

# **The Impact of Term Limits on Michigan's Legislature**

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Based on interviews with 460 legislators  
during a 14-year study of Michigan's Legislature

# Interviews for Seven Legislative Sessions

- Four House Sessions:
  - One pre-term-limits baseline 1998 (95 of 110 members)
  - Three post-term-limits sessions 2000, 2002, 2004 (93, 93, and 89 respondents from the possible 110 members)
- Three Senate Sessions:
  - One anticipating term limits baseline 1999 (35 of 38 members)
  - Two post-term-limits sessions 2003, 2007 (28 and 27 respondents from the possible 38 members)
    - Second post-term-limits Senate was dominated by veterans with decades of experience in the House.

# State Term Limits Provisions & Level of Professionalization

Limit in Years	Consecutive	Lifetime Ban
8 Total	<i>Nebraska (2006)*</i>	
12 Total		<i>Oklahoma (2004/2004)</i>
6 House/8 Senate	Now changed to 16 yrs. total.	—————> <i>Arkansas (1998/2000)</i>
	Now changed to 12 yrs. total	—————> <b>California (1996/1998)**</b> <b>Michigan (1998/2002)</b>
8 House/8 Senate	<i>Arizona (2000/2000)</i>	<i>Missouri (2002/2002)</i>
	<i>Colorado (1998/1998)</i>	
	<i>Florida (2000/2000)</i>	
	Maine (1996/1996)	
	Montana (2000/2000)	
	<i>Ohio (2000/2000)</i>	
	<i>South Dakota (2000/2000)</i>	
12 House/ 12 Senate	Louisiana (2007/2007)	Nevada (2008/2008)

States in bold type have highly professional legislatures, those in italics are moderately professional, and the others are part-time (Squire, 1992)

Years in parentheses indicate date of impact in the House then the Senate. \* Nebraska has a unicameral legislature. \*\*California changed its law in 2012.

# Summary of Impacts of Michigan's Term Limits

- Effects on Committees:
  - Newly elected legislators chair committees – more conflict
    - Leaders and others usurp chairs' prerogatives
    - Autocratic leadership style/coercion/bad personal dynamics
  - Who is consulted in committee deliberations
    - Local officials are the losers
    - Interest groups are the winners in the Senate
- Relationships take time to develop, but term limits truncate time:
  - Friendship networks in the house look very different
    - Less time spent building coalitions across party lines
  - Relationships between legislature and governor decline
  - Relationships between the two chambers decline
- Time spent monitoring state agencies declines:
  - Not much political payoff for politically ambitious legislators looking for next job
  - Takes a lot of substantive knowledge about a specific state agency and its programs
  - Takes contacts and ties within the agency to know what to ask about

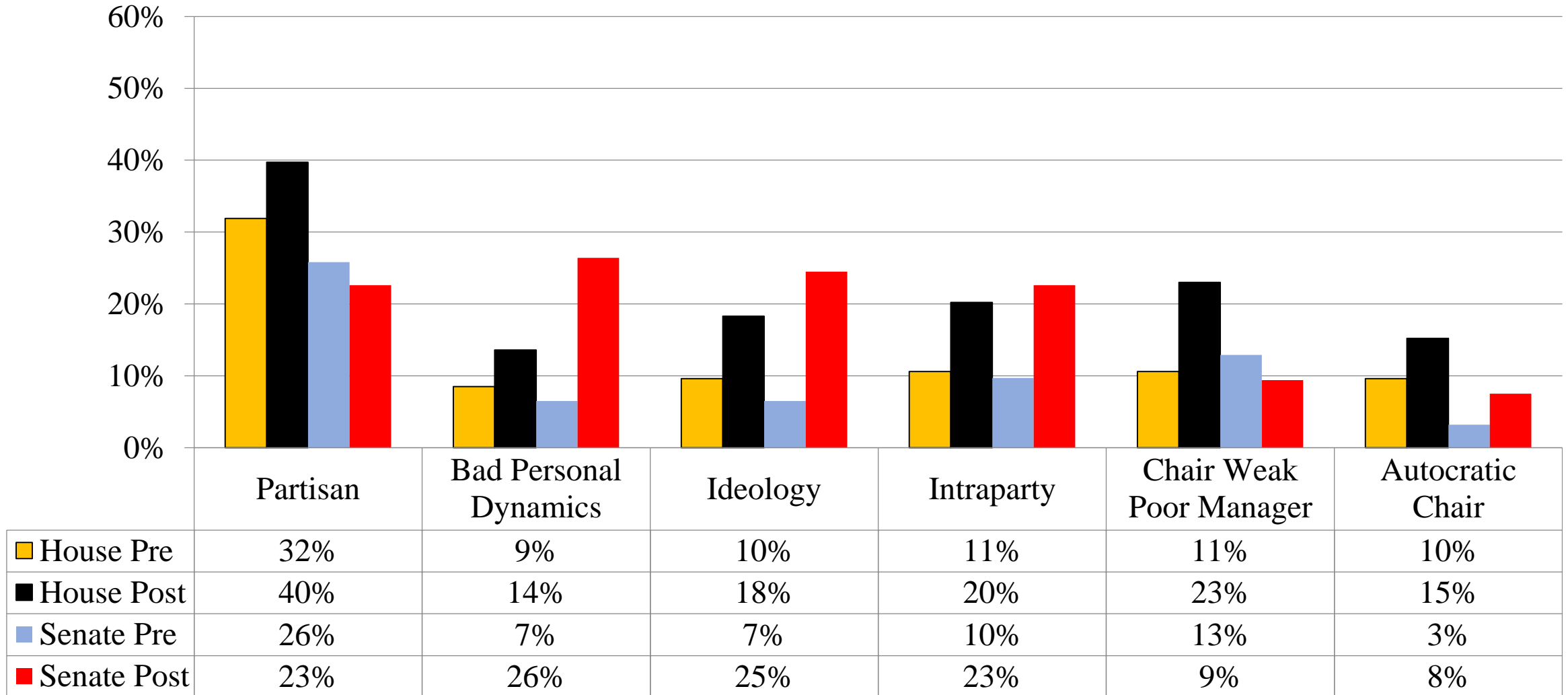
# Some Unintended Consequences

- Inexperienced Leaders
  - Chamber leaders and committee chairs have very little experience compared to predecessors.
    - Prior to term limits, committee chairs typically served for years in the chamber and on a committee before leading it.
  - Term limits restrict the opportunities chamber leaders and committee chair have to develop substantive and procedural expertise.

# Term Limits Impacts on Leadership

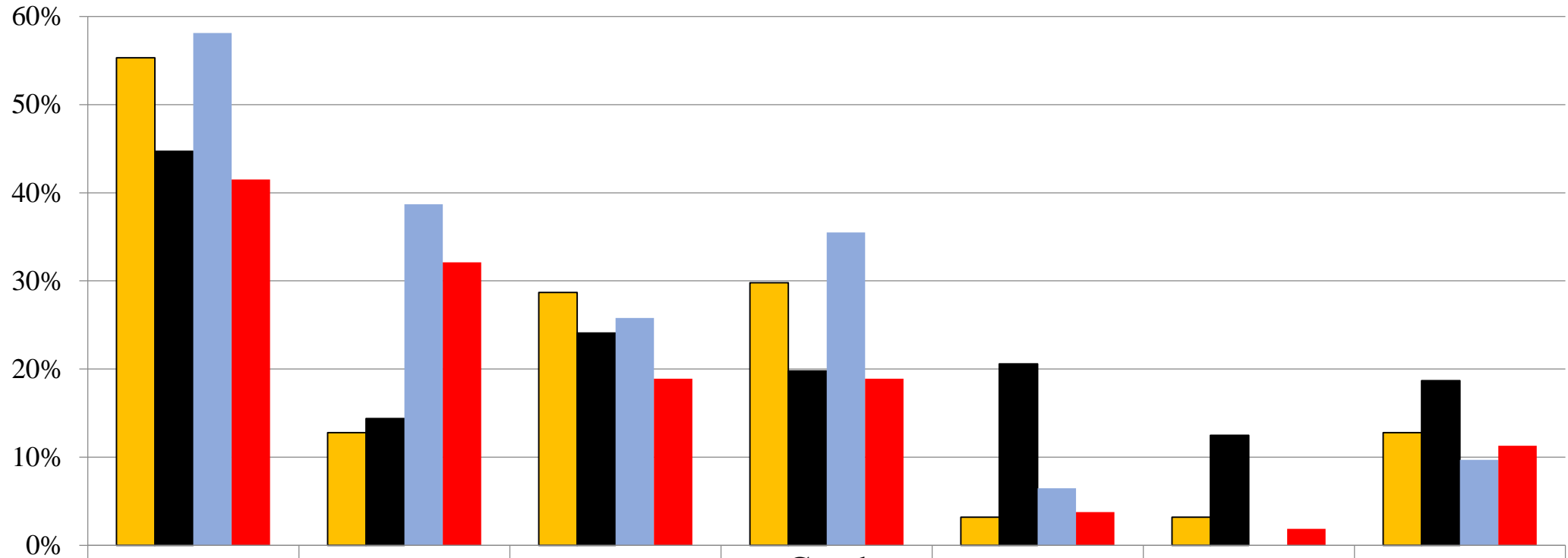
- The Committee System is based on experienced chairs and leaders.
  - legislators complain that chamber leaders and **committee chairs are autocratic**, and
  - legislators **rely on committee chairs less** for information about a difficult issue, and
  - legislative **leaders usurp the power** of committee chairs if chairs do not comply with their wishes, and **money has a bigger impact** on who becomes the chair.
  - Even with single party control, inexperienced leaders have a **harder time negotiating** with the other chamber and with the executive branch.

# Reasons for Committee Conflict



Proportion of respondents making this sort of comment – open-ended questions.

# Managing Conflict in Committees



	Negotiate	Allows Voice	Advance Work	Good Personal Dynamics	Information is Limited	Time is Rationed	Leaders Intervene
House Pre	55%	13%	29%	30%	3%	3%	13%
House Post	45%	14%	24%	20%	21%	13%	19%
Senate Pre	58%	39%	26%	36%	7%	0%	10%
Senate Post	42%	32%	19%	19%	4%	2%	11%



# Some More Unintended Consequences

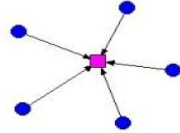
- **Undermines Relationships Among Legislators.**
  - This contributes to less comity and courtesy in committees.
- **Less Bipartisan Policy making.**
  - Part of this reflects the absence of bi-partisan friendships,
  - But it also seems likely to reflect the election of more ideologically extreme legislators.

# Network Relationships

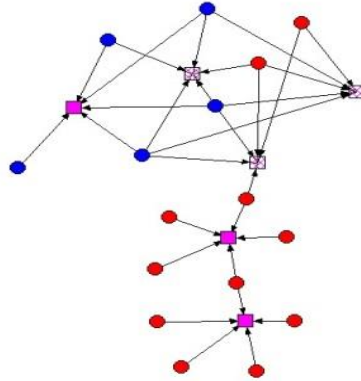
- Friendship:
  - In Michigan we found fewer clusters of friends who can make deals and more clusters of the disenfranchised and ostracized legislators.
- Influence:
  - In Michigan, we found less informal influence (no formal role) and more influence for legislators who hold a formal role (speakers, etc.)
- Information Flows:
  - In Michigan, we found information networks that were easily controlled by one or a few actors and vulnerable to becoming decoupled.

# House Friendship Networks

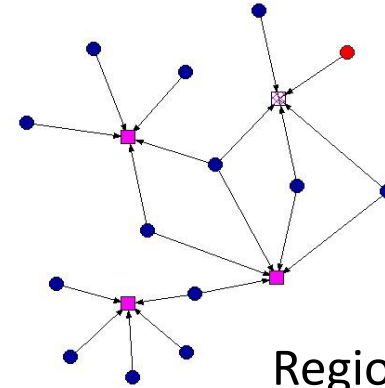
Friends 1997 House



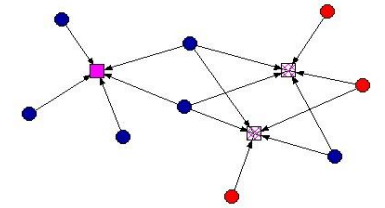
Powerbrokers



Friends 1999 House

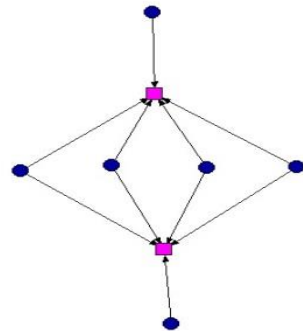
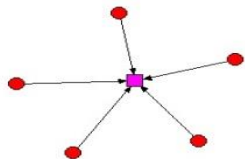


Regional Ties



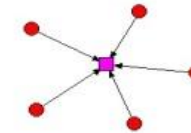
Friends 2001 House

Tea and Sympathy



Friends 2003 House

Tea – No sympathy



Blue dots for Democrats  
Red dots for Republicans  
Fuschia Squares for Partisan Hubs  
Crosshatched Squared for Bipartisan Hubs

**Priority Legislators Place on Tasks Before and After Term Limits by Chamber**

House Before Term Limits		House After Term Limits		Senate Before Term Limits		Senate After Term Limits	
Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.	Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.	Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.	Rank and Activity	Mean Diff.
<b><i>High Priority Tasks</i></b>							
<b>1 Talk to Voters</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>1 Talk to Voters</b>	<b>0.78</b>	1 Attend District Events	0.68	1 Help Voters	0.59
2 Help Voters	0.48	<b>2 Attend District</b>	<b>0.62</b>	2 Help Voters	0.53	2 <i>Talk to Voters</i>	0.57
<b>3 Attend District</b>	<b>0.46</b>	3 Help Voters	0.56			3 Attend District Events	0.48
<b><i>Moderate Priority Tasks</i></b>							
4 Study Proposed Laws	0.15	4 Get Money for District	0.20	<b>3 Develop New Laws</b>	<b>0.39</b>	4 Study Proposed Laws	0.22
		5 Study Proposed Laws	0.17	4 Get Money for District	0.38	5 Get Money for District	0.16
				5 <i>Talk to Voters</i>	0.33		
				6 Study Proposed Laws	0.12		
<b><i>Average Priority Tasks</i></b>							
5 Get Money for District	0.07	6 Own Party Coalitions	-0.07	<b>7 Bipartisan Coalitions</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>6 Develop New Laws</b>	<b>0.01</b>
<b>6 Bipartisan Coalitions</b>	<b>-0.06</b>						
7 Own Party Coalitions	-0.06						
<b><i>Low Priority Tasks</i></b>							
8 Develop New Laws	-0.13	7 Develop New Laws	-0.18	8 Own Party Coalitions	-0.39	7 Own Party Coalitions	-0.23
		<b>8 Bipartisan Coalitions</b>	<b>-0.31</b>			<b>8 Bipartisan Coalitions</b>	<b>-0.35</b>
		9 Attend Lansing Events	-0.35				
<b><i>Avoided Tasks</i></b>							
9 Attend Lansing Events	-0.41	10 Fundraising	-0.65	9 Attend Lansing Events	-0.62	9 Fundraising	-0.45
<b>10 Monitor Agencies</b>	<b>-0.52</b>	<b>11 Monitor Agencies</b>	<b>-0.79</b>	10 Fundraising	-0.72	10 Attend Lansing	-0.47
11 Fundraising	-0.60			<b>11 Monitor Agencies</b>	<b>-0.73</b>	<b>11 Monitor Agencies</b>	<b>-0.55</b>

Number of Respondents: House Before Limits 89 to 91; After 240 to 256 and Senate Before Limits 31 to 33; After 52 to 54

Bold type denotes statistically significant change in the differenced measure of legislators' activities

# What to do? A few tentative ideas . . .

- Ballot Proposals
  - Lengthen term limits – total time in either chamber
    - California and Arkansas are the models
  - Mandatory hearings for all state audits
    - Washington State’s I-900 ballot initiative is a model
- Build relationships among legislators:
  - A role for interest groups and lobbyists
    - Organize events—retreats, lunches, sponsor amateur sports teams, . . .
  - A role for chamber leaders and non-partisan staff
    - Road trips to inspect state infrastructure, facilities, and programs
- Partisan balance on oversight committees (many states do this)
  - More Joint Chamber Committee Meetings, especially for audit reports
  - Public report on legislative action to address problems identified in audits