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Study Finds Fault With Term Limits

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Study Finds Fault With Term Limits COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri voters approved legislative term limits in 1992, and they have been in effect for nearly a decade. The term limits restrict Missouri state legislators from serving more than eight years in the same legislative chamber.

Now a Mizzou researcher has studied the effects of term limits, and thinks the effect has not always been good for state government.

[David Valentine](#), a research associate professor in the [Truman School of Public Affairs](#) at the University of Missouri, studied the effects of these term limits a decade after they were enacted. He found the term limits have had a negative effect on the institutional knowledge of legislators.

“Term limits have caused a dramatic decrease in the amount of legislative experience in the last ten years,” Valentine said. “It takes most new legislators about four years to learn the intricacies of the legislative process, the social organization of the House and Senate, the details of government, broader issues, and how to balance everything with the needs of their districts and the expectations of their party. By the time they gain this knowledge, they only have a relatively short time to utilize their knowledge before their term limit expires. In addition, the absence of experienced legislators precludes learning from more experienced peers.”

One of the primary arguments for supporters of term limits is that the limits will decrease the amount of influence lobbyists have on the policy-making process. Valentine found that the opposite seems to be true and that lobbyists seem to be gaining more influence among legislators.

“Many new, inexperienced legislators do not fully understand many of the complex issues for which they must make policy,” Valentine said. “They are so busy learning how to do their jobs before their term limit expires that they do not have time to adequately research each issue. This often results in legislators relying on lobbyists to educate them on issues, and while most lobbyists do not try to deliberately mislead legislators, the legislators may only get one side of multi-faceted issues.”

Valentine believes simply repealing term limits would do little to change the culture or the performance of the Missouri legislature in the foreseeable future. He suggests that a repeal of term limits should be coupled with a careful review of legislative performance to ensure that the legislature is prepared to meet the demands of the future.

More broadly, Valentine indicates that voters should have a more realistic view of the role of legislators. He believes civic education in schools is important, as well as fostering knowledge among contemporary voters of how state government works.

Valentine says the state cannot expect a significant positive change in legislative performance without a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Link of Interest

- [2011 Term Limits Report](#)

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