



PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

TERM LIMITS FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

A National Survey of Registered Voters

2023

MARCH

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Overview

Efforts to establish term limits on Members of Congress have been undertaken for nearly a century, with the first Congressional vote taking place in 1945. States have also tried to put term limits on their own federal legislators, and currently over half of states have such laws on their books, but they were struck down by the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that a constitutional amendment is needed to establish term limits on federal legislators, and thus requires support from two thirds of Congress or two thirds of states. Congress almost achieved this in 1995, after the Supreme Court decision, but fell a few dozen votes short. That was the last time there was a vote on term limits in Congress.

Recently, the issue has been given new life due to the House's speakership negotiations in which Speaker McCarthy (R) guaranteed a vote on congressional term limits. Several bills have been introduced this Congress that call for a range of term limits, from three to six terms for House Members, and two to three terms for Senators: **H.J. Res 3** by Rep. Fallon (R), **H.J. Res 5** by Rep. Fitzpatrick (R), **H.J. Res 11** by Rep. Norman (R), **H.J. Res 20** by Rep. Van Orden (R), **H.J. Res 32** by Rep. Tenney (R), **S.J. Res 2** by Sen. Cruz (R).

To find out how Americans feel about term limits, the Program for Public Consultation conducted an in-depth survey where respondents went through a process called a "policymaking simulation" in which they were effectively put in the shoes of a policymaker. They were given a briefing on the issue and evaluated competing arguments before making their recommendation.

To ensure that the briefings were accurate and balanced, and that the arguments presented were the strongest ones being made, the text of the survey was reviewed by experts, including those who favor and those who oppose each proposal. Changes were made in response to their feedback.

Fielding

The survey was conducted online from February 1 - 14, 2023 with a national probability-based sample provided by Nielsen Scarborough from their sample of respondents, who were recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of households. The sample included 2,700 respondents with a margin of error of +/- 1.9%.

Responses were weighted by age, income, gender, race and geographic region. Benchmarks for weights were obtained from the US Census' Current Populations Survey of Registered Voters. The sample was also weighted by partisan affiliation.

A further analysis was conducted by dividing the sample six ways, depending on Cook's Partisan Voting Index (PVI) rating of the respondent's Congressional district. This enabled a comparison of respondents who live in very red, red, somewhat red, somewhat blue, blue, and very blue districts.

Summary of Findings

An overwhelming majority (83%) favored passing a constitutional amendment to establish term limits in Congress, with little difference between partisans: 86% of Republicans, 80% of Democrats and 84% of independents. Bipartisan support for this proposal has remained steady since [PPC's first public consultation survey on term limits in 2017](#), which found 80% in support (Republicans 88%, Democrats 73%).

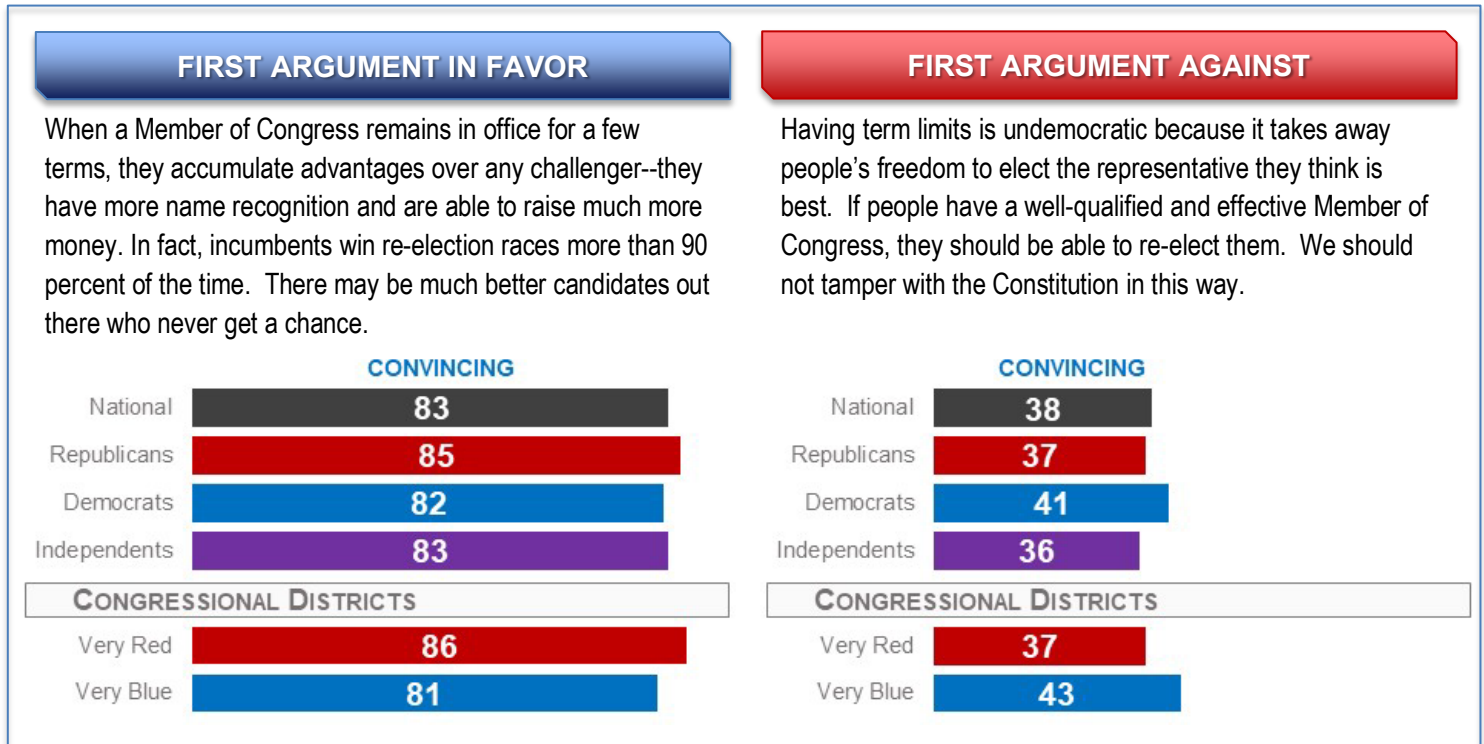
Respondents who favored the constitutional amendment were then given the opportunity to specify the number of terms they prefer. The median response for House Members was four terms (Republicans three, Democrats four, independents four). For Senators, the median response was two, nationally and among all partisan groups.

While voters certainly have preferences for the number of terms, the exact number of term limits is not a breaking point for most voters. The 2017 survey asked respondents about a specific number of terms Representatives should be limited to that were put forward in actual legislation, and found bipartisan majority support of at least seven-in-ten for all of them.

Assessment of Arguments

The first argument in favor of term limits explained how incumbents have a large advantage in elections and asserted that this hinders the ability of better candidates from getting a chance. Over eight-in-ten found this convincing (83%), including 85% of Republicans, 82% of Democrats and 83% of independents.

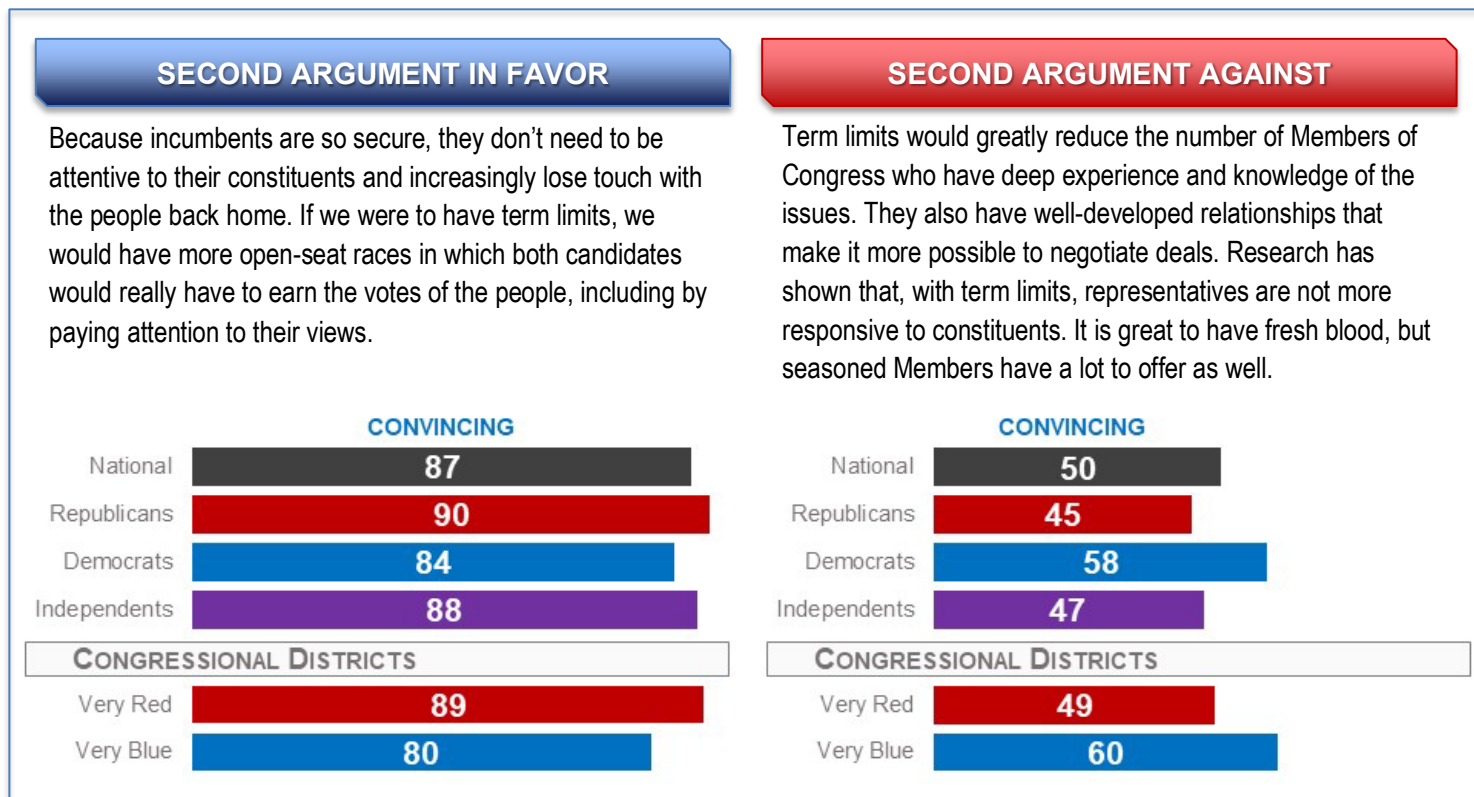
The first argument against contended that term limits are undemocratic because they take away people's freedom to elect the representative they feel is best. Just 38% found this convincing, including less than half of Republicans (37%), Democrats (41%) and independents (36%).



The second argument in favor proclaimed that the security of incumbents reduces their need to be responsive to their constituents, and that open-seat races would require candidates to better pay attention to the views of the

people. An overwhelming 87% found this convincing, including nine-in-ten Republicans, 84% of Democrats and 88% of independents.

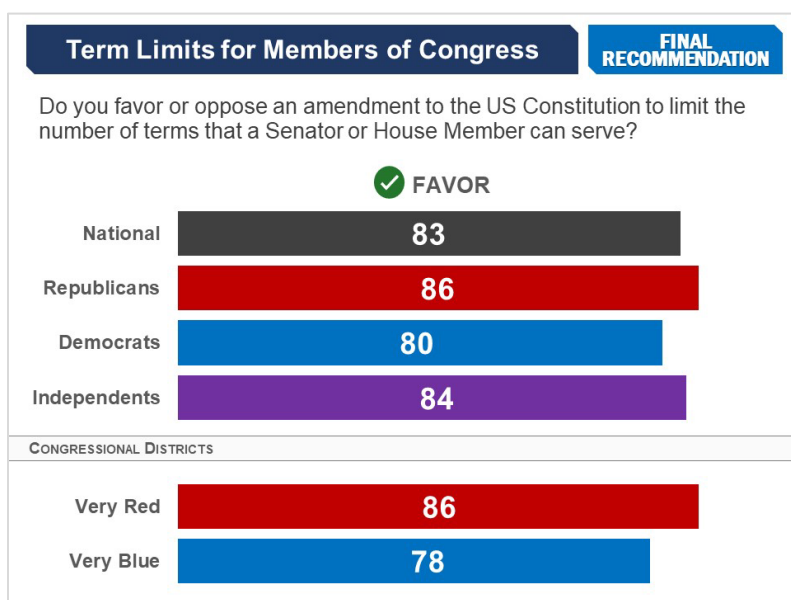
The second argument against stated that term limits would reduce the amount of experience and knowledge in Congress, and cited research showing that term limits fail to increase responsiveness. Half found this convincing, including less than half of Republicans (45%) and independents (47%), but a majority of Democrats (58%).



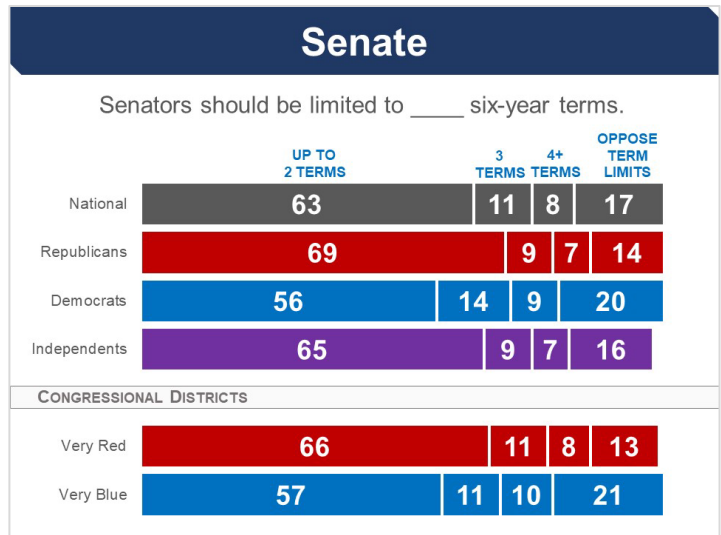
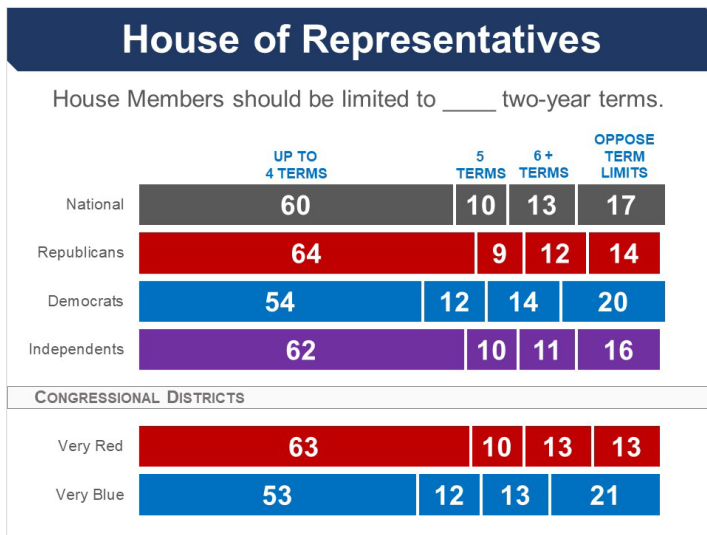
Final Recommendations

Eighty-three percent favored the proposal to pass a constitutional amendment to limit the number of terms a Member of Congress can serve. This included 86% of Republicans, 80% of Democrats and 84% of independents. Majorities were in favor in all types of Congressional districts, from very red (86%) to very blue (78%). The 2017 survey found similar levels of support for a constitutional amendment to put in place term limits (80%, Republicans 88%, Democrats 73%).

Respondents who favored the proposal were then given the opportunity to choose how many terms House Members and Senators should be limited to. The median response was four terms for House Members, nationally and among



Democrats and independents. Among Republicans, the median response was three terms. For Senators, the median response was two terms, nationally and among all partisan groups.



Sixty percent chose up to four terms for House Members (Republicans 64%, Democrats 54%, independents 62%), with another 17% that said five or six terms. For Senators, 63% chose up to two terms (Republicans 69%, Democrats 56%, independents 65%), with another 16% saying three or four terms.

The 2017 survey took a different approach to find out the specific term limits that the public favors. The sample was divided in three and presented different sets of term limits for House Members and Senators, based on actual legislation. Similar bipartisan majorities favored each option:

- House Members limited to 3 terms and Senators to 2 terms (70%, Republicans 76%, Democrats 66%)
- House Members limited to 4 terms and Senators to 2 terms (73%, Republicans 79%, Democrats 66%)
- House Members limited to 6 terms and Senators to 2 terms (72%, Republicans 80%, Democrats 66%)

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The Program for Public Consultation seeks to improve democratic governance by consulting the citizenry on key public policy issues governments face. It has developed innovative survey methods that simulate the process that policymakers go through — getting a briefing, hearing arguments, dealing with tradeoffs — before coming to their conclusion. It also uses surveys to help find common ground between conflicting parties. The Program for Public Consultation is part of the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland.

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