Term Limits: Impacts and Approaches

January 8, 2026







What We'll Cover



Overview



Areas of Impact

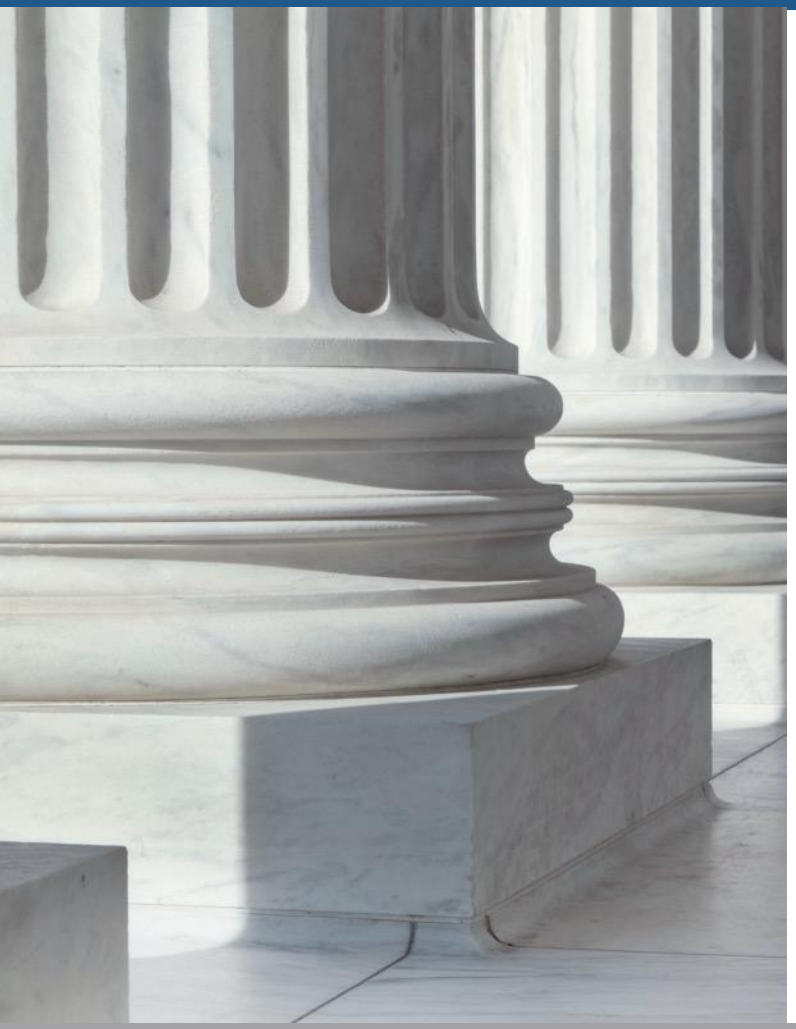


State Examples



Term Limits Overview

Term-Limited States



16 states have term limits:

- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Florida
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Michigan
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- South Dakota

Consecutive vs. Lifetime Limits

Consecutive Limits

8 Senate/ 8 House

- Arizona
- Colorado
- Florida
- Maine
- Montana
- Ohio
- South Dakota

12 Senate/ 12 House

- Louisiana

12 Total

- Arkansas

Lifetime Limits

8 Senate/ 8 House

- Missouri
- North Dakota

12 Total

- California
- Oklahoma
- Michigan

12 Senate/ 12 House

- Nevada



Amended Term Limits

Arkansas



Term limits were created through a 1992 citizen-initiated ballot measure and allowed 6 years in the House and 8 years in the Senate.

In 2014, voters approved a legislatively-referred measure removing chamber limits and extending total service to 16 years.

In 2020, voters approved another legislatively-referred measure changing the lifetime term limit to a consecutive term limit. Legislators may serve 12 consecutive years and return after a 4-year break.

California



Initial term limits, created by a 1990 citizen-initiated ballot measure, were 6 years in the Assembly and 8 years in the Senate.

In 2012, voters approved a citizen-initiated measure that reduced the total number of years served from 14 to 12 and eliminated the chamber limits.

Michigan



A 1992 citizen-initiated ballot measure created term limits of 6 years in the House and 8 years in the Senate.

Voters approved a 2022 legislatively-referred ballot measure to move to a combined limit of 12 years total.

Repealed Term Limits

By the Legislature

- Idaho
  - Enacted in 1994, repealed in 2002
- Utah
  - Enacted in 1994, repealed in 2003

By the State Supreme Court

- Massachusetts
  - Enacted in 1994, repealed in 1997
- Oregon
  - Enacted in 1992, repealed in 2002
- Washington
  - Enacted in 1992, repealed in 1998
- Wyoming
  - Enacted in 1992, repealed in 2004



Broader Institutional Changes

- Turnover is increasing across all legislatures, not just those with term-limits.
- Since the 2022 elections, 45 of the 108 total top leader positions in all the states and territories have changed hands. That's about 42% of all leaders in two years.
- Nearly a third of all state legislators in 2025 were women and the percentage of women in legislatures has been increasing since at least 2016.

NCSL State Legislatures News Article



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Are Long-Serving Legislative Leaders a Thing of the Past?

As the nature of legislative service evolves, leaders with years—even decades—of experience may become an endangered species.

By Taylor Huhn | April 10, 2024

State Legislatures News | People | Leaders | About State Legislatures

Mississippi Rep. Phillip Gunn served as House speaker for 12 years. When he handed over the gavel in January, it was the first time that many members of the chamber had experienced a transfer of power to a new leader. (Courtesy Phillip Gunn)

When Mississippi House Speaker Phillip Gunn officially handed off the speaker's gavel on Jan. 2 this year, it marked the end of his 12 years as the chamber's leader and the longest term of service of any state house speaker in the country. The exchange also marked the first time that many members of the chamber had experienced a transfer of power to a new leader, Rep. Jason White.

Part of the beauty of representative democracy is that, while the cast of characters involved changes constantly, the institution itself remains. Of course, some of those characters have longer stints than others, and legislative leaders can have an outsized impact on the institution during their time of service. However, as the nature of legislative service evolves, the role of leaders may be changing as well, with fewer serving for multiple years—or even decades.



Common Areas of Impact

Impact on Staff



Knowledge depository

Institutional

Policy depth

Parliamentary



More training provided to legislators



Increased size or part-time to full-time

Impact on Legislators



Turnover

- Typically highest with initial effect of term limits
- Not exclusive to term-limited states



Shorter track to leadership positions



Relationships

- Within the legislature
- With lobbyists and the executive branch



State Examples

Nevada



Training

- Passed in 2011, *Nevada Revised Statutes* (NRS) 218A.285 requires all new legislators to attend the Legislative Training Academy
  - Legislative procedure and protocol, budgetary matters, policy briefings
  - 9 days total in 2024-25, November – January
  - Experienced legislators serve on panels for some trainings
- Additional reports and publications are provided by the Legislative Council Bureau
  - Fiscal Analysis Division
- Legislative Council Bureau's Research Division started an informal liaison program

At-a-Glance

- Biennial session
- 21 Senators, 42 Assemblymen/women
- Term limit: 12 years in each chamber, then ineligible
- Enacted 1996, first impact in 2010
- Estimate losing one-third of legislators every 2 years

Nevada



Structural Changes

- Legislation to establish annual sessions has been introduced nearly every session since 1960. They rarely get traction, and the change would require amending the constitution.
- In 2021, interim committees moved from studying specific topics to mirroring the subject areas of session standing committees.
- Bill draft requests are limited by statute and rules. Individual legislator limits were in place before term limits, but the limits per house were added in 1999.

AUTHORIZED ENTITY	# OF BDRs	TIME FRAME	SOURCE
Assembly Member: Incumbent	4	On or before August 1, 2024	NRS 218D.1
	5	August 2, 2024, through December 10, 2024	
	1	February 3, 2025, through February 10, 2025	
Assembly Member: Newly elected	5	On or before December 10, 2024	
	1	February 3, 2025, through February 10, 2025	
Senator: Incumbent	8	On or before August 1, 2024	
	10	August 2, 2024, through December 10, 2024	
	2	February 3, 2025, through February 10, 2025	
Senator: Newly elected	10	On or before December 10, 2024	
	2	February 3, 2025, through February 10, 2025	
Chairs of standing session committees, or a person designated in place of the Chair	1 per 18 measures referred to the committee during the 2023 Session	Before the November 5, 2024, General Election[1]	NRS 218D.1
Standing session committees / Legislators	60 per House[2]	February 3, 2025, through 5 p.m. on February 17, 2025	Joint Rule 14
Speaker of the Assembly and Majority Leader of the Senate	15	Before the November 5, 2024, General Election[3]	NRS 218D.1
	10	Emergency requests during session	Joint Rule 14
Minority Leaders of the Assembly and the Senate	10	Before the November 5, 2024, General Election[3]	NRS 218D.1
	3	Emergency requests during session	Joint Rule 14

Source: Nevada LCB Bill Draft Requests by Entity

Montana

Training

- Legislator orientation was introduced in 2003. Initially only Legislative Services Division but now includes other divisions and Senate/House staff
  - Bill drafting, caucus time, legislative rules, public right to know, public document training, ethics, harassment
  - Open to all legislators
  - Panel presentations from experienced or previous legislators
  - Create mentor groups with a mixture of new and returning legislators
  - Committee of staff from each division began preparing about 1 year in advance
  - Runs in a few phases from November through the first week of session in January
- Also host legislative days about 6 months before elections. They are open to candidates and offer additional formal training



At-a-Glance

- Biennial session
- 50 Senators, 100 Representatives
- Term limit: 8 years in any 16-year period
- Enacted 1992, first impact in 2000
- Lost nearly 25% of legislators every session from 2017-2025

Montana



Structural Changes

- Montana's constitution (adopted in 1972) allows for annual sessions, but the public voted it down in 1974
  - Two other ballot initiatives were also struck down in the 1980s
- Interim work has increased
- The Secretary of the Senate and Chief Clerk of the House were previously part-time, session-only positions but now have part-time roles in interim
- Caucus staff are now year-round

Other Changes or Challenges

- Institutional knowledge and policy expertise
- Lobbyist experience parallels staff's
- Building trust
- Decorum
- Interim studies

Colorado

Training

- New legislator orientation has 3 phases: general onboarding, subject matter/legislative services agencies, and bill drafting/fiscal notes
  - One phase is in November after election, one in December, and one in January before session
- Includes running practice committees and floor sessions
- Over 20 new members every 4 years
- Previous legislators set up a concurrent training several terms ago to discuss onboarding from a policymaker's perspective
- Orientation is not required, but leaders encourage attendance and most new legislators attend

Changes

- Term limits are rarely discussed at this point
- The bill introduction limit predates term limits
- Potential higher impact on leadership



At-a-Glance

- Annual session
- 35 Senators, 65 Representatives
- Term limit: 8 consecutive years in each chamber, resets after 4 years out of office
- Enacted 1990, first impact in 1998
- Nearly 40% turnover after 2021 redistricting



Thank you!

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