

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD: NEW LEADERSHIP IN THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF OKLAHOMA

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The Oklahoma political culture is set for a new era. Several political and demographic factors explain why the change is occurring, such as term limits, growing suburbanization, and increased newcomers in some rural legislative districts. As term limits decreases the importance of seniority, the power structure in the legislature may be determined by the sheer number of representatives each area brings to the capitol. The effect of term limits and population shifts will cause the energies of the legislature to be focused more on the issues of concern for urban and suburban Oklahomans, often at the expense of their rural counterparts. These factors will affect primarily rural legislators, which, from statehood to the present, have disproportionately influenced Oklahoma politics.

Rural roots in Oklahoma's political culture run deep. Agrarian ideals are reflected in the state's constitution, as economic regulations were initiated with the intent to preserve the family farm (Morgan and Morgan 1977). Such rural-centered beliefs created a prairie populism that prefers "decentralization and dispersion rather than concentration" (Holloway and Meyers 1992, p. 27). This political culture has been a device that the state's rural legislators have helped create and have

used to their benefit. However, Oklahoma's political culture is changing because the political culture represented in the state legislature is changing. This paper describes how and why this change is occurring and what impact such change will mean to the Sooner state.

Definitions of politics often refer to a division of goods and services or a determination of what is important for a society. Harold Lasswell's "who gets what, when and how" and David Easton's "the authoritative allocation of values" are two definitions of politics that fit such descriptions. Politics, however, works within the larger context of a society's culture that makes decision-making possible. The term "political culture" has been referred to as "a set of orientations toward a special set of social objects and process"(Almond and Verba 1989, p. 12). Countries will have their own political cultures, while regions and state governments within countries may also have cultural differences in their politics. This is the belief of one of the well-known scholars on variances in American political cultures, Daniel Elazar. For the state of Oklahoma, Elazar views the political culture as both traditionalistic and individualistic. According to Elazar, the traditionalistic aspects of Oklahoma political culture would make the state paternalistic and elitist with a minimal importance on parties. Elazar considers individualistic states to view politics as "just another means by which individuals may improve themselves socially and economically" (1972, p. 94). Elazar's third type of political culture, moralistic, which finds politics to be the basis of mankind's search for the good society, was found to be a relatively obscure concept in Oklahoma. Elazar made his description on the political culture of Oklahoma thirty years ago when the state was dominated by one party, the Democratic party, and the state was heavily influenced by the rural areas. Increasingly, Oklahoma is a competitive state for both parties in all but local races and there is more influence from the urban/suburban communities. While the political culture may remain as Elazar described—what has been transforming is the institution that guides the political culture, the Oklahoma legislature.

Throughout Oklahoma's history, despite the demographics that belie such influence, the rural areas have been most influential in the direction of the state's political culture. In rural Oklahoma, as this paper will argue, legislators have been able to campaign with a style that focuses primarily on personality and little on policy. This component of the political

culture is starting to wane in the Sooner state. The result will be an influence on the political culture that will become more urban based and policy centered rather than rural based and personality centered. A greater emphasis on policy could create a moralistic political culture, which may cause the political parties to submit policy alternatives to the voters. Now that the state has been politically and demographically altered in new ways from its history, interest group activists, media figures, and local politicians coming from the urban and suburban areas will be the prominent figures that shape the political culture of Oklahoma. This power shift is actually several decades behind the population shift of the state.

One of the most interesting phenomena of Oklahoma demographics is the location of its population. About 70 percent of the population lives in a diagonal corridor generally thirty miles wide extending from Miami in the northeast to Lawton in the southwest (Morgan, England, and Humphreys 1991). Roughly 10 percent of the state's population can be found northwest of this corridor, and the remaining twenty percent can be found in the southeast section. Oklahoma is a state with wide-open space, but a rather concentrated population. Increasingly more of the residents of the Sooner state make their homes in the two major urban areas, Oklahoma City and Tulsa, or in the suburbs of these two cities.

The demographic alterations are just part of the changes occurring in Oklahoma that will affect the political culture of this state. In fact, the state has had a majority of its population reside in non-rural areas since the 1970s (Kirkpatrick, Morgan, and Kielhorn 1977). The state's legislature, however, has continued to be inordinately controlled by rural legislators. In addition to demographics, evidence will be provided that other factors are now in place that will cause a significant transformation for the legislature and for the individuals who become legislators. These factors are new residents to the state moving in lake homes, primarily in the northeast and southeast regions, term limits, and the greater use of media in legislative campaigns.

Simultaneously, the legislators and the legislature itself are changing. Legislators from traditional rural areas cannot campaign in the style that they are used to. Once term limits is in place, the urban legislators will gain in their influence over the institution. These changes impact the type of individuals who decide to run for office and also affect the

issues of importance in the legislature. In greater fashion, political matters of Oklahoma will pit rural areas of the state against the suburban and urban areas. These issues, such as the continued legalization of cockfighting, will feature a conflict of the old customs (rural) against the modern (urban). Such conflicts will, in many ways, transcend the representation of parties and ideology. A study on the shifts of a state's political culture tells us not only why these shifts are taking place but also how it will shape future political battles. The structural alterations taking place in Oklahoma's political leadership will be significant compared to the historical patterns found throughout the state's existence. These changes will mark the third shift in the political structure. The political structure first was Democratic and rural dominated from statehood to 1960s and the second was two-party and rural/urban shared power from 1960s to present. In the years to come, the political culture will most likely be Republican majority and urban/suburban dominant.

OKLAHOMA POLITICAL STRUCTURE (STATEHOOD TO 1963)

State organizations of political parties in the United States respond to the localized needs of their public. This can cause state organizations of the same party to vary due to the differences in history and culture. As a result of its own unique history, Oklahoma has a political party structure that developed primarily on its own. The term "culture" implies a shared experience. Because no other state has the shared experience like Oklahoma's, this state could be in a category by itself in regards to the study of state politics. The political parties of Oklahoma developed independently of the national parties. Oklahoma historians James Scales and Danney Goble wrote of the isolation of both political parties that was evident during the pre-statehood days:

Eastern Democrats, whose number was probably greater than that of the Republicans were systematically excluded from the patronage troughs. As a result, their party long lacked purpose, not to mention organization. On the other side, the territory's Republican party existed largely as a distribution center for federal appointments, its activities geared for winning not the voter's

approval but the president's favor. For those reasons, both were isolated from the mainstream of the national party battle (1982, p. 6).

This description also fits in nicely with Elazar's portrayal of the traditional political culture.

As the parties developed with the statehood of Oklahoma, one party, the Democratic Party, was poised to dominate. The Oklahoma delegation for the constitutional convention included one hundred Democrats and only twelve Republicans. Added to the lopsided partisan design of the constitution, most Republican officials did not participate in the convention because of the "carpetbagger" image that plagued them from the patronage rule of the federal government in Oklahoma territory. The constitution that was created put the Democrats in a position of power for many years, as they garnered most political offices at the county level. The Democrats made sure that county governments formed during statehood would be the power base for the party for years to come (Morgan and Morgan 1977).

While the Democrats may have been the dominant party, they were not a united party. As the Democrats had an overwhelming advantage in Oklahoma politics from the 1930s to the 1960s, the party found plenty to argue about within its own ranks. Scales and Goble made this observation of the Democrats: "having obliterated their Republican opposition, the state party fell victim to the fragmentation of personality cults, even as its national counterpart was evolving into a disciplined, if diverse, body" (1982, p. 187). One of the greatest areas of division for the Democrats was Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policy. In fact the division over this policy was so deep that it led to a coalition of anti-New Deal Democrats and Republicans, which helped elect Republican Ed Moore to the U.S. Senate (Scales and Goble 1982).

Despite occasional success, Oklahoma Republicans, throughout the first sixty years of the state's history, found themselves on the losing end for almost all elections. Unlike the states from the old Confederacy, states where one-party Democratic rule was also the norm, the groundwork was always in place for two-party competition in Oklahoma. Unfortunately for the Republicans, their success was always stymied by events that were in large part beyond their control. The first was the statehood convention that gave Democrats control over most county

governments and the state legislature for many years. Next came the Great Depression and conversely the political success of Franklin Roosevelt during the 1930s. The political career of Robert S. Kerr, lasting from the forties to the early sixties, continued Democratic success. As governor and senator, Kerr did not spend his time fighting for the Democratic Party. Instead he was known as “a tireless booster of Oklahoma products and industry” (Darcy 2000, p. 21). The best description of Kerr would not be a Democratic senator from Oklahoma but rather an Oklahoma senator who happened to be a Democrat. This left Republicans with a conundrum: “Republicans found it difficult to campaign against an incumbent, issue avoiding, Oklahoma booster, in Washington” (Darcy 2000, p. 21). While this may have been difficult for the Republicans to position themselves against Kerr, it was also detrimental for Democrats on the issue of party building. From the legacy of Kerr, Democratic officials in Oklahoma have been more concerned with holding office than with the policies that could be shaped as a result of having the office. Since Kerr’s leadership, other Democratic leaders, such as David Boren and George Nigh, have campaigned on their own personal popularity, not their party ideals. Noting such strategy, current Democratic state chairman Jay Parmely observed, “even in our glory days the party was not strong” (Myers 2002, p. A-13). Such inability to build a strong party reflects Elazar’s description of the independent political culture. This lack of clarity from Democrats and independence from the national party made the state Democrats unique. This behavior helped the state Democrats survive as the majority party in the state legislature. The weakness in this attitude for state Democrats has been evident in its growing failure to field candidates and its lack of a political “bench” for statewide and federal offices.

THE MODERN PHASE OF OKLAHOMA POLITICS (1963 TO 2002)

Democratic control of Oklahoma Government began to noticeably erode in the 1960s. Scales and Goble observed how the death of Robert S. Kerr on New Year’s Day of 1963 coincided with the accelerated decline of power for the Democrats in Oklahoma (1982). At about the same time of Kerr’s death, the first Republican governor of Oklahoma,

Henry Bellmon, was to be inaugurated. Bellmon had taken advantage of another split within Democratic ranks; this time the split was between urban and rural factions. This division had grown out of the reform movement instigated by the urban-oriented governor from Tulsa, J. Howard Edmondson. By 1962, the year of Bellmon's victory, the Democrats had sharp divisions along clear urban/rural lines. Candidate W. P. Bill Atkinson represented the urban faction and former governor Raymond Gary represented the predominately rural old guard against reform. This fractious behavior of Democrats finally caught up with them as Bellmon, a tireless organizer for Republicans, not only became "the father of modern Sooner Republicanism" but also ushered the beginning of two-party politics in Oklahoma (Scales and Goble 1982, p. 329).

With Bellmon's election, a new structure in the political parties began. The two parties shared power but did not compete much against each other. The parties found their domains within the state. Republicans increasingly succeeded in federal elections. Oklahoma Democrats continued to hold an advantage in party registration, but their members had abandoned their national party even before Bellmon's election and now appeared to abandon their state party. In presidential politics, the only Democratic presidential candidates to carry this state since the days of Franklin Roosevelt have been Truman in 1948 and Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Even with his landslide in 1964, Johnson won by less margin in Oklahoma than in other states. In 1968 Republican Richard Nixon replaced Roosevelt's victory with the greatest margin of victory in Oklahoma, by defeating George McGovern in all seventy-seven counties and garnering an amazing seventy-three percent of the vote. The gains made by Republicans that have progressed considerably since the 1960s shows the dichotomy of Oklahoma politics in this stage: success for Republicans federally and continued success for Democrats in the legislature.

Despite their victories federally, Republicans have yet to take over the legislature, although their recent election gains suggest a takeover in the next two election cycles. Why such lack of success at the legislative level? One way to explain this strange political configuration is the difference in rural and urban politics. Oklahoma had different dynamics in its rural and urban politics, compared to most states. This has made the two parties of Oklahoma not fit the typical patterns found nationally

for Democrats and Republicans. Sarah McCally Morehouse described the typical groups of support for the two major parties nationally (1981). In most states, Democrats receive strong support from the poor, African-Americans, union members, Catholics, and central-city dwellers, with marginal support from middle-class suburban voters. Republicans, in contrast, receive their support from a combination of non-poor, White, nonunion families, Protestants, and residents outside of the central cities (Morehouse 1981). Except for the poverty element, Oklahoma has the combination that should benefit the Republicans. This combination may explain why Republicans have been dominant at the congressional level. The elements mentioned by Morehouse that lead to Republican success are found in most southern states that have also witnessed a tremendous growth for the Republicans in the last two decades. There is one major exception, however, and that is the large percentage of African-Americans that reside in southern states. It is the African-American vote that has kept many southern Democrats in congress (Morehouse 1981). Without concentrations of Oklahoma African-Americans, Republicans were frequently able to take all the state's congressional seats. Democrats have been able to hold on to the legislature in Oklahoma because of the distinction of Democrats in the rural areas from the national Democratic Party.

In most states Democrats get their support from the cities and Republicans from small towns and farms (Jewell 1955). This has not been the situation in Oklahoma. The two major cities, Tulsa and Oklahoma City, have been the main areas of support for the Republicans, whereas the rural areas of northeastern, southeastern, and southwestern Oklahoma have been supportive of the Democrats. The demise of Democratic victories in Oklahoma federal and presidential elections was forecasted by its inability to win in the two major cities. In presidential elections, for example, Lyndon Johnson in 1964 was the last Democrat to carry Oklahoma City, while Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 was the last to carry Tulsa. In gubernatorial politics, Republican Frank Keating carried both counties by large numbers in 1994 and 1998. For the 2002 state house races, twenty-seven districts have no Democratic candidates. Of those twenty-seven districts, eighteen are found in the cities or suburbs (*The State Filings* 2002, A18).

Why are the two major cities in Oklahoma so heavily Republican? Oklahoma City and Tulsa fit the descriptions by Morehouse on

Republican strongholds. Both cities have small minority populations and both have a small percentage of union members in their total workforces. It can also be said that both cities have newspapers that tend to favor Republicans and that the Protestant faiths that dominate are fundamentalist or evangelical, which both tend to support the Grand Old Party (GOP) in overwhelming numbers. These are all reasons why the cities of Oklahoma do not fit the normal pattern of Democratic support that is found in many cities throughout the United States. It is also an indication that as rural Democratic legislators will have a weakened grip on the state, as this paper suggests, the Republicans will gain control as the cities and suburbs increase their clout in Oklahoma.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

Oklahoma may be considered a rural state symbolically, even though demographically it is not. Since statehood, Democrats have received, certainly in legislative races, a great deal of support in rural areas. Democratic legislative candidates may win in rural sections of Oklahoma because they are more conservative than their national party. The Democratic legislature never voted to allow liquor by the drink or gambling on horses. Both practices were approved by votes of the people. In addition, the Oklahoma legislature has required schools to provide only sexually transmitted disease (STD) and/or HIV/AIDS education but has not required sexuality education as have many states (Donovan 1998). On gay rights, Oklahoma is one of sixteen states that still have sodomy laws that prohibit consensual sex between same-sex partners. Oklahoma does not have a law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, nor does its hate crimes law include sexual orientation (*State-by-State Sodomy Law Update* 2000). On the issue of guns, in sharp contrast to national politics, many Democratic legislators in Oklahoma are supported by the National Rifle Association (NRA) in their reelection bids. The NRA might be giving to Democrats because they are in the legislature's majority. The Democrats have passed legislation that is supported by the NRA. The legislature passed a concealed handgun law that allows citizens with a license to carry a concealed handgun in public. On social or morality issues, Democratic legislators find themselves to the right of their national party. The legislature also may

have remained in Democratic control for such a great length of time because of the phenomenon of dual partisan identification. This phenomenon suggests that voters have a psychological attachment to their local party and would rather have a dual partisan identification rather than change party registration (Hadley 1985). Of course, one of the reasons voters may have a strong attachment to their local party is that it behaves in a similar fashion as the party they vote for nationally. In other words the local Democratic officials are more like national Republicans than national Democrats.

Rural Democratic legislators can succeed where their state party may not because the voters have different expectations for them. If state legislators continue to provide services and stay in contact with the “folks back home,” they can get reelected despite their national party. This means that the “home style” of legislators, the way in which incumbents present themselves and build a trust with their constituencies, determines their success at the polls, not ideology or partisanship (Fenno 1978). What helps Democrats in rural areas of Oklahoma is that they are individuals who have been in the area for quite some time. Such lengthy residency allows them to be trusted by the voters, and their voting records are not an important factor. In traditional districts, those with little change in the population, namely rural areas, a politician can continue to stress personality or service as a reason for reelection because the politician is essentially talking to the same group of voters every reelection year. One former rural legislator said that people don’t care about the issues, they want to know if they can call you if they have a problem, and will you help them find a job if they ask.

As a district is shaped by new additions of citizens or as a district is redesigned from a rural district to a more suburban one, politicians will need to rely on other practices in order to get votes. Candidates who must continue to reintroduce themselves to voters will need to stress ideology and policy positions. Richard Fenno has described this phenomenon as rural members of Congress must transform their political strategies by adopting less “person-intensive connections” and by adopting more “policy-intensive connections” as their districts change (2000). Many rural Democratic legislators in the Oklahoma state house are witnessing such changes to their districts. This will cause a different type of candidate to run in the future and will also decrease the power

of rural Democrats, ushering in a new phase to Oklahoma's political culture.

While demographic dynamics affect all parts of the state, the changes that have occurred in Oklahoma's population have had the greatest impact on the rural legislators. Rural Democrats never developed with the national party. This was to the advantage of the rural Democratic legislator as there would be a loyal group of voters who would support them and no consequences for them to pay if their national party alienated that same group of voters. For years, rural Democrats would not need their national party because Republicans in Oklahoma, in most parts of the state at least, were not competitive. As the state has changed and has become more urban and suburban, the rural Democrats have a smaller and unknown group of voters to attract.

As noted previously, the urbanization of Oklahoma is not an entirely recent event. In fact, by the 1970s, more than two-thirds of the state's population was found in urban areas (Kirkpatrick, Morgan, and Kielhorn 1977). These ongoing population shifts in Oklahoma are important to the future of rural legislators because there is also a reshaping of rural legislative districts. Populations in Oklahoma are shifting not only to counties that surround the two major cities, but also to counties that have lakeside communities.

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the shifting of population in Oklahoma. Counties with the largest population growth are primarily counties that border the two major cities or are counties with lakes. Canadian and Cleveland counties have a border with Oklahoma county, where Oklahoma City is located. Wagoner and Rogers counties have a border with Tulsa county. The counties of Cherokee, Delaware, Marshall, McIntosh, and Wagoner counties in Table 1 are described as "lake" counties. The counties and their corresponding lakes are as follows: Cherokee county has Lake Tenkiller, Delaware county has Grand Lake, Marshall county has Lake Texhoma, McIntosh county has Lake Eufala, and Wagoner county has Lake Fort Gibson. There is some indication that these counties have used their lakes as development for homes, which mainly serve retirees. One such indication is that most of these lake counties, with the exception of Wagoner county, a growing suburban area for Tulsa, could have a high percentage of their population over

TABLE 1**Top ten counties with largest population growth (1990-1997)**

County	Growth Rate %	Description	% + 55
Delaware	20.7	Lake	32.8
Rogers	19.0	Suburb	27.6
Canadian	13.8	Suburb	15.9
McClain	13.3	Rural	21.8
Wagoner	13.2	Lake/Suburb	18.0
Cleveland	13.1	Suburb	13.4
Cherokee	12.5	Lake	23.4
McIntosh	12.0	Lake	35.4
Marshall	11.2	Lake	34.2
Mayes	11.1	Rural	26.4

SOURCE: 1999 county and city extra: annual metro, city, and county data book 8th edition.

fifty-five and also be a high growth area. While most retirees may have similar policy demands, which may help Democratic candidates for the legislature, many newcomers to the state may have a different partisan makeup than the locals. In fact, Steve Edwards, a former Republican Party state chair, cited that on the recruiting process for his party “we look to where Republicans are moving in, which is the lake areas in northeastern Oklahoma.”

As for the counties with the greatest population decreases, the message is quite clear. It is the rural areas, predominately in Western Oklahoma, that are losing population. Certainly the rough times for the oil/gas industry and the need for less labor in agriculture have led to the decrease.

Many factors in population tilt against the rural Democratic legislator in Oklahoma. The most populated areas in the state, the suburbs and

urban centers, have increasingly become solid Republican supporters, which explains the success of the GOP in federal elections. Meanwhile, many of the traditional Democratic rural areas are losing population or their Democratic characterization through the advent of suburbanization or newcomers moving in. This demographic structure bodes not only for a greater Republican presence in Oklahoma politics but also for a political culture that focuses increasingly on the needs of urban and suburban dwellers.

Despite the greater numbers in cities and suburbs for Oklahoma, the rural legislator still has the upper hand at the state house. For an illustration of this power, Table 3 lists the committee chairs for the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

TABLE 2

Top ten counties with largest population deficits (1990-1997)

County	Growth Rate %	Description	% + 55
Tillman	-16.2	Rural	28.9
Roger Mills	-13.1	Rural	27.6
Harper	10.9	Rural	32.9
Woods	-9.4	Rural	32.7
Dewey	-9.2	Rural	31.7
Harmon	-8.4	Rural	32.8
Blaine	-7.7	Rural	29.2
Cimarron	-6.6	Rural	27.9
Ellis	-6.1	Rural	31.7
Alfalfa	-5.6	Rural	33.7

SOURCE: 1999 county and city extra: annual metro, city, and county data book 8th edition.

TABLE 3**Committee Chairs in Oklahoma State House**

Committee	Chair	District
Administrative Rule	Charlie Gray	Urban
Agriculture	James Covey	Rural
Appropriations	Mike Mass	Rural
Banking	Debbie Blackburn	Urban
Career & Technology	Barbara Staggs	Rural
Commerce	Lloyd Fields	Rural
Common Education	Larry Roberts	Rural
Congressional Redistricting	Lloyd Benson	Rural
Corrections	Ron Kirby	Rural
County & Municipal Governance	Gary Taylor	Rural
Criminal Justice	David Braddock	Rural
Economic Development	Dale Turner	Rural
Environment & Natural Resources	M.C. Leist	Rural
Government Operations	Mary Easley	Urban
Higher Education	Bill Nations	Suburban
Homeland Security	Bill Paulk	Urban
Human Services	Darrell Gilbert	Urban
Insurance	Kevin Cox	Urban
Judiciary	Opio Toure	Urban
Mental Health	Al Lindley	Urban
Public Health	Fred Stanley	Rural
Public Safety	Ray McCarter	Rural
Redistricting	Bill Paulk	Urban
Retirement	J. T. Stites	Rural
Revenue & Taxation	Clay Pope	Rural
Rules	Russ Roach	Urban
Science & Technology	Abe Deutchendorf	Rural
Small Business	Bob Plunk	Rural
Tourism	Kenneth Corn	Rural
Transportation	Mike Tyler	Suburban
Veterans	Dale Wells	Rural
Wildlife	Dale Smith	Rural

SOURCE: The Oklahoma House of Representatives

THE FUTURE DIRECTORS OF THE OKLAHOMA POLITICAL CULTURE

Of the thirty-two standing committee chairs, twenty come from predominately rural districts, ten come from predominately urban districts, and only two come from the suburbs. Committee chairmen have considerable influence on the direction and design of legislation. Thus, the lawmaking process in Oklahoma still has a rural flavor, even though the population in Oklahoma is no longer heavily rural. The state house in the very near future may no longer be able to sustain its rural roots. Three factors all dealing with demographics have so far been espoused as reasons for the changes in Oklahoma political culture: the increased population in urban centers, more growth in suburbs, and outsiders moving into lakeside communities. Two remaining factors need to be explored, each of which has an impact on the type of individuals who will choose to be legislators: term limits and the growth of media in legislative races.

Term limits is certain to change the political landscape of states that have adopted it. This certainty is based on the fact that many of the political leaders who dominate state politics will simply no longer be able to hold their offices. In the next two election cycles for Oklahoma, fifty-seven of the one hundred and one state representatives will be term limited. Rural districts across the state will have thirty-four members term-limited out as opposed to twenty-five from urban or suburban districts (Ford 2001). Certainly, term limits reduces the experience advantage some legislators give their districts when muscling for the agenda in the legislature. Political scientist Linda Fowler believed term limits would decrease the incentive to run for office because candidates would not see a return on their investment by building a political career (1994). However, term limits may enhance representation by giving other groups more opportunities to serve. New members will have power as a result of term limits. Some studies have concluded that there may be some benefit to women and nonwhites as well as to the minority political party of a state (Farmer 1998). If changes such as these occur, then a legislative body may become truly "representative." Nevertheless, for regions of a state that need political expertise to balance their declining numbers, such as many rural areas of Oklahoma, term limits may bring more harm than good.

The perception among many rural legislators is one of concern over what will happen to their districts once term limits takes effect. House Speaker Larry Adair stated,

You are probably going to see the demise of rural Oklahoma. Most rural lawmakers stay [in office] a long time. In metropolitan areas lawmakers leave earlier. Rural lawmakers stay in touch with their constituents more than metropolitan lawmakers do. Term limits will cause a shift of power from rural to urban that will create a consolidation of county government and rural schools and a more centralized form of government.

With the consolidation of rural governments and schools, efficiency in education and government may be achieved, but at the expense of access for rural citizens. Such emphasis on access has been a cornerstone for Oklahoma's political culture (Holloway and Meyer 1992). Rural legislator Rick Littlefield also expressed his view on the impact of term limits: "Seniority is the key to the Oklahoma legislature. It matters for committee assignments and the contact a legislator has with agency directors. Bureaucrats and lobbyists will run the government of Oklahoma once term limits kicks in." The legislators' comments on office tenure are correct, to a degree. Currently eleven representatives from rural districts have served over twelve years, but only five representatives from urban or suburban districts have served over twelve years. The average tenure difference, however, between rural and urban/suburban representatives is very similar. Rural representatives have an average tenure of eight years, and urban/suburban representatives have seven years.

Adair and Littlefield suggest that some areas of a state might need more experience than other areas in the state legislature. If term limits shifts the power from rural to urban areas in the state, the legislature may not seem as attractive to candidates in rural Oklahoma in the future. In comparison, urban and suburban areas may be able to unite their delegations and out-vote rural legislators, tilting the laws and policies of the state to their favor. Not all experts on term limits believe that decreasing seniority will create a bloc voting mentality for lawmakers. Instead, term limits may cause candidates to campaign on how they would serve the district, not on how they would seek consensus in the capitol. Legislators may become increasingly parochial due to term limits and focus more on casework than on legislation (Kazee 1994). This

practice, if it does occur, may give short-term benefits to constituents, but could harm the state as it may damage comity in lawmaking.

The way power will be allotted in a term limited legislature is a major concern for rural lawmakers. Oklahoma City and Tulsa have the upper hand if determination of authority in the legislature increasingly becomes a numbers game. This result will lead to more committee chairs in the hands of urban/suburban legislators, especially if the Republicans become the majority party in the state house. The priorities of Oklahoma's political institutions will increasingly be the priorities of urban and suburban voters.

Not only will the composition of the legislature change, causing the urban and suburban legislators to have more influence than their rural counterparts, the type of politicians who run in rural districts will change in the future. This is a result in the change of political strategies found in rural Oklahoma. Rural districts in Oklahoma have been areas where candidates focused on a "person-intensive" campaign. Congressional scholar Richard Fenno has referred to this as a campaign that does not focus on policy or party, but instead focuses on personal contact and service (2000). This strategy has worked especially well in rural areas where there has been little population influx and the candidates themselves have been from the areas for quite some time. With the change of districts, such as the alteration of a rural district to a more suburban one, candidates must then run a more "policy-intensive" campaign. Such campaigns, as the term suggests, stress policy and also party affiliation (Fenno 2000). Districts with fluctuating populations, such as suburban districts or the lake resort districts in Oklahoma, have voters that rely on policy or partisan cues when making their voting decisions. More voters will not respond to the traditional "you know me and my family" person-intensive campaign.

Currently and more so in the future, candidates for the legislature in rural areas, as with the rest of the state, will need to emphasize a media campaign. A combination of term limits, new voters, and suburbanized districts will cause candidates to use the airwaves to introduce themselves to unfamiliar constituencies. Thus, legislative campaigns will become costlier. One recent candidate's success, which might be a signal for future campaigns, was the election of Jim Wilson in rural eastern Oklahoma District 4. Wilson, a political novice, spent over ninety thousand dollars in his election. Much of his money was

spent on television advertising. He believed that such spending was necessary in order to boost his name recognition and to drive off potential opponents. The candidates of the future in rural parts of Oklahoma should be more oriented towards policy and partisan issues, and will also need to be skilled in fundraising.

By 2004, when term limits begins its firm grip on the Oklahoma legislature, the politics of the Sooner state will be dictated by the urban and suburban regions as never before. This is not a mournful claim but merely a realistic one. In addition, barring some unforeseen political rift or scandal on the part of the GOP, the state will have a Republican majority in the state houses. With a combination of greater urban influence and Republican control, it should be no surprise that priorities will change in ways that will alter the political culture of the state.

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

Throughout this paper, the evidence of change in Oklahoma's political culture is more suggestive than empirical. The demographic patterns are strikingly evident, but the impact that term limits and fundraising will have on this state's politics is anecdotal and subjective. Not too surprisingly, career-minded legislators do not like term limits. Despite the uncertainty of predicting the future, here is what we can surmise of Oklahoma's politics thus far. It has gone through two phases in its politics: first a traditional one-party system with power emanating from rural areas; second an emerging two-party system and a greater voice for non-rural areas. As the state went to its second phase, there were alterations to the political culture. Some changes that occurred in the early 1960s, the beginning of this new phase, were the repeal of prohibition, central purchasing for state agencies, and a merit system for state employees (Scales and Goble 1982). Possible changes in Oklahoma's political culture in the near future deal with gamecocks, agribusiness, taxes, education, and party competition.

Oklahoma is one of three states, along with New Mexico and Louisiana, to have legalized cockfighting. In this sport, bantam roosters are fixed with razor sharp devices to their spurs. The fighting continues until one bird can no longer go on. Opponents charge that this is an inhumane entertainment and should be stopped. Supporters cite the

tradition of the event and ask to be left alone. According to a recent poll, sixty-five percent of Oklahomans wanted the sport to be banned. Over sixty percent of respondents charged that the sport gives the state a backward image (Martindale 2002). While the differences on this subject were not great between rural and non-rural areas, fifty-five percent of residents in rural Oklahoma wanted the sport banned, these poll numbers may reflect the changes that are occurring in rural Oklahoma. As more outsiders move to rural areas and as rural areas become suburbanized, more people may place greater importance in the issue of state "image." Such concern for state image is evident in Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating's remark on this fowl sport, "it is simply embarrassing to Oklahoma to be seen as one of only a tiny handful of locations outside the Third World where this activity is legal" (Ervin 2002, p. A-11).

Cockfighting is not the only poultry issue that illustrates change in Oklahoma. Chicken houses that are owned by some of the major meat producers in the United States, such as Simmons and Tyson, are found in the state of Oklahoma. The attitude towards this business is a mixed response. The City of Tulsa's water supply is currently threatened by the chicken farms located in eastern Oklahoma, specifically Lake Eucha in Delaware county, since the runoff from these farms pollutes the area's watershed (Ervin 2000). This suggests that chicken farm regulation would be an issue that unites Oklahomans from rural and non-rural areas. Nevertheless, while no one wants to live near a chicken house or have his or her drinking water polluted, chicken is still a popular product, and these farms do produce jobs. It may mean that chicken farms in the future will move farther away from the water supplies of metropolitan areas, to avoid complaints of water pollution and nuisances. This will increasingly transfer the poultry problem to the rural areas. By moving the farms to more remote areas of rural Oklahoma, the chicken producers will find a less than united front against their business in the state. In this past year, a farming operation was proposed to build ninety chicken houses on five hundred acres in extreme northeast Oklahoma in Ottawa County, away from the suburbs and Tulsa's water supply (Warford-Perry 2002). While this particular enterprise was stopped, a smaller chicken farm operation is in the planning stage at a nearby location (Sturgeon 2002). Agri-business proposals such as this may indicate the future burdens that will be placed on rural areas as these operations try

to balance demand for their product while avoiding protests from cities and suburbs.

Oklahoma may be able to escape the image of a backwater place with a ban on cockfighting, as the opponents of such sport proclaim, but one reality the Sooner state cannot escape is its attachment to Texas. Oklahoma will always be North of Texas, thus sharing a border with one of the most powerful and influential states in the country. While difficult to accept for proud Oklahomans, some state leaders find aspects of Texas state government worth adopting. As cities and their suburbs start to dominate Oklahoma politics, a greater charge will be made to eliminate the state's income tax and various sales taxes and move towards a tax system comparable to Texas's. This transformation will shift more burdens on rural areas and the small towns that serve their needs. An elimination of income taxes will most likely increase property taxes, which will increase the tax rates for landowners in rural Oklahoma. A reduction in sales taxes, or in some cases outright elimination of such taxes, may seem beneficial to many residents since this is a regressive tax; it does not consider the revenue base for services in small towns across Oklahoma. Without sales taxes many small towns could not provide adequate fire or police protection for their citizens. The debate surrounding taxes in Oklahoma has primarily focused on the benefits it would provide for job production in the metropolitan areas, an indication of the shifting political power in the state.

With the growing power of Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and their environs, Oklahoma becomes a more centralized place. One policy area where this will become increasingly evident in the future will be education. The struggle over Governor Keating's curriculum requirements brings centralization of education to the forefront. The governor's plan would require four units of English and three units of Math, Science, and Social Studies (Ervin 2000). While lauded by many lawmakers and citizens, a criticism of the plan was the loss of control from local schools (Ervin 2000). Another concern has been that greater curriculum requirements weaken the possibilities for students who want to pursue vocational training rather than a college-track education. Tied into centralization of education is the issue of school consolidation. Schools that cannot provide necessary curriculums for their students could be absorbed into other schools. Rural schools would most likely

be the ones to be absorbed since they would not have the tax base to support the demands for such curriculum.

Politically, Oklahoma's future will have two-party competition with Republicans having considerable advantages. The GOP will never dominate as the Democrats did back in the 1930s, when the legislature at times had few if any Republicans to counteract the majority party. Nonetheless, the Republicans in the future will most often be the majority party in the legislature and will be the favorites in gubernatorial and most congressional races. The district lines for legislative seats do not indicate the true strength of Oklahoma's metropolitan areas. A non-rural agenda will shape the legislature after term limits begins its reign in 2004. Democrats may see few advantages on the horizon in Oklahoma. The future should make Democrats adopt a unified party strategy for the first time in the state's history. Instead of individualized and personality-based campaigns, Oklahoma Democratic politicians will have to articulate to voters what the Democratic Party in Oklahoma stands for. That will be a new experience for a party that has never needed to be united or to concern itself with the issues of its national counterpart. It may appear that Oklahoma Democrats would lose even more by connecting themselves to their national party, but currently as the party does not control the Executive Branch or the United States House of Representatives, the opportunity is ripe for Democrats to focus on local concerns in ways that distinguishes them from Republicans. Democrats have had success in the South recently by "finding candidates that fit their districts and can build a message from the ground up" (Chaddock 2001, p. 2). In order to have success in Oklahoma, the national Democrats will need to provide support of candidates in the state and trust the instincts of the candidates as they hone their own message. Oklahoma Democratic candidates will also need to walk the tightrope of being independent of the national party, yet at the same time supporting the party so as not to alienate partisan supporters in their districts. The Republicans, through years of losses, have strengthened their party unity and message. Democrats are now in a position that will require them to become an effective counterpart to the Republicans for the good of the state and their own existence.

Two-party competition will be a benefit to the citizens of Oklahoma. It will give voters choices and ways to reward and punish policy

alternatives from the two parties. In fact, all the future issues described in this essay can be beneficial to the state of Oklahoma. Nevertheless, as in physics and also with politics, for every action there is a reaction. The changes described will assist more people in this state, and they also may steer the state in directions that more people in non-rural areas want to go.

These reforms also indicate something new for Oklahoma, an increasingly moralistic political culture. As the name suggests, the moralistic political culture is most concerned with developing a good society. Elazar characterizes this venture as “a struggle for power. . .but also an effort to exercise power for the betterment of the commonwealth” (1972, p. 96). Indeed reforms in animal rights, agriculture, taxes, and education may create a better society in Oklahoma. Nevertheless, reforms do alter lifestyles and this can only happen, as Elazar alludes, through an exercise of power. One’s level of enthusiasm for reform can be based on whose lifestyle is being altered. The reforms listed above disproportionately affect rural Oklahoma more than other parts of the state.

For rural Oklahomans and their political leaders, the future will encompass a reality that they have already experienced in part. In the last decades rural areas have lost population comparable to the gains made in urban and suburban areas. In the future, rural areas will also lose political clout commensurate to those population losses.

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