of credible challengers. The Oklahoma policy institute found that candidate filings for legislative office increased from 2016 to 2018 by nearly 100 (a difference of nearly 200 from 2014). To take that one step further, there was a decrease in the number of elections with no contest from 2014 and 2016 to 2018.<sup>4</sup> Discontented constituents were more willing to run for office, even against an incumbent, because of the public walkouts. Alternatively, the existence of legislative term limits ensures that there will be a certain number of guaranteed open seats as incumbents' term out of office. The publicity of the protests can make it easier for an educator to obtain a seat over someone who is not directly tied to the push for education.

While they may seem to be an odd pairing, Oklahoma and

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4 Find the report here: <https://okpolicy.org/oklahomas-2018-elections-were-different-in-many-ways/>

West Virginia are similar in size, partisanship, and even have similar institutional resources. Table 2 highlights some of the key similarities between these two states. Every election, there are 125 seats up for reelection in Oklahoma: each of the 101 seats in the Oklahoma House of Representatives and 24 seats in the Senate (of State Legislatures 2018). The West Virginia House of Delegates has 100 members and the Senate has 34 (only half of the Senate seats are up for election every two years).<sup>5</sup> Both states have the same term lengths, 2 years in the lower chamber and 4 years in the upper chamber. Additionally, both states have a secure Republican majority.

Oklahoma and West Virginia are also comparable in institutional resources. Using Squire's (2017) professionalization index as a reference, the two states offer similar resources and are somewhat professionalized. State legislative professionalization can indirectly influence competition in state legislatures. For example, different levels of professionalization are associated with different types of candidates who run for office (Fiorina 1994). Also, leaders in more professionalized state legislatures are more likely to engage in candidate recruitment (Sanbonmatsu 2006). Thus, the fact that Oklahoma and West Virginia have a similar level of professionalization suggests that the two states have comparable conditions in terms of competition in state legislatures.

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<sup>5</sup> All information is from the West Virginia House of Delegates website.

Table 2: Similarities Between Oklahoma and West Virginia

	Oklahoma	West Virginia
Legislature Size	101/24	100/34
Term Length	2/4	2/4
Majority Party	Republican	Republican
Professionalization Score	.229	.157
Advancement Prospect Score	.12	.14
Term Limits	Yes	No

The very intention of term limits was to alter the electoral process by artificially increasing legislative turnover (Daniel and Lott 1997). This increased turnover puts challengers in a better position to seek and win office. In many instances, incumbents in term-limited states are considered to be safer than those in states without term limits (Sarbaugh-Thompson and Thompson 2017); however, the citizen upset over education effectively removed that incumbent security in states such as Oklahoma. As a result, the legislature became susceptible to change; turnover rates spiked, more incumbents lost election, and the legislature ultimately became more representative of those who felt they were wronged.

The 2018 election was unique for all states, aside from the teacher walkouts. Nationally, 2018 had the highest recorded mid-term election voter turnout in recent years (McDonald 2018). Both West Virginia and Oklahoma had higher than normal levels of turnout. In fact, Oklahoma had record turnout, more than 12 percent higher than the previous year and the highest number of votes cast in 22 years.<sup>6</sup> In West Virginia, turnout for 2018 was up by 10 percent from the previous year.<sup>7</sup> This trend indicates a national uptick in voter

6 <https://kfor.com/news/officials-oklahomas-midterm-voter-turnout-sets-new-22-year-high/>

7 Information from the West Virginia Secretary of State website.

turnout, which benefited candidates but is unlikely attributed to teacher walkouts. Rather, the high voter turnout was able to help candidates secure a seat in the legislature opened up by term limits.

In the 2018 election for the West Virginia House of Delegates, there were thirty-four new members elected. Out of the thirty-four new lawmakers in West Virginia, thirteen beat out an incumbent. In the Oklahoma House of Representatives, there were forty-seven new representatives elected. Eleven incumbents lost to challengers during the primary election.<sup>8</sup> This means that nearly half of the seats in the House of Representatives are now filled with first-term members. 30 percent of the newly elected members replaced an incumbent who was seeking reelection.

The 2018 election clearly brought changes to the Oklahoma Legislature, but how much of this change was directly related to the uprising brought on by the teacher walkout? We first look at the number of teachers who ran for office in 2016 and 2018. Second, we assess whether teachers were more likely to be electorally successful after the public walkouts. Specifically, we look to see if teachers were more successful in 2018 than they were in 2016. There are more than 200 individuals in each state for each year, allowing us to empirically test the relationship between the existence of term limits and the success of teacher candidates. We utilize the State Legislative Election Results (SLERs) dataset from Carl Klarner. These data are supplemented with original research on the careers of each candidate who pursued office in West Virginia and Oklahoma for the 2016 and 2018 general election.<sup>9</sup>

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8 For reference, the Tulsa World reported only 5 incumbents had lost a primary election in Oklahoma since 1994 (Blatt 2018).

9 These supplemental data were gathered from state legislative records, personal campaign websites, Face-book campaign sites, Twitter campaign sites, and online newspapers.

Using the SLERs dataset and supplemental information about legislative careers we are able to evaluate how many teachers run for office and assess whether they are more likely to be successful. The SLERs dataset contains election results from the general election for legislative positions. We limit the results to 2016 and 2018 in West Virginia and Oklahoma to evaluate whether the highly publicized walkouts had a profound effect on the election. While teachers in these two states had been struggling to negotiate with the legislature for years, the problems were not overtly public until the early 2018 walkouts.

Table 3: The Number of Teachers Seeking Office

	Oklahoma		West Virginia	
	2016	2018	2016	2018
Candidates	43	53	28	28
Winners	15	25	13	11

Table 3 contains information on the number of teachers who ran and those who won office in 2016 and 2018. For reference, Todd Makse found that an average of 12 percent of lawmakers identify their occupation as being within the field of education (2019, 315). In 2016, both states had a similar number of teachers who won the election, although Oklahoma had far more teachers pursue office. The difference between 2018 and 2016 is what is of interest. Oklahoma had an evident jump in the number of teachers who sought office and the number of teachers who were declared a winner, while only 53 ran for a seat there were actually 65 candidates who filed (Blatt 2018). Additionally, Oklahoma had a record number of incumbents lose during the primary election, eight of the lawmakers who lost voted against the measure to increase educational funding earlier in the year (Blatt 2018). In West Virginia, the same number of teachers pursued office and fewer won in 2018. Using this



information, we explore whether Oklahoma teachers were significantly more likely to win office in 2018.

## FINDINGS

In this section, utilizing a logit model, we assess whether teachers were actually more likely to win an election after the 2018 walkout. Electoral success, or winning the general election, is the dependent variable, and being a *teacher* is our independent variable. We first control for incumbent legislators to differentiate from the new challengers, incumbents tend to be more electorally secure. Additionally, we control for Democratic candidates because both legislatures are predominately Republican and we want to account for the potential partisan shift. There are also controls for two different types of elections that can occur: first, senate elections; second, elections for multi-member districts.<sup>10</sup>

The results are displayed in Table 4. When comparing Oklahoma state elections in 2016 and 2018, a teacher being elected is statistically significant in the 2018 election while it is not in the 2016 election. In contrast, in West Virginia, being a teacher is insignificant both in the 2016 and 2018 state elections. What is interesting is that incumbents are less likely to win in both states across both years. While teachers are able to replace incumbents in Oklahoma, West Virginia is replacing incumbents with people who are descriptively representative of the incumbents. From the *Democrat* control, there is no evidence of a wide-sweeping partisan shift in either state, Republicans are still more likely to win the election.

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<sup>10</sup> Oklahoma does not have any multi-member districts, West Virginia had 22 multi-member districts.

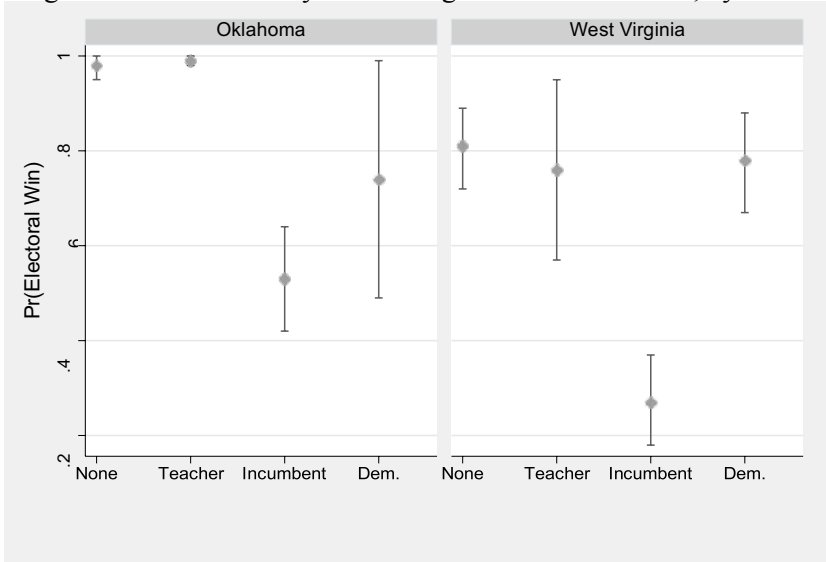
Table 4: Logit Analysis of Teachers Winning Office

	Oklahoma		West Virginia	
	2016	2018	2016	2018
Teacher	-0.015 (0.504)	1.371*** (0.477)	-0.266 (0.494)	-0.319 (0.493)
Incumbent	-4.158*** (0.645)	-3.584*** (0.671)	-2.343*** (0.315)	-2.484*** (0.320)
Democrat	-1.881*** (0.407)	-2.652*** (0.439)	-0.864*** (0.313)	-0.180 (0.309)
Senate Election	0.271 (0.446)	-0.041 (0.445)	-0.128 (0.436)	-0.246 (0.470)
Multi-Member District			-0.164 (0.335)	-0.313 (0.335)
Constant	4.043*** (0.649)	3.713*** (0.662)	1.795*** (0.362)	1.698*** (0.360)
N	236	236	243	242

Standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

In order to better understand the differences between Oklahoma and West Virginia, we present predicted probabilities for winning the 2018 election in each state. In Figure 1, we present three important candidate qualifications: whether the candidate is a teacher, an incumbent, or a Democrat. The baseline for this analysis is someone who does not meet any of these qualifications. Comparing the two states, it is clear that the probability of a teacher winning an election in Oklahoma is significantly higher than in West Virginia. The other significant difference is that incumbents have a higher probability of winning an election in Oklahoma than in West Virginia.

Figure 1: The Probability of Winning an Election in 2018, by State



Of the teachers who won office in Oklahoma, 18 were elected for their first term in 2018. State Senator Carri Hicks was one of several teachers who told reporters she felt compelled to run for office as a result of the walkouts. A list of these 18 lawmakers can be found in Table 5 along with their job and electoral outcome. In total, four of these new teachers beat a sitting incumbent, but 13 faced an open seat thanks to term limits.<sup>11</sup> Though 12 out of the 18 freshmen are Republicans, it is not surprising given that Oklahoma is largely a red state. Where these members deviate from their predecessors is in their experience and policy focus, which is centered on education.

<sup>11</sup> Table 7 in the Appendix (pg 32) provides a list of all the new members, not just teachers, elected to the OklahomaHouse of Representatives in 2018.

Table 5: Newly Elected Oklahoma Legislators, 2018 (Note: \* denotes beating the incumbent.)

Chamber District	Name	Party	Job	General Challenger	Primary Challenger	Open Seat
H-3	Kiger	R	Former teacher and principal	Y	Y	Y
H-15	Randleman	R	Psychologist affiliated with schools	Y	Y	Y
H-20	Conley	R	Teacher	Y	Y*	N
H-24	Phillips	R	Community college professor	Y*	N	N
H-25	Johns	R	Principal	Y	Y	Y
H-27	Sterling	R	Agriculture educator	N	Y	Y
H-33	Talley	R	Preacher/college Chaplain	N	Y*	N
H-34	Ranson	D	Teacher	Y	N	Y
H-35	Burns	R	Educator/coach	Y	Y	Y
H-65	Hasenbeck	R	Teacher	Y	Y*	N
H-74	Vancuren	R	Teacher/coach	N	Y	Y
H-77	Waldron	D	Teacher	Y	Y	Y
H-79	Provenzano	D	School administrator	Y	Y	Y
H-95	Albright	D	Teacher	Y	Y	Y
S-6	Bullard	R	Teacher	Y	Y	Y
S-16	Boren	D	Educator/attorney	Y	Y	Y
S-40	Hicks	D	School teacher	Y	Y	N
S-42	Stanley	R	Former teacher and principal/adjunct professor	Y	N	Y

In West Virginia, there was very little electoral change and consequently there was little change in the legislature and in the mindset of members.<sup>12</sup> Only two of new delegates in West Virginia list teacher as their profession, Jeff Campbell and Cody Thompson. Campbell was appointed to fulfill a vacancy before being re-elected in 2018.<sup>13</sup> Cody Thompson, however, did beat out an incumbent in the general election. As a result of the lack of change, there was another teacher walkout in West Virginia in 2019 (Greene 2019).

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In 2018 teacher walkouts drew national attention to teacher pay and educational resources. After the walkouts ended, Oklahoma and West Virginia handled their education problems in very different ways but in both states teachers did not achieve their desired changes. Why did some states see electoral change while others did not? We provide an answer to this question by presenting a case study examining the electoral change in the aftermath of the walkouts. Teachers were dissatisfied with the education budget and their pay, which triggered the walkout. Voters regarded the walkouts not as just the teachers' problems but as problems with the states' education system, which garnered increased support. This public support encouraged teachers' continued demand for pay increases and a better budget. But the legislature remained unresponsive. As a result, the teacher walkout continued as further protests against the state governments and eventually affected the 2018 state legislative elections.

Even though the walkouts were similar in these two states, the consequences were different. The walkout in Oklahoma created significant electoral change, whereas the walkout

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12 For a list of all the new members in the Virginia House of Delegates see Table 6 in the Appendix (pg 31).

13 [https://www.register-herald.com/news/candidate-profile-jeff-campbell-west-virginia-house-district/article\\_55bdebc-ccab-5ed2-9d60-dc6af786d11c.html](https://www.register-herald.com/news/candidate-profile-jeff-campbell-west-virginia-house-district/article_55bdebc-ccab-5ed2-9d60-dc6af786d11c.html)

in West Virginia resulted in little change. Why did the walkout produce greater change in Oklahoma? The evidence presented here demonstrates that term limits helped to open an avenue for disgruntled constituents to seek elected office. Although early on, the teacher walkout in Oklahoma did not result in the desired legislative changes, it did stem an electoral change by bringing in 59 new state legislators. A number of new legislators are educators and those that are not advertise any connection they may have, whether it be a parent or spouse. While the walkouts did not stimulate short-term changes, they did make a long-term difference for the overall composition of the legislature.

The findings in this study contribute to our understanding of the effects of term limits and suggest several implications for state politics. First, our results provide reason to believe that term limits have positive influence on democratic representation. Some prior studies argue that term limits have negative effects on representation and responsiveness because lawmakers, who are single-minded seekers of reelection, lack the motivation (Powell, Niemi and Smith 2007; Carey, Niemi and Powell 2000; Cohen and Spitzer 1996; Boeckelman 1993). However, in the case of Oklahoma, this study demonstrates that the term limits can be an institutional solution by allowing teachers to be new members of the state legislature and, thus, facilitate democratic representation. Hence, we support the argument that term limits assist lawmakers who are more likely to be responsive to their constituents' preferences (Chen and Niou 2005; Petracca 1991). In this case, those lawmakers who were not responsive in early 2018 lost their seat in the November election.

Second, our findings also show that the positive influence of term limits on democratic representation can strengthen when particular issues become more salient as a result

of political movements such as walkouts. In the case of Oklahoma, the teacher walkouts could not lead to a successful change in the 2016 election despite the presence of term limits because there was a lack of public support. However, in 2018, the walkouts made educational issues more salient because teachers successfully persuaded citizens to pay particular attention to the issues and support their positions. As Gillion and Soule (2018) argue, grassroots movements such as walkouts and protests play an important role as an informative cue that facilitates the social learning process. Moreover, because the movements allow potential challengers to obtain signals for when to enter a race, citizens' discontent in the street is more likely to be reflected in elections. Our findings demonstrate that the permeable institutional setting of term limits can facilitate the impact of political movements on electoral outcomes. That is, the teacher walkouts shed light on the failure of incumbents on the educational issues and, at the same time, term limits legally prevented many incumbents from running for office while having qualified candidates - especially, educators - enter upcoming races with public support. As a result, this successfully led to a change within the state legislature.

While we acknowledge the limitations of the two-state case study, we demonstrate that the different electoral consequences in the states are caused by different institutional circumstances. Without the presence of term limits in Oklahoma, it is likely that there would not have been any electoral changes. This study illustrates the potential for electoral changes in state legislatures based on both public upset and institutional rules. This also helps to increase current understandings of the relationship between a public movement and subsequent electoral change.

Even though we demonstrate that term limits have positive

effects on democratic representation, we are still cautious about the effects of term limits on responsiveness. Because democratic representation may not guarantee substantive responsiveness (Pitkin 1967; Phillips 1995), the fact that teachers became members in Oklahoma may not necessarily mean that they will solve the educational problems in the state. Therefore, to examine substantive changes in terms of responsiveness, it would be fruitful to analyze how educational budgets and policies have changed since teachers entered the Oklahoma state legislature.

The changes that occurred in Oklahoma are not unique. There have been other instances of electoral change in term-limited states following protest movements. In Colorado after the 2012 election, which legalized recreational marijuana, Democrats gained five seats in the House after having lost five in the previous election. In Arizona, following the death of George Floyd, Hispanics/Latinos came out in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement, as of 2020 the number of Hispanic/Latino legislators increased by 7 percent and the number of Democrats increased by 8 percent.<sup>14</sup> While it appears there have been successful electoral shifts in some states, this is not a given. In Missouri, there was very little electoral change following the 2014 protests in Ferguson, Missouri following the death of Michael Brown (only a 2 percent increase in Black and Democratic lawmakers). These other examples of activism are worth exploring to better understand the connection between protests and electoral change and the institutional rules that can create room for success.

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14 <https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/state-legislator-demographics.aspx>



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## APPENDIX

Table 6: West Virginia Districts with Newly Elected Members, 2018

Table 7: Oklahoma Districts with Newly Elected Members, 2018

Table 6: West Virginia Districts with Newly Elected Members, 2018

District	Party	General Challenger	Primary Challenger	Party Switch	District	Party	General Challenger	Primary Challenger	Party Switch
1	D	Y*	(y)	Y	36	D	Y	Y	Y
4	D	Y	(y)	N	38	R	Y	Y	N
6	R	Y	Y	N	42	D	Y	Y	N
10	R	Y	n.a.	N	43	D	Y	Y*	N
13	R	Y*	(y)	Y	44	R	Y*	Y	Y
16	R	Y	Y	N	45	R	Y	Y	N
16	R	Y	Y	N	47	R	Y	Y	N
18	R	Y	N	N	48	R	Y*	(y)	Y
20	D	N	Y	N	50	D	Y*	Y	Y
22	R	Y*	(y)	Y	51	D	Y*	Y	Y
24	D	Y	Y	N	51	D	Y*	Y	Y
27	R	Y	Y	N	54	R	N	Y	N
28	R	Y	Y	N	59	R	Y	Y	N
29	R	Y*	Y	N	62	R	Y	Y	N
31	R	Y	Y*	N	63	R	Y	Y	N
32	D	Y	Y	N	67	D	Y*	N	Y
35	D	Y*	(y)	Y					

A “Y” indicates that the representative did face a challenger during either the primary or general election, while an “N” indicates that they did not. In West Virginia, there are some multi-member districts, a (y) indicates that while there was competition in the election there were enough seats available for each person running to win a seat. Italics indicate members who have previously served in the legislature and \* denotes when a member faced and beat an incumbent. (The winner in district 10 did not compete in the primary.)

Table 7: Oklahoma Districts with Newly Elected Members, 2018

District	Party	General Challenger	Primary Challenger	Party Switch	District	Party	General Challenger	Primary Challenger	Party Switch
2	R	Y	N	N	61	R	Y	Y	N
3	R	Y	Y	N	62	R	Y	N	N
6	R	Y	Y	Y	63	R	Y	Y*	N
10	R	Y	Y*	N	65	R	Y	Y*	N
11	R	N	Y	N	67	R	Y	Y*	N
14	R	Y	Y*	N	68	R	Y	Y	N
15	R	Y	Y	Y	69	R	Y	Y*	N
17	R	Y	Y	Y	71	D	Y	N	Y
18	R	Y*	Y	Y	74	R	N	Y	N
20	R	Y	Y*	N	75	R	Y*	N	Y
24	R	Y*	N	Y	77	D	Y	Y	N
25	R	Y	Y	N	79	D	Y	Y	Y
27	R	N	Y	N	80	R	Y	Y*	N
31	R	Y	Y	N	82	R	Y	Y	N
33	R	N	Y*	N	83	D	Y	Y	Y
34	D	Y	N	N	86	R	Y	Y	Y
37	R	N	Y*	N	94	D	Y	N	N
41	R	Y	Y	N	95	D	Y	Y	Y
42	R	Y	Y	N	98	R	Y	Y	N
43	R	Y	Y	N	99	D	N	Y	N
45	D	Y	Y	N	100	R	Y	Y	N
47	R	Y	Y	N	101	R	Y	Y*	N
48	R	Y	Y	N					

Note: A “Y” indicates that the representative did face a challenger during either the primary or general election, while an “N” indicates that they did not. Italics indicate members who have previously served in the legislature and \* denotes when a member faced and beat an incumbent.