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Female Candidate Emergence and Term Limits: A State-Level Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines term limits to determine the effect they have on female candidate emergence in state legislatures. Initial research finds a negative relationship between term limits and female representation. I offer a candidate-level theory and empirical approach to reevaluate how term limits affect female representation overtime. I argue term limits create an incentive structure that favors female candidates since the incumbency advantage is lessened. To test this theory, I set up a quasi-natural experiment with term limits as the treatment in a difference-in-differences test. Furthermore, I also run logistical regression analysis using candidate-level data from all fifty states from 1990 to 2000. I find women are more likely to run for office in open seats created by term limits. Last, this pattern holds for both Republican and Democratic female candidates.

Keywords

term limits, women and politics, female state legislative candidates

Introduction

Term limits are one of the most significant institutional changes to take place since the modernization of state legislatures (Kurtz, Cain, and Niemi 2007). And since the implementation of term limits, a puzzle in the literature emerges. Conventional wisdom suggests open seats help women gain descriptive representation since women fare as well as men in elections. Term limits provide more open seats, which suggests females have more opportunities to enter into office (Burrell 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Fox 2000; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997). Yet studies conducted after the implementation of term limits find the greater number of open seats have negative consequences for female descriptive representation (Bernstein and Chadha 2003; Carroll and Jenkins 2001).

This article seeks to bridge the puzzling finding that more open seats, created by term limits, results in fewer women in office, but focuses on the candidate emergence stage. Theoretically speaking, term limits are only beneficial to women if women actually run for office. Normatively speaking, understanding how term limits help or hinder female candidate emergence is important to study for furthering descriptive representation. Theories on descriptive representation claim the makeup of legislative bodies should reflect the demographics of the public. Politicians better represent their constituents if they resemble the populace with regard to gender, race, social, and economic status. Scholars theorize the importance of descriptive representation and its implications for society because females bring different issues, experiences, and viewpoints to the political table. Increasing the percentage of women in political positions leads to more favorable policies for women (Osborn 2012; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Swers 2002).

In the United States, female descriptive representation has been, and continues to be, much lower than male descriptive representation at all levels of government. Currently, at the state level, female representation ranges from a low of 12 percent in Louisiana to a high of 41 percent in Colorado. The average percentage of females in all fifty state legislatures is only 24.2 percent (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP] 2014; National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL] 2014). Not only is the current percentage low, but the percentage of women in state legislative branches has become rather stagnant since the 1990s (Norrander and Wilcox 2012). Given that a large amount of policy-making is delegated to the states, the lack of female representation across all states is troublesome (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013).

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Research providing a greater understanding of when and why women run for office, or emerge as candidates, is a critical stage in the process toward understanding the unequal representation between males and females at all levels of government.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I provide a discussion of the extant literature with regard to female candidate emergence and term limits. Next, I detail my expectations on how term limits will affect female candidate emergence. Then, I introduce the data and methods used to test my hypothesis and conclude with a short discussion of the findings and implications of this study.

Emergence

A thread of the women and politics literature focuses on how and why women run for office (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Fox and Lawless 2004). In other words, why do some female candidates emerge and run for election while other potential candidates never run? Before there can be parity, there has to be pool of women who are willing to run for office, and ultimately win their campaigns. Below is a discussion of the four main factors scholars identify as inhibiting the emergence of female candidates: institutional barriers, socialization, ambition, and political factors.

Institutional Barriers

From an institutional perspective, the low rates of female descriptive representation in the United States are explained by two main theories: the incumbency advantage and eligibility pool. Incumbency advantage posits that incumbents' high reelection rates reduce opposition and leave little opportunity for new candidates to compete (Burrell 1994; Carroll and Jenkins 2001; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). Furthermore, research finds female candidates at the congressional level to be just as likely to win elections as men, indicating that females are not at an electoral disadvantage per se, but the high incumbency rate keeps women out of office (Burrell 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Fox 2000; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997). As such, women will enter office at a glacial pace because the incumbency advantage is so significant.

A second institutional constraint is that the female candidate eligibility pool is smaller than the male candidate pool. The eligibility pool, or where the majority of all candidates emerge from, consists mainly of positions in law and business.[1] Women in Congress tend to emerge from careers in teaching, social work, and health care without a background in politics rather than the typical "political" fields previously mentioned (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Clark 1994; Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007). Therefore, since fewer women are potential candidates, parity is difficult because women simply do not run.

Sociological Factors

Second, extant literature suggests there are sociological, cultural norms at play which keep women from seeking office. Women are less likely to be socialized to run for political office (Fox and Lawless 2004). Yet political conditioning research suggests women who are engaged in politics are more likely to emerge and run for office at any level (Fox and Lawless 2004). Furthermore, women are more likely to be engaged in politics if issues are salient to them (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006).

Family responsibilities also inhibit women from being in office, since women tend to have a disproportionate share of responsibilities (Fox and Lawless 2004). Not only that, women see private, family commitments as conflicting with public commitments, and this has changed little overtime (Burrell 1994; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Sapiro 1982). Yet these cultural gender norms that seem to place time constraints on future candidates do not seem to inhibit women from participating in other areas of politics—women are just as, if not more, likely to be engaged in local, community-level politics. Therefore, sociological-based time constraint theories are not a sufficient explanation to a lack of female emergence (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001).

Ambition

Third, research finds ambition levels differ by gender; specifically, women's ambition levels are inherently lower than male's. The gender differences in political ambition levels is in part due to the fact that women perceive themselves to be less qualified than men to run for office (see Fox and Lawless 2004; Fulton et al. 2006).

Political Factors

Last, there are political factors that influence whether or not a person will run for office. Research finds parties have a large and significant impact on whether a female will run for office. Most female candidates do not consider running for office until they are approached by a party leader. Without recruitment, the majority of current women office-holders had never seriously considered running for office. There are more women in office when women are actively recruited, whether by party or political organization (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Sanbonmatsu 2006).

Term Limits

Term limits are an important institutional attribute that may serve as a bridge between emergence and descriptive representation by creating more open seats. Term limits in state legislatures place restrictions on the number of times an official can serve in office.[2] States began enacting term limits in the early 1990s as a way to force government turnover. Many citizens were displeased with the lack of effective governance at the state level and wanted to stop incumbents from running for office (Reed and Schansberg 1995; Thompson and Moncrief 1993).

Prior to the enactment of term limits, most researchers hypothesized term limits would be beneficial for females. Term limits act as a way to combat the incumbency advantage and create more open seats. These open seats would provide women more opportunities to run for office (Carroll and Jenkins 2001; Crane 1995; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Ferry 1994; Thompson and Moncrief 1993). Yet, when term limits began to take effect, researchers found term limits did not have the intended effects on women in office (Bernstein and Chadha 2003; Carroll and Jenkins 2001). In 1998, seven states had their first round of termed-out politicians, which created 215 open seats across all seven states. The number of these 215 seats held by women actually dropped from fifty-eight to fifty-three after the 1998 election. Thus, the introduction of term limits resulted in a net loss of five seats for women (Bernstein and Chadha 2003).

In a cross-sectional analysis of the impact term limits had for the year 1998, scholars find an overall negative effect on women in office, but there was variation by state. Some states, such as Arizona and Arkansas, saw minor gains in the number or females in office but most suffered, which reflected in a declining number of females in office (Carroll and Jenkins 2001). Yet what explains these differences across states? And, more importantly, do these initial findings hold up across a longer temporal sample? Further research is needed to resolve the conflict between the expectation that term limits would allow for more female candidates and the early empirical evidence to the contrary.

Emergence and Term Limits Theory

The literature on candidate emergence and term limits offer conflicting explanations on the expectations of female emergence. The term limits literature mainly focuses on overall success of female candidates and largely ignores the impact term limits may have on candidate emergence. Perhaps women are running for office more frequently in the term limited states but are not winning elections. This theory incorporates expectations about open seats from term limits literature and eligibility pool assumptions from the emergence literature to develop a general argument regarding female candidate emergence in term-limited states.

Open Seats

Existing research regarding female descriptive representation is concerned with aggregate levels of female success. Yet as previously discussed, a critical stage of analysis is candidate emergence. The only way women will gain parity is if they run and subsequently win. All else being equal, in terms of electoral outcomes, term limits can only be effective if the number of female candidates running within the states increases. For example, if there are more open seats (created by term limits or not) and the same number, or fewer, women running for office, then open seats will not have a positive impact on the number of females in office. This idea is especially important in term-limited states since the nature of term limits creates more open seats.

Without an increase in female candidate emergence, we are unlikely to find support for the conventional wisdom that more open seats will lead to more women in office. Carroll and Jenkins (2001) show that in states with term limits, the number of female officeholders decreased when term limits were enacted. However, it is possible this finding is due to lower levels of female candidate emergence. The lack of female candidate emergence is apparent in Carroll and Jenkins' (2001) finding that females did not run in a large number of primary elections for either party.

The greater number of open seats created by term limits provide potential female candidates with more opportunities to emerge. Since an incumbent cannot continuously run, the overall likelihood of winning an election will increase for new candidates. Further, Fulton et al. (2006) find women are more likely to run in races if/where they perceive their chances of winning to be high. This rational behavior is present in all candidates as studies also find that candidates act rationally when deciding to enter a race—most only run when the likelihood of winning the seat is high (Black 1972; Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Lazarus 2008). Open seats, created by term limits or otherwise, offer a better chance at winning an election than running against an incumbent. Therefore, states with open seats created by term limits should see an overall increase in the number of female candidates emerging because the perceived opportunity to win the seat is higher.

Eligibility Pool

The greater number of open seats created by term limits will likely effect the eligibility pool. The presence of term limits may influence more women to emerge as

candidates in state legislative elections. This is due to the fact that with term limits, the job is temporary and politics is not necessarily a career path. Therefore, anyone can theoretically have a desire to run and hold office for a short period of time. Amateur candidates, those with no previous office-holding experience, tend to run if they perceive their chance of success to be high, but this is not a necessary condition to emerge (Lazarus 2008). Term limits may create a pool of amateur candidates, specifically female candidates, who are motivated to run for factors other than being a career politician—especially if a potential candidate thinks they can win.

Support for an amateur female candidate pool already exists at the state level. A 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study by Carroll, Sanbonmatsu, and Walsh find nearly 43 percent of women in the lower chamber of the state legislatures had no previous officeholding experience. More importantly, nearly 73 percent of females in the lower house claimed their decision to run for office was not done as a stepping stone toward higher office. The study also finds that nearly 79 percent of women in the lower chamber reported having an occupation that allows for sufficient time and flexibility to hold office was important when considering their run for office. These findings suggest that many women in state legislatures do not plan on being career politicians. Therefore, term limits enhance this favorable environment and allow more opportunities for potential female candidates to run, hold office, and still avoid being career politicians.

Term limits have the potential to create a larger eligibility pool of female candidates. Term limits may add a little extra incentive to run for office since the length of time someone can spend in office is limited. Thus, term limits create a unique opportunity for noncareer politicians to serve short term in office to make policy changes[3] and then leave after they are termed out.

Furthermore, term limits can also have a positive impact on women who want to be career politicians. Given theories on rational choice candidate entry models (Black 1972; Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Lazarus 2008), politicians run when they are most likely to win. Term limited seats will not have an incumbent running, so these seats should theoretically be easier to win, given the lack of an incumbency advantage. This is good for ambitious female politicians because they are in a better situation to win office than when compared with female challengers in a state without term limits trying to win a seat against a long-term incumbent.

Term limits provide a structured timeline for how long one can legally stay in office before they move on to the next level of government. Career politicians may find this structure useful for moving up the political ladder. For example, a female may desire to move out of the lower chamber in the state legislature but no opportunities exist in the upper chamber. States with term limits in both chambers have more open seats and, therefore, greater opportunities for new candidates to run for office. Further, term limits provide an opportunity for women to gain experience and exposure quickly if they move between chambers after being term-out, especially for women who may want to progress into federal office, or governorships, after they have termed out of their state legislature.

In sum, taking into consideration the constraints and variation in the use of term limits across states, one should not expect a drastic increase of women in office in states with term limits immediately. Rather, the number of women in office will likely rise fairly steadily over time as more officials are forced to vacate the state legislature. There may be loss in the short term as research finds (Bernstein and Chadha 2003; Carroll and Jenkins 2001), but this should not be the norm. Open seats will gradually increase as incumbents are termed out, providing potential women candidates with more opportunities to run. In other words, term limits, in combination with open seats, increase the number of women in the eligibility pool. The crux of this theory relies on the fact that term limited states will only increase the number of women in office if the number of women running for office increases. Term limits create a favorable environment for noncareer and career female politicians to run for office, and this is the possibility that I will empirically evaluate in the remainder of this article.

Therefore,

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Term limits increase the likelihood of female candidate emergence.

Data

To examine the hypothesis, I utilize a candidate-level data set of each state's lower legislative chamber. The candidate data comes from the State Legislative Election Returns (SLER): 1967–2010 (Klarner et al. 2013). The dataset captures candidate-level state legislative elections and includes variables such as election results, term length, type of legislative election, incumbency status, and party identification. The large time span allows me to better test the impact of term limits on female candidate emergence. I conduct the analysis across all fifty states at the candidate level in the general election (discussed more below) using a quasi-natural experiment design. I examine the years from 1990 to 2010, both pre- and post-term limits, across all candidates meeting the standard 5 percent threshold (Canon 1978) using states without term limits as the control group.

The SLER data does not contain the candidate's gender, and therefore, I coded each candidate's gender. As a robustness check, I have also utilized the CAWP (Center

for American Women and Politics) database as a cross-reference. CAWP provides a list of the total number of women who ran in an election for each state. After coding the SLER dataset to include gender, I looked to the CAWP dataset to examine any discrepancies. When there were discrepancies between SLER and CAWP, I cross-referenced the Secretary of State's original election results (when available) to fix or confirm the findings from my dataset. Further, in a handful of cases where the Secretary of State's election results were not readily available and discrepancies existed, I searched newspaper articles for gender candidate cues.[4]

While the SLER dataset contains a large number of election periods, I will only use the time period from 1990 to 2010. Since 1996–2000 is the time frame in which most states first experience the impact of term limits, the time frame allows a roughly equal number of election cycles pre- and post-term limits. The analysis for this time period will therefore capture a considerable amount of elections both before and after term limits took effect in states. Furthermore, the candidate-level dataset is quite large over a twenty-year time frame and produces roughly eighty thousand observations.[5]

Design

As briefly mentioned, the enactment of term limits provides the unique opportunity of an intervention point for an experimental design. Mooney (2009) addresses a major concern when treating term limits as a natural experiment: exogeneity. To model a causal relationship, there needs to be random assignment of the treatment and control group. To test for random assignment, Mooney (2009) ran a series of difference of means tests between states with term limits and states without term limits. The results find the most common and widely used state-level explanatory variables have no statistically significant differences between states with term limits and states without term limits. In other words, there is not a unique underlying factor about states that enacted term limits versus states that did not enact term limits. For example, a state's population, gross domestic product (GDP), ideology, electoral turnout rates, legislative professionalism, and so on, do not predict the adoption of term limits. Therefore, term limits can be treated as a natural experiment because the states with and without term limits have no statistically significant differences between them—that is, random assignment of term limits occurred. The treatment group for the design includes all the states that enacted term limits, and the control group includes all the states that have not enacted term limits.

The enactment of term limits happened at different points in time across the states. Term limits first took effect in a handful of states in the late 1990s and continued to be implemented through the 2000s. As such, there will be multiple intervention points that are unique to the state enacting the term limits. Using panel-level data, I am less likely to violate the assumption that an unobservable/unmeasurable variable has an impact on my main independent variable, term limits. This is important when determining a causal link between term limits and the dependent variable. Table 1 provides a list of the term limited states (which have not been repealed). The table provides the year in which the term limits were enacted and the year in which the first round of legislators were forced to leave due to term limits.

Table 1. Term-Limited States.

State	Year enacted	Year of impact
Maine	1993	1996
California	1990	1996
Colorado	1990	1998
Arkansas[a,b]	1992	1998
Michigan	1992	1998
Florida	1992	2000
Ohio	1992	2000
South Dakota[a]	1992	2000
Montana	1992	2000
Arizona[a]	1992	2000
Missouri	1992	2002
Oklahoma	1990	2004
Nebraska	2000	2006
Louisiana	1995	2007
Nevada	1996	2010

Source. NCSL (2014): "The Term-Limited States."
[a]Indicates multimember districts.
[b]Eliminated multimember districts after 2000 election.

Variables

Dependent

The dependent variable is *female candidate emergence*, which is a dichotomous variable where "1" is a female candidate and "0" is a male candidate. Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics on the number of female candidates in the sample. Between 1990 and 2010, female candidates made up about 26 percent of the total candidates running for office. Male candidates during the same time period made up roughly 73 percent of the total sample. The numbers are not surprising since the overall percentage of women in office across the states during that time averages around 20 to 25 percent.

Independent Variable

The main explanatory variable of interest is *term limits*. States with term limits are coded "1" and states without term limits are coded "0." Since, the intervention points

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Female Emergence.

Variable	Number	Percentage of sample
Female Candidates	24,537	26.30%
Male Candidates	68,380	73.30%

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Term Limits.

Variable	Number	Percentage of sample
Non-Term Limit Seats	79,029	85.54%
Term-Limit Seats	13,888	14.46%

will be scattered due to states implementing term limits in different years, each state with term limits will be coded to reflect the year in which that state's term limits take effect. States with term limits are coded as "0" until they implement term limits (states who never implement term limits remain coded as 0 throughout). Table 3 shows the distribution for states with and without term limits. Approximately 15 percent of candidates run in term-limited seats. Whereas non-term-limited seats make up about 85 percent of the total sample (the non-term-limited seats include states with enacted term limits but elections before they were implemented). Since this is candidate-level data with a focus on candidate emergence, these numbers represent the distribution of candidates running in the term-limited and non-term-limited races (not the total number of available seats).

Table 4 below provides further descriptive statistics showing the distribution of the data for candidate emergence and term limits. At first glance, females are more prevalent in term-limited states, making up 28 percent of the total candidates versus non-term-limited seats where females are only 25.9 percent of the total candidates. Males are much more likely to emerge as candidates in term-limited and non-term-limited states when compared with their female counterparts making up roughly 71 to 74 percent of the observations within each set of states.

Table 4. Distribution of Candidates and Term Limits.

Variable	Non-term limits	Term limits
Female Candidates	20,646 (25.9%)	3,891 (28%)
Male Candidates	58,383 (73.9%)	9,997 (71.2%)

Control Variables Candidate-Level Controls

The model includes several candidate-level and state-/district-level controls. The first control is for *open seat* and is coded as "1" if a candidate runs in a district with an open seat and "0" if an incumbent is running within that district. As extant research and my theory suggests, open seats decrease institutional barriers for women to enter office so I expect open seats to have a positive impact on the likelihood a female will run for office.

Incumbents have an advantage in elections, even at the state level. Incumbents are more likely to win their elections and is an important variable to include in the model. Here, *incumbent* is coded so a "0" is a non-incumbent and "1" is an incumbent candidate. As with the extant literature, I expect incumbency to have a negative impact on female candidate emergence. Incumbents inhibit females from winning office and may keep them from running completely due to the costs associated with running a campaign, especially one where the challenger is expected to lose against an incumbent. While congressional literature finds women have an increasing tendency to run as challengers against female incumbents (see Lawless and Pearson 2008), much of the literature finds incumbents dissuade candidates from emerging.

Another important control variable is *party*. Research finds female candidates tend to emerge and hold seats in office more often as Democrats than Republicans. Republicans are coded as "0," and I expect that Democrats, coded as "1," will have a positive impact on the number of female candidates.

A measure of competitiveness is also important, especially since females are less likely to run for office if they perceive their chances of winning to be low. As a crude measure of competitiveness, I include the *number of candidates* in each election. While this is not a direct measure of whether a race is competitive or not because it does not include the types of candidates running,[6] Lawless and Pearson (2008) find females tend to be in elections where they are facing more than one opponent. While a majority of races are unopposed or have only two candidates, capturing opposition, especially if there is zero opposition, is an important control.

State-Level Controls

Research also finds women are more successful when they compete in multimember districts (MMD; Carroll 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). This is due to the fact that there are more opportunities to win a seat, and it is not a zero-sum game. A handful of state legislatures use MMDs in their elections rather than single-member districts (SMD). To measure MMDs, I use the *district type* variable, which differentiates between the types of districts. The variable is coded as a dummy for purposes of this study where "0" is an SMD and "1" is an MMD.

I also include a control for *term length*. Given my theory that term limits may attract females who do not wish to be career politicians, I expect there to be a negative

relationship between the length of a term in office and female emergence. Females should be more likely to emerge in states with fewer years in a term; the longer a term, the less likely a female will emerge. Most lower chambers in states have two-year terms, but there are a small handful of states with four-year terms.

I also include a measure of *legislative professionalism*. I use the Squire index, which is a value between 0 and 1 assigned to states based on the level of professionalization within the legislature. Values closer to 0 are the least professional, and values closest to 1 are the most professional (see Squire 1992). I expect professionalization to have a negative impact on the likelihood a female candidate will emerge. This measure is capturing my theoretical argument that women are more likely to emerge when they do not want to be career politicians; therefore, when professionalism increases, female emergence will decrease.

Last, I include a measure for if a candidate emerges in a southern state. The variable *south* is coded with a "1" if the state is a southern state and "0" if otherwise. This measure tries to capture some of the known differences between female representation in the southern versus northern states. I expect southern states will have fewer women emerging as candidates. Table 5 below lists all the variables and their predicted direction for the logistical regression.

Table 5. Variables and Predicted Directions for Logistical Regression.

Variable	Predicted direction
Term Limits	(+)
Open Seat	(+)
Incumbent	(–)
Party ID	(+)
Number of Candidates	(–)
District Type	(+)
Term Length	(–)
Legislature Professionalization	(–)
South	(–)

Method

I employ two methods to test my hypothesis that term limits increase female candidate emergence. The first is a difference-in-differences method. Difference in differences allows time-invariant covariates to be factored out, while incorporating overall exogenous shocks or trends in the system. Difference in differences allows the researcher to control for many factors while "manipulating" one key variable, in this case, term limits, to provide a causal link between the independent and dependent variable.

The difference-in-differences method is shown below using states as the unit of analysis. Equation 1 represents the model for states with term limits. Term limits serve as an intervention point, and the difference in female emergence rates before and after term limits were implemented is provided. The model keeps all variables constant while the unobservable/time-invariant, *ai*, factors are already factored out. Equation 2 represents the control group: states without term limits.[7] Equation 3 represents the difference between the treatment and control groups: states with term limits and states lacking term limits. The error terms are also differenced so this better captures overall shocks to the system and can capture any general trends. If there is a difference found in Equation 3, then term limits have a causal impact on women emergence.

$$\Delta yiTL = \delta 0 + \beta + \Delta uiTL \quad (1)$$

where $\Delta yiTL$ denotes the difference in y for states with term limits

$$\Delta yiNTL = \delta 0 + \beta + \Delta uiNTL \quad (2)$$

where $\Delta yiNTL$ denotes the difference in y for states without term limits

$$\Delta yiTL - \Delta yiNTL = \beta + \left(\Delta uiTL - \Delta uiNTL\right) \quad (3)$$

where y is the mean number of women emerging.

I also run a logistical regression to examine the impact term limits have on the likelihood a female candidate will run for office. The unit of analysis for the logit model is the candidate year. Therefore, candidates will appear in the model for every election cycle they run as a new observation. Where difference in differences examines the overall difference in emergence between male and female candidates in states, the logistical regression aims to capture and predict the likelihood a candidate is a female based on the electoral environment at the individual level. Last, the standard errors are clustered around each individual legislator to control for differences across each candidate.

Results

The difference-in-differences results find term limits increase the mean number of female candidates running for office in states. Table 6 and Figure 1 provide evidence of this relationship within and across states. States with term limits, labeled with (e) for experimental group, see a small increase in the number of females emerging while states without term limits, label (c) for control, see a smaller overall increase. Figure 1 shows the positive effect term limits have on female emergence as well. Post-term limits, there is an overall increase in female

Table 6. Difference in Differences.

Female emergence	*M*	*SE*
Pre-term limits (e)	0.243	0.004
Post-term limits (e)	0.267	0.004
$\Delta yiT\ L =$	0.024	
Pre-term limits (c)	0.240	0.003
Post-term limits (c)	0.258	0.002
$\Delta yiN\ T\ L =$	0.018	
$\Delta yiT\ L - \Delta yiN\ T\ L =$	0.006	

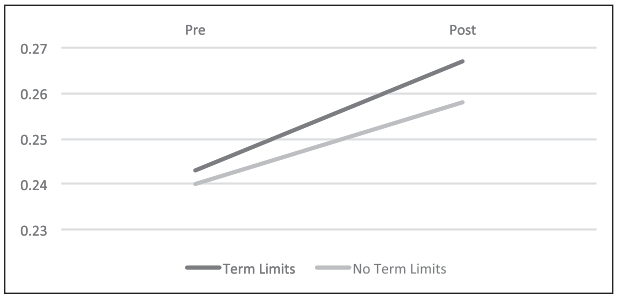

Figure 1. Women emergence in states pre- and post-term limits.

emergence for all the states, but the slope is steeper for states that enacted term limits.

The control group, states without term limits (c), saw a within-group difference in female emergence post-term limits (1996) of 1.8 percent, while the experimental group, states with term limits (e), have a within-group difference of 2.4 percent. Substantively, this shows term limits increase the overall percentage of women emerging by about 0.6 percent. While the percentage seems rather small, this 0.6 percent effect size of term limits equates to roughly ten more women emerging in term-limited states. For example, between 1994 and 2000, Ohio (a state with term limits) had a 0.06 difference in means. In 1996, forty-one females ran for office and in 2000, the first year term limits took effect, fifty-two females emerged (even if just by 0.6 percent, or ten females per election year), the better their chances are for increasing descriptive representation overall in those states. Women cannot win office and gain parity if they are not emerging. Term limits, as tested in the difference-in-differences model suggest there is a positive, causal relationship between term limits and female candidate emergence.

The difference in differences analysis provides a look at states, while the logit analysis looks at the individual level (while controlling for state-level factors). Table 7 shows the results of the logit model, which also supports the hypothesis that term limits increase the likelihood a female candidate will emerge. Logistical regressions are

Table 7. Likelihood Candidate Is a Female.

Variable	Coefficient	*SE*
Term Limit	0.085	0.033
Open Seat	0.077	0.023
Incumbent	−0.036	0.027
Party ID	0.467	0.030
Number Candidates	0.025	0.007
District Type	0.138	0.043
Term Length	−0.058	0.031
Professionalism (Squire)	−0.286	0.109
South	−0.306	0.040
Constant	−1.170	0.074
$n = 88285$		

Standard errors are clustered around candidate ID.

not directly interpretable without predicted probability models, but term limits is in the expected, positive direction and is statistically significant. Furthermore, all of the control variables are consistent with past literature, in the expected direction, and most are also statistically significant at a level. Only incumbency and term length are insignificant, but both are on the cusp of significance at the .10 level.

While the direction and impact are important, predicted probabilities for logistical regression provide substantive, interpretable results. Table 8 provides predicted probabilities for when a candidate is a Democrat, and Table 9 provides the predicted probabilities for Republican candidates. All the predicted probabilities values are set based on the most likely of cases, rather than an overall mean, which oftentimes captures unlikely cases (such as a 2.5-year term, which does not exist). Therefore, number of candidates is set at 2 (to represent one opponent), term length is set to two, south is set to zero (only looking at nonsouthern states), and professionalization is set to the mean.[8] The tables vary by open seat, district type, incumbency, and party identification.[9] The Open Seat column represents races where no incumbent runs for office. The Non-Incumbent column represents candidate emergence for non-incumbents in nonopen seat races, that is, challengers. Last, the rows represent whether the candidate is in a term-limited or non-term-limited state, and whether the candidate is in an SMD or MMD.

Table 8 shows the substantive differences between Democratic female candidate emergence in term-limited and non-term-limited states. Women are emerging about 2 percent more of the time when term limits are present. In an SMD when there is an open seat, a female candidate emerges about 32 percent of the time in states without term limits versus 34 percent of the time in states with term limits. Open seat races in MMDs also have women emerging 2 percent more in the term-limited states at

Table 8. Predicted Probabilities for Democrats.

Female emergence	Open seat	Non-incumbent
Single-member districts		
No term limits	0.321 (0.006)	0.304 (0.006)
Term limits	0.340 (0.008)	0.323 (0.008)
Multimember districts		
No term limits	0.352 (0.010)	0.334 (0.009)
Term limits	0.371 (0.012)	0.354 (0.012)

All margins are significant at $p < .01$. Standard errors provided in parentheses.

Table 9. Predicted Probabilities for Republicans.

Female emergence	Open seat	Non-incumbent
Single-member districts		
No term limits	0.229 (0.005)	0.215 (0.005)
Term limits	0.244 (0.007)	0.230 (0.007)
Multimember districts		
No term limits	0.254 (0.008)	0.240 (0.008)
Term Limits	0.270 (0.011)	0.255 (0.010)

All margins are significant at $p < .01$. Standard error provided in parentheses.

about 37 percent of the time versus 35 percent of the time in the non-term-limited states. Women are most likely to emerge in these MMDs with term limits. And while this number is not 50 percent (meaning half the candidates are men, half are women), 37 percent is quite high given the average 24 percent descriptive representation across all the states.

Female emergence as challengers (non-incumbents) also provides evidence in support of the hypothesis that term limits increase female emergence. Women are emerging around 30 percent of the time in SMDs with no term limits versus 32 percent of the time in states with term limits. While winning a seat as a challenger is generally harder due to the incumbency advantage, term limits seem to encourage more women to run. The same pattern exists in MMDs where women emerge as challengers around 33 percent of the time in non-term-limited states and 35 percent of the time in the term-limited states.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that women are just as likely to emerge as challengers in term-limited states as they are in open seats in states without term limits (around 32 percent in the SMDs and 35 percent in the MMDs). This comparison is important because previous literature finds open seats are one of the best chances women have to gain parity, and they emerge much more often in these seats. Given the equal likelihood of turnout between said open seats and the term-limited nonopen seats, the effect of term limits is similar to the "best case" scenario for women emergence. This suggests term limits lower the incumbency advantage (or at least the perception of how strong it is) and increase a candidate's confidence in their ability to win an election to a level similar to an open-seat election.

Table 9 reports the predicted probabilities for Republicans. The overall predicted probabilities are comparatively lower than the Democratic ones, which is expected given Democratic female candidate trends. The literature finds women are much more likely to emerge, and ultimately win office, as Democrats. For example, Democratic women emerge around 34 percent of the time in term-limited SMDs versus Republican women only emerge around 24 percent of the time. There is about a 10 percent difference between female Democratic and Republican candidate emergence.

Despite the comparatively lower emergence rates, term limits still have a positive effect on female Republicans. The difference in female Republican candidate emergence between term-limited states and non-term-limited states is about 1.5 percent. In other words, the probability a female Republican will emerge increases by about 1.5 percent in term-limited states (vs. about 2 percent for Democratic women). For example, in open seat races in SMDs, women emerge about 23 percent of the time in states without term limits and about 24 percent of the time in states with term limits. The pattern is similar in MMDs where women emerge around 25 percent of the time in states without term limits and 27 percent of the time in states with term limits.

Looking at Republican challengers in the Non-Incumbent column also supports the hypothesis that term limits increase emergence. Women are much more likely to emerge as challengers in term-limited states than non-term-limited states. In SMDs with term limits, women emerge 23 percent of the time versus 22 percent of the time in states without. And in MMDs, women emerge 26 percent of the time versus 24 percent of the time in states without. Further, the results are consistent with the Democratic female candidate emergence finding that women emerge as challengers in term-limited states as often as women emerge in open seats in states without term limits.

While term limits only increase Republican female emergence by 1.5 percent, any increase is arguably positive for women (especially Republican women) who are rather underrepresented in states. Given that term limits increase Democratic female emergence by about 2 percent, the overall increase term limits provide for both parties is evidence that term limits do not have the negative, unintended consequences on women in office. The evidence provided here supports the theory that term limits increase

female candidate emergence and also sheds a bit more light on the conventional wisdom about how the incumbency advantage hurts women. Term limits seem to change the candidate pool, and lower the effects of the incumbency advantage. This change lowers the risk associated with running, which increases the number of women willing to emerge as candidates—in open seats, as challengers, and across both parties. Term limits increase the number of women running, and when women run, they win.

Conclusion and Implications

Currently, females make up only 24 percent of state legislators in the United States. This is concerning given a 2009 CAWP study that indicates the growth of female candidates at the state legislative level has remained fairly stagnant since 1997. Since about half of women in higher office begin their political career at lower levels of government, this stagnation in female state legislators is an important area of research to study. If the number of women in state legislatures does not increase and/or gain parity, to generally reflect the population descriptively, the implications for descriptive and substantive representation is concerning at the state and national level.

This article offers a theoretical explanation on how the institutional feature of term limits affects the number of female candidates deciding to run for office. Initial studies on term limits suggest term limits have negative effects on female descriptive representation but largely ignored emergence. Using a candidate-level dataset and experimental design, I find term limits have a positive effect on women candidate emergence. Further, the findings suggest term limits are more beneficial than open seats are for increasing emergence. Term limits boost Democratic females' emergence about 2 percent and female Republican emergence by about 1.5 percent. This suggests term limits may be creating an incentive structure that is widening the eligibility pool. Specifically, term limits make seats, both open and nonopen, more desirable to women candidates.

Overall, these findings are important because the initial findings suggesting term limits are bad for women may not be as problematic as expected. A greater number of female candidates emerging, as presented here, can lead to a greater number or females in office. Future research should focus on the success of female challengers in term-limited states. The results here suggest term limits decrease the incumbency advantage and incentivize women to emerge more as challengers in term-limited seats. The more research and data on these women candidates available, such as candidate quality, campaign financing, and so on, may add insight into how term limits increase emergence, but may not increase descriptive representation. For example, women may emerge, but research suggests competition and relative candidate quality matter, especially in open seat elections (Barnes, Branton, and Cassese 2017; Fulton 2012, 2014). As this article argues, emergence is only the first step, but increasing female challengers is a step in the right direction toward parity—especially if women are successful in their pursuit of office as challengers, rather than waiting for an open seat. Perhaps the successful women are those running in the open seats rather than as challengers. Future research should disentangle this relationship to make the connection between term limits and female descriptive representation.

Last, implications for national representation of women in office are worth considering. The impact of term limits and the type of candidate attracted to the legislatures are likely to have an impact beyond the state level. If term-limited states are attracting candidates who do not want to be career politicians, this may negatively affect female recruitment success for congressional races. Take for example the possibility of a candidate seeking office in a term-limited state with no intentions of being a career politician and leaving after their term has expired—the politician may go back to their previous career, or they may seek higher office. If this politician is female and decides not to run for higher office, overtime, descriptive representation at the national level may be negatively affected. Therefore, future research tracking where women go after they are termed out in the states would also be an important addition to the literature on descriptive representation.

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Notes

1. Men also receive more encouragement than females at a younger age to enter fields that are more likely to lead to political careers such as law and business (Fox and Lawless 2004).
2. Since the 1990s, twenty-one states have passed legislation for term limits, but six states have repealed them. Term limits were generally passed via citizen initiatives, and in four states (Massachusetts, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming), the state supreme courts repealed the term limits, and in two states (Idaho and Utah), the state legislature repealed the term limits (NCSL 2014)
3. Also in the 2008 CAWP recruitment study, 35 percent of women in the lower chamber report their decision to run was based on concern about one or more specific policy issues.

4. In the cases where I could not determine the gender of a candidate, I did not include these cases in the models. Some were missing first names in the original SLER study, and I could not determine first names. The missing candidates make up <3 percent of the total observations.
5. Some states allow candidate fusion; candidates can run under multiple-party identifications in the same election. For these cases, I use the party ID, which received the most votes. For example, if Jane Smith ran as a Republican and received ten thousand votes, and as a Democrat with five thousand votes, I drop the Democratic identification, and Jane Smith is coded as a Republican for the election year.
6. That is, whether or not the candidate is a qualified candidate and is more likely to win than a nonquality candidate. Nonquality means a candidate has little to no relevant experience in politics. Usually specified as previous office-holding experience at some level of government.
7. By nature of experimental design, the control group never enacted term limits but a standard year is set as a point of comparison for the pre-/post-estimation. Therefore, the year 1996 is used as the beginning of the "post treatment" for the control group—states without term limits—since the first wave of term limits began in the same year.
8. The online appendix provides two additional tables for female candidate emergence in the South.
9. Tables 8 and 9 have the exact same parameters for determining the predicted probabilities and the only variation between the two is party identification.

Supplemental Material

Replication data for this article is available with the manuscript on the PRQ website.

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