Are Term Limits a Woman Candidate's Friend?

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Introduction

Over the years many have questioned why we do not see more women getting elected to political office especially in legislatures which require collaboration, a skill that women are assumed to be naturally good at. A variety of reasons have been proposed. One of these reasons is the effect of incumbency. Those who are concerned with the effect of incumbency on the number of women elected to public office argue that the solution is establishing term limits for legislators (Darcy et. al. 1994). It is hypothesized that term limits will expand the opportunities for women to get elected. However, researchers have found that this logical solution is not as effective as many had hoped. Scholars argue that based on their analyses of the percentage of women in state legislatures, term limits have not increased the number of women legislators. In fact, some of the research shows a loss of seats for women (Carroll 2001; Carroll & Jenkins 2001a).

Although this research makes one think that term limits may not be the solution that many had hoped they would be, in this paper we argue that the earlier research did not use the proper methods to test the effect of term limits on increasing the number of women in state legislatures. Early studies include only states that have established term limits and the research focuses on one or two time periods. As a result, the researchers do not provide a comparison between the number of women in term limited state legislatures and the number of women in state legislatures without term limits. Furthermore, focusing on one or two time periods ignores the fact that the effect of term limits may only be apparent when comparisons are made among states over an extended period of time.

Additionally, many of these studies focus on one chamber of the state legislatures (Carroll & Jenkins 2001b; Carroll & Jenkins 2001c; Bernstein & Chadha 2003) or combine the data of both legislative chambers (Carey et. al. 1998), assuming that the relationship between term limits and the number of women getting elected to state legislative office will be the same

in the lower and upper houses of the state legislatures. In other words, these studies do not analyze the effect of term limits in the lower and upper chambers of the state legislatures separately. This too limits the thoroughness of the analysis.

Our contention is that to get a full understanding of the impact of term limits on increasing the number of female state legislators, we must approach the subject utilizing a time series analysis of states with and without term limits. A thorough analysis must also examine the effect of term limits in each chamber separately. Only when comparing the legislative chambers separately in both types of states across time can we provide a rigorous analysis and understand the full effect of term limits on women's state legislative representation.

For the purpose of testing our contention, we examine the number of female legislators in both chambers[1] of the state legislatures in all fifty states from 1990 to 2008. The analysis includes 16 states in which term limits have been implemented. The remaining states are included in the analysis for comparison purposes (See Table 1). The decision to use 1990 as our starting point of analysis is because 1990 is the first year any state adopted term limits.

We begin this paper with a literature review addressing the reasons why the number of women in elected office is low. This literature is followed by a review of the research on the effect of term limits on women's legislative representation at the state level. The paper then explains our current analysis of the relationship between term limits and women's representation in state legislatures. We conclude this paper with suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

As mentioned above, existing literature provides several reasons why women's legislative representation is still relatively low. According to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), 24.3% of the state legislators are women (2009). Although in some states women are more successful in getting elected to their state legislatures (women hold 35% or more of the state legislative seats in Colorado, New Hampshire, Vermont and Minnesota), in other states women have been far less successful. For example, in South Carolina, Oklahoma, Alabama, Mississippi and Pennsylvania women currently hold less than 15% of the state

[1] Since Nebraska has a unicameral state legislature we analyze the one chamber.

legislative seats (CAWP 2009). Despite the fact that women's representation in state legislatures is over 10% in all states now, only five years ago one state (Alabama) was barely at the 10% mark and another (South Carolina) was below 10% with the percentage of female state legislators at 9.4% (CAWP 2009).

One of the reasons that scholars offer to explain the small number of women in elected office is the influence of party support and financial resources on the success of female candidates. According to this reason, in the past party elites did not view women as viable candidates and thus were less willing to provide organizational and monetary support for the women (Darcy et. al. 1994; Witt et. al. 1995; Ford 2006). However, as more women have run and been successful in their bids for political office, party support has increased (Biersack & Herrnson 1994). Interest groups have also realized the viability of female candidates and have increased their financial support for women running for political office. In fact, research shows that female candidates receive similar amounts of PAC money as male candidates signifying their electability (Herrick 1995). Furthermore, the establishment of various organizations such as Wish List and Emily's List that target the recruitment and election of more women to political office has also provided the needed resources for a female candidate to become an officeholder (Darcy et. al. 1994; Nelson 1994; McGlen et. al. 2005).

Another reason that is used to explain the lack of female elected officeholders is the kinds of issues that are focused on during the campaign (Huddy & Terkildsen 1993; Witt et. al. 1995; Cook 1998; Dolan 2001). When elections revolve around security and crime issues, voters tend to view women as unqualified to deal with these issues, and therefore do not vote for the women. These assumptions are based on long-established stereotypes that are difficult to overcome. However, when the issues are gender-related or social concerns like education, health care and assistance for the disadvantaged, voters assume that female candidates are better prepared to deal with these issues. As a result, voters will vote for the women.

A third reason for the small percentages of female elected officials is the lack of a deep eligibility pool of qualified female candidates. Scholars have found that even when women have the same professional accomplishments as men, the women are still less likely to run for political office (Duerst-Lahti 1998; Fox & Lawless 2004) resulting in a slower than desired increase of the number of viable female candidates. In their comprehensive analysis of the political

ambition of women, Fox and Lawless (2004) found that even when women have the same personal characteristics and qualifications as men, the women are less likely to seek elective office. However, this condition may be changing as we find more women working their way up the political ladder and developing the credentials and name recognition that are necessary to get elected. Recent literature has addressed the development of a political pipeline that is providing qualified female candidates for a variety of political offices (Rogers 1993; Pearson & McGhee 2003). Those who advocate for expanding the pool of experienced women candidates expect that as more women serve in lower political offices, we will see increases in the number of quality female candidates that run for higher offices (Carroll 1994; Darcy et. al. 1994; Duerst-Lahti 1998).

Finally, it has been argued that the incumbency advantage has been a major hindrance to the success of female candidates. The benefit of incumbency is that it provides the name recognition and resources that are vital for a successful campaign (Jacobson 2004). Since men tend to be the incumbents running for office, they are more likely to benefit from the advantage (Carroll 1994; Darcy et. al. 1994; Witt et. al. 1995). However, as more women get elected and run for re-election, incumbency will eventually benefit the women. For the current time, scholars argue that female candidates should target open seat elections where women stand the same chance as men of getting elected (Wilcox 1994; Seltzer et. al. 1997).

Those who advocate the use of term limits to increase the number of female elected officials argue that term limits can weaken the advantage of incumbency and thus provide more opportunities for electing women to political office (Darcy et. al. 1994; Ferry 1994). Jonathan Ferry contends that term limits will provide for an increase in the above mentioned open seats which research shows women are competitive in seeking (1994). Other scholars insist that term limits will benefit groups that tend to have shorter stays in office. According to the group-specific continuation rates used to "calculate expected lengths of completed tenures" (pg. 713), Reed and Schansberg argue that since women tend to be in office for shorter periods of time than men, term limits will increase the representation of women (1995). Based on this research, the potential for term limits increasing the number of women in elected office seems logical.

Research that demonstrates the actual effects of term limits on increasing the amount of female state legislators is relatively meager. Most of the studies examine the performance of

women state legislators following the implementation of term limits utilizing the case study approach (Petracca 1998; Caress 1999; Van Vechten 2000; Cain & Kousser 2004; English & Weberg 2005; Richardson et. al. 2005) focusing on one state at a time. However, the authors argue that many of the gains women have made are also influenced by other factors within the states such as national events (the Year of the Woman), increased activity of women's organizations and redistricting. Furthermore, research indicates that the positive effects of term limits on women's representation are apparent in the state senates but less substantial in the state lower houses (Carroll & Jenkins 2001a).

In addition to these studies, research also shows the positive effect of term limits on women's representation from an international perspective. Leslie Schwindt-Bayer (2005) utilizes a cross-national approach to study the disadvantage of incumbency for women seeking elected office. Schwindt-Bayer found that even controlling for other influences, term limits increased the election of women. However, she also cautions that there are limitations to her study. Since Schwindt-Bayer analyzes national legislatures in 33 different countries, she is examining term limits that prohibit immediate reelection rather than limiting legislators to a specific number of terms which is a method not utilized in the countries studied.

Despite expectations and hopes that term limits would increase the number of women in political office, there is research that leads us to believe that term limits may not be the solution we hoped they would be. Several studies have shown that not only did term limits lack the positive effect of increasing the number of women in state legislatures, but they had the opposite effect; the number of women in state legislatures actually decreased following the implementation of term limits in some states (Carroll 2001; Carroll & Jenkins 2001a; Carroll & Jenkins 2001b). According to this research, term limits may lead to more open seats during elections, but women cannot benefit from these opportunities unless they run for office. In other words, term limits need to be coupled with recruitment efforts. Although this research makes a compelling argument that term limits are not as effective by themselves, the research does not get the entire picture due to the method used to study the subject. As mentioned earlier in the paper, these studies only include states with term limits; therefore, they do not compare the results from term limited states with the results from non-term limited states. In addition, these studies focus on two points in time rather than over an extended period of time and several of the

studies do not analyze the legislative chambers separately. As a result, the research does not provide a complete analysis of the potential effect of term limits.

The Current Study

As mentioned earlier, this study argues that to truly understand the effects of term limits on the increase of women in state legislatures we need to examine term limits across time and across all states. If we are to understand the impact of term limits during a time in which women's representation has changed from previous eras, then it is important to combine states with and without term limits into the same study. By doing this we are able to determine if any growth is due to an overall increase in women's representation throughout the country. We are also able to see if any decline or plateau effect was more severe in non-term limited states. This approach gives us as close to a natural experiment as possible. By comparing across time instead of with a single year, we are able to see changes throughout the term limits era without being overly sensitive to a single good year for women candidates like 1992 or reversals of those years like 1994.

It is also important to analyze the effect of term limits separately on upper and lower legislative chambers. The studies which have analyzed the upper and lower chambers separately have shown a significant positive effect of term limits on women's representation in upper chambers. However, these studies did not find the same positive effect for lower chambers. These scholars argue that the positive influence in upper chambers is due to the lower chamber serving as a pool of qualified candidates for election to the upper chamber. By term-limiting women in the lower chamber, these women are often viewed as serious candidates for the upper chamber. Without continued targeted recruiting of women who could be qualified candidates for lower chamber races, women may not be primed to run for the mandated open-seats in lower chambers. Therefore, the gains women made in the lower chambers in the early 1990s might now be seen in the upper chambers but will dissipate without more effective recruitment of qualified women into politics.

To test for an impact of term limits on women's representation, we examine data from all 50 states from 1990-2008. By looking at this time frame we are able to capture the impacts of term limits from the earliest date that term limits were passed in 1990 by the voters of California,

Colorado, and Oklahoma. The dependent variable for our analysis is women's representation in state legislatures. This is measured as the percentage of state legislators who are female in a given year. This information is from the publicly available information at the website of the Center for American Women and Politics (www.cawp.rutgers.edu).

The primary independent variable of interest is a measure of term limits. The initial hope from term limits was that women would have more opportunities when the predominantly male incumbents were term-limited out of office. Therefore, we use a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not term limits had taken effect in a given year in a given state. For example, California in 1990 would receive a value of 0 since although term limits passed that year, no legislator was vulnerable to term limits. The year of impact for term limits in California was 1996. Therefore, for every year after the impact the value for California is a 1.

Included in our analysis are a series of other independent variables used to account for other possible influences. In this preliminary analysis, we look at three types of factors. First, we include measures concerning the type of legislature. Using the categorization from the National Conference of State Legislators (www.ncsl.org) we used dichotomous variables indicating full-time and hybrid legislatures. The expectation is that women should be more represented in part-time legislatures (used as the omitted category) due to the smaller degree of family disruption. Following the expectations in the single year study of Caress and Kunioka (2006) based on the belief that women were more likely to take family situations into consideration before deciding to run, it is expected that women are more likely to run for legislative seats in states with part-time legislatures. In this study, the variable for full-time legislature was close to statistical significance but did not quite reach it. By examining the entire term limits period, we may be able to find whatever effect might exist.

We also include variables for two types of state characteristics. The first is the percentage of women in the work force and the second is the political culture characterization by Daniel Elazar (1984). We expect a positive relationship between women's representation in the legislature and percentage of women in a state's workforce. We also expect both individualistic and moralistic states to have a higher amount of women's representation in their state legislatures than would be found in traditionalistic states (which is the omitted category in this analysis).

Therefore, we expect the dichotomous variable indicating individualistic states and moralistic states to suggest a positive relationship with the dependent variables.

Results

The findings for the first analysis are reported in Table 2. The dependent variable for this analysis is the percentage of state legislators who are female. The primary independent variable of interest is whether legislative term limits had taken effect in a given state. According to the results in Table 2, the term limits variable achieves statistical significance and suggests a positive relationship with women's representation in state legislatures. This finding is in contrast to most of the past research that was unable to find a statistically significant relationship between term limits and women's representation. The impact of term limits is small, however. Although this research is among the first to show a statistically significant relationship, the actual impact is estimated at only 1.54%. In other words, women's representation in legislatures is approximately 1.54% higher in term-limited states than in non term-limited states.

In addition, to the primary independent variable of interest, we also find a significant relationship between state political culture and women's representation. Women are more successful in states with individualistic political cultures and moralistic political cultures when compared to traditionalistic cultures. When compared to traditionalistic states, women's representation is 6.14% higher in individualistic states and 10.03% higher in states with moralistic political cultures. These findings confirm that there is a political geography to women's success in American politics with significantly lower levels of representation in the south (traditionalistic) than in other parts of the country.

No relationship was found between women's representation and the type of legislature. Neither full-time nor hybrid legislatures could be distinguished from part-time legislatures. These findings are in contrast to the expectations of Caress and Kunioka (2006). The differing results may be the result of the multi-year nature of this study and the inclusion of all 50 states for a complete analysis. The variable for percentage of women in the work force did not obtain statistical significance either.

We also conducted separate analyses for women's representation in upper and lower legislative chambers. Due to its unicameral legislature, Nebraska is not included in either of

these analyses. The results for the analysis of the upper chambers are reported in Table 3. Consistent with the past research reported earlier (Carroll and Jenkins 2001a), legislative term limits have a positive effect on the percentage of women in upper legislative chambers. The term limits variable achieves statistical significance and the results suggest that in term-limited conditions the percentage of women in the upper chamber is 6.62% greater than in non term-limited conditions. The results for the other variables are similar to those reported in Table 2 for the entire legislative body. The political culture variables are significant with coefficients that are comparable to the results reported in Table 2. Just as in the previous equation, the other variables do not achieve statistical significance.

The analysis of term limits and women in lower chambers is reported in Table 4. These results tell a different story and suggest a negative relationship between term limits and the amount of women in lower legislative chambers. The term limits variable is significant at the 0.08 level and the coefficient is -1.7 suggesting that the percentage of women in lower legislative chambers is slightly less in term-limited states than in non term-limited states. These findings support the belief that term limits might pose a problem for women because after initial gains, women might be term-limited out of office only to be replaced by men. Without additional recruitment efforts, term limits may be a lost opportunity for women in politics and may harm the effort to increase women in state legislatures by term-limiting successful women. The findings for the other independent variables are consistent with the findings reported in Tables 2 and 3.

Conclusion

This analysis supports the expectations of scholars who argue that term limits are part of the answer to increasing the number of women in political office. We demonstrate that term limits have an effect on the increase of the percentage of women in state legislatures. When examined separately by type of chamber, we find evidence suggesting that this relationship only holds true for upper legislative chambers and that there is some evidence suggesting a slight negative effect in lower legislative chambers.

While this study presents evidence that suggests a positive impact of term limits on women's representation, the impact is very small. Furthermore, this impact may be short-lived

due to the findings for lower legislative chambers. If the negative impact of term limits in lower chambers continues then there will be fewer women in those chambers to serve as quality candidates for those states' upper chambers. Therefore, this study is consistent with the dominant belief that term limits may only be part of the solution to women's under-representation. Other factors, such as advances in the recruitment of women to run for competitive seats, are important parts of the solution as well.

These findings are in contrast to many past studies that suggested no impact of term limits on women's legislative representation. Future research will need to include a more comprehensive approach to the full question of term limits and representation. Now that some evidence exists to suggest an impact, future research can incorporate this cross-sectional time series analysis as a more comprehensive approach. These studies will need to examine the recruitment efforts and the candidate pools that exist within states including separate analyses of upper and lower legislative chambers.

Table 1: States with Term Limits and Dates of Impact

Arizona	House and Senate 2000
Arkansas	House 1998; Senate 2000
California	Assembly 1996; Senate 1998
Colorado	House and Senate 1998
Florida	House and Senate 2000
Louisiana	House and Senate 2007
Maine	House and Senate 1996
Michigan	House 1998; Senate 2002
Missouri	House and Senate 2002
Montana	House and Senate 2000
Nebraska	2008 (unicameral)
Nevada	House and Senate 2006
Ohio	House and Senate 2000
Oklahoma	House and Senate 2004
South Dakota	House and Senate 2000
Wyoming	House and Senate 2004

Term limits were passed but either overturned in the courts or repealed by the legislative process in Idaho, Oregon, and Utah.

Table 2: Term Limits in Effect and Women's Representation

Variable	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error	P>|z|
Term Limits in Effect in State	1.542	0.390	0.000
Individualistic Political Culture	6.143	2.447	0.012
Moralistic Political Culture	10.032	2.229	0.000
Full-time Legislatures	1.254	2.670	0.639
Hybrid Legislatures	2.253	2.202	0.306
Percentage of Women in Labor Force	0.040	0.068	0.558
Constant	12.040	4.426	0.007

Number of Obs = 950; Number of Groups = 50

R-sq within = 0.02; R-sq between = 0.34; r-sq overall 0.28

Table 3: Term Limits in Effect and Women's Representation In Upper Legislative Chambers

Variable	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error	P>|z|
Term Limits in Effect in State	6.622	2.137	0.002
Individualistic Political Culture	6.660	2.368	0.005
Moralistic Political Culture	10.770	2.438	0.000
Full-time Legislatures	-0.292	5.608	0.958
Hybrid Legislatures	1.834	1.587	0.248
Percentage of Women in Labor Force	0.128	0.105	0.219
Constant	4.021	6.487	0.535

Number of Obs = 931; Number of Groups = 49

R-sq within = 0.030; R-sq between = 0.34; r-sq overall 0.16

Table 4: Term Limits in Effect and Women's Representation in Lower Legislative Chamber

Variable	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error	P>|z|
Term Limits in Effect in State	-1.701	0.975	0.081
Individualistic Political Culture	6.503	2.303	0.005
Moralistic Political Culture	10.181	2.033	0.000
Full-time Legislatures	0.032	2.247	0.989
Hybrid Legislatures	1.757	2.030	0.387
Percentage of Women in Labor Force	-0.215	0.208	0.300
Constant	29.300	12.411	0.018

Number of Obs = 931; Number of Groups = 49

R-sq within = 0.02; R-sq between = 0.21; r-sq overall 0.13

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